

TREASURY SERIES No. 2.

**Scriptures  
Concerning the  
Saviour**

or

**The Third and Three  
in Holy Writ.**

**Harold F. G. Cole.**

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**Scriptures Concerning  
the Saviour**

OR

**The Third and Three  
in Holy Writ.**

BY

**Harold F. G. Cole.**

(AUTHOR OF "CONCERNING SICK SAINTS,"  
"CONCERNING JONAH," "CONCERNING SOLOMON'S TEMPLE,"  
"CONCERNING THE ADVENTS AND THE AGES," ETC.)

**“A threefold cord is not  
quickly broken.”**

Ecclesiastes 4, 12.

## Foreword.



**W**HAT a miracle of multiplication was wrought on the barley bread furnished by the man from Baal-shalisha ! (2 Kings iv. 42). It seems almost like a foreshadowing of the greater miracle of the Gospels,—the feeding of the five thousand by our Lord.

Shalisha, we are told, means “three,” and as Baal is the equivalent of Lord, Baal-shalisha means “the Lord of three.” This book of Mr. Cole’s enables us to recognise the place, in the meaning of its name, as typical of the Lord Jesus. He is indeed Lord of the “three” which runs so marvellously through the Scriptures that testify of Him,

And as the man from Baal-shalisha brought food for the people of God, so our author, coming to us in his book from the Lord of "three," brings a welcome and wonderful supply of spiritual food. In the following pages he sets it before us, and we have but to eat and be filled.

May our gracious God multiply and bless what is herein provided, that our souls may be richly nourished.

HAROLD P. BARKER.



## Contents.



CHAPTER.	PAGE.
I. "GOD OUR SAVIOUR" ... ..	9
II. THE PASSION OF THE SAVIOUR ...	16
III. THE PATHWAY OF THE SAVIOUR...	21
IV. EARLY PICTURES OF THE SAVIOUR'S WORK ... ..	30
V. TABERNACLE PICTURES ... ..	43
VI. LATER PICTURES AND PROPHECIES	59
VII. THE PROCLAMATION OF SALVATION ... ..	79
VIII. "THE FINGER OF GOD" ... ..	96





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in Holy Writ.**

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**Chapter One.**

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**"GOD OUR SAVIOUR."**

**N**OT the least among the many wonders of Holy Writ is the use made therein by the Holy Spirit of the number three.

The study of this subject is of absorbing interest, and is, moreover, exceedingly useful to the servant of the Lord in many ways, in these days of doubt.

On every side there are men who deny, and many more who doubt, such great and vital verities as the Deity of the Lord Jesus, the redemptive character of His sacrificial death,

and the verbal inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. And those of the Lord's people who are brought into contact with such doubters, and are confronted with such doubts, may derive much help from a knowledge of the way in which the Holy Spirit has used the number three throughout the Bible. For the Spirit of God has seen fit to insert that number in His Word so repeatedly, and in such remarkable connections, that a careful and prayerful study of its use cannot fail to strengthen our faith in each of those great verities we have mentioned.

Further, a study of the inspired record of things which happened three times, of incidents which occurred at the third hour, and of events which took place on the third day, will show again and again that happenings, which at first sight might be regarded as the result of chance, accident, or human caprice, were really Divinely ordered and over-ruled according to "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God."

Again, a study of the occurrences of the third and of three in the Word, will rejoice the hearts of those who love the Lord, for it will emphasise, in a way new perhaps to many, the pre-eminent place which, from the very beginning of human history, the Lord's person and work occupied in the mind of God, and the way in which every part of the Scriptures pointed to His cross—the supreme and central fact of all time.

Three has been termed the number of solidity; a mere surface has two dimensions

(length and breadth) only, but a third dimension (thickness, i.e., height or depth) is essential for solidity. Three is the number of the cube in which all three dimensions—"the length and the breadth and the height of it"—are equal.

Three has been termed a sanctuary number—it is the smallest number of straight lines which can form an enclosure or sanctuary by completely separating part of a surface from all the surrounding surface. Three is the number of the triangle; two lines start from the same spot, but the second, going off at an angle, gets ever farther and farther from the first, until a third line comes from the first to the second and thus, through itself, connects the second with the first once again. Which things are an allegory.

The number three was held in great esteem by the ancients, who regarded it as sacred and as being specially connected with the gods. They considered that three represented the whole of anything (its beginning, its middle, and its end), all time (the past, the present, and the future), and all creation (the heavens, the earth, and the underworld), and so represented also the immortal gods who had made all things.

But we need not consider further these aspects of the use of three (though they are interesting, and though there may possibly be found in them faint traces of that early knowledge of God which is referred to in Romans I. 20—25) since it is not from these sources, but from **the Holy Spirit's use of the number three in the Scriptures**, that the Lord's

people may obtain much useful instruction and valuable help.

Many other numbers (e.g., 4, 7 and 12) are used symbolically in Holy Writ, some of them (e.g., 4) frequently in conjunction with the number three, and the study of the Biblical usage of all such numbers is very instructive; but we must at present devote our attention to the number three only.

Let us proceed, therefore, without further introduction, to the consideration of some of the numerous references to the third and to three in the Word of God; and may the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the ever blessed Trinity, instruct us in our study of that Word, every detail of which has been inspired by Him, and the whole of which has been declared by Him to be "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3. 16).

The first Scripture to which we shall refer is the nineteenth verse of the twenty-eighth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel; in that verse we read the Lord's instruction that His disciples were to baptize "in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." It is to be observed that the Lord said in the Name, not in the Names, of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Here then is a text (not the only one, see e.g., 2 Corinthians 13. 14) clearly indicating the Holy Trinity—the Three Persons in the One Godhead. Now there can be no doubt that the peculiar importance attached to the number three in the Holy Scriptures is due, in the first place, to the fact that it is **the number of the Persons in the Godhead,**

in consequence of which we find that number used, again and again, to signify Divine manifestation, completeness and perfection.

Again and again, both in the Old Testament and in the New, God has in various ways connected this number three with the references made to Himself and to His Name. For instance, in Isaiah 6. 3, we read that the seraphim used the word "Holy" **three times** at each mention of the Lord—"One cried unto another and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory."

Again, in Numbers 6. 23—27, we read that God's Name was to be put upon the children of Israel by means of a **threefold** benediction—"Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the Children of Israel, saying unto them, (1) the Lord bless thee and keep thee: (2) the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: (3) the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace. And they shall put My Name upon the Children of Israel; and I will bless them."

Again, in Revelation 4. 8, we read that the living ones, around the throne of God, "rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." Here we have a threefold description of God, each of the three parts of which is again divided into three parts.

Now we find that, in the Word, **the Three Persons in the Godhead are most clearly revealed in connection with the redemption and salvation of sinners.** In several Scriptures we see that the Eternal and Ever Blessed

Three—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—are all concerned in that salvation. We read, for instance, in Hebrews 9. 14, that **“Christ through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God.”** And it is noticeable that God in His Word has repeatedly and remarkably connected the number three with references to Himself as the Saviour.

For example, in the Epistle to Titus the phrase **“God our Saviour”** occurs **three** times (once in each chapter) and the expression **“Jesus Christ our Saviour”** also occurs **three** times (again once in each chapter). Here we notice that the number three is connected with God as Saviour, and we notice in addition that the title of Saviour, which is given to God **three** times, is given **three** times also to the Lord Jesus Christ; and surely this has been done only because Christ is God (as indeed He is distinctly called in Titus 2. 13).

Again, when we turn to the brief Epistle of Jude, which also speaks of **“God our Saviour”** (verse 25), we find that almost all the thoughts and illustrations in that epistle have been arranged in groups of **three**. (There are about a dozen triplets and threefold divisions in the twenty-five verses of Jude).

A brief Bible study will show that **the number three**—the number of the Persons in the Godhead, and consequently the number of Divine manifestation—**has been connected with the Saviour's redemptive work**, so many times and in so many ways as to prove, beyond question, that this was done designedly, and that the design must have been that of God Himself. Numerous references are made to

the number three in each of the inspired records of the Saviour's work; the number is also found again and again in the record of the prophecies and pictures by which salvation was foretold and foreshadowed; and, further, the number is introduced frequently at the most important points in the record of the proclamation of salvation.

So frequent are the occurrences of this number of Divine manifestation, so many and so marked are the references to the third and to three, in connection with the Saviour's payment of the redemption price, and with the pathway which led to His passion, that it seems almost impossible for anyone to consider them fairly without perceiving clear evidence of "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" in the transactions themselves, and equally clear evidence of the "inspiration of God" in the very wording of the records of those transactions.

Let us now consider, in the first place, some of the references to the third and to three in connection with the passion of the Saviour—the payment of the price of redemption, the shedding of His precious blood, and His death upon the cross. Then, let us observe the prominence given to this number throughout the record of the pathway of the Saviour, from His baptism to His death. After that, let us turn back to the Old Testament and note some of the occurrences of the number in the pictures and prophecies of salvation; and, then, let us pursue the subject by turning again to the New Testament and observing some of the references to three and the third in connection with the proclamation of salvation.

## Chapter Two.

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### THE PASSION OF THE SAVIOUR.

**I**N the first place then we turn to the references to the third and to three in connection with the cross and passion of the Saviour—His death, the shedding of His precious blood, the payment of the price of our redemption.

We learn from Mark 15. 25, that it was **"the third hour"** when the Saviour was crucified. We learn also that after **three hours**, that is at the sixth hour, the abnormal darkness began which lasted for another **three hours**—"when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour" (Mark 15. 33).

We know that at the place called Calvary there were **three** crosses, for He was crucified with two malefactors—"on either side one, and Jesus in the midst" (John 19. 18). And we know that when those **three** crosses were erected "the Scripture was fulfilled, which saith, "And He was numbered with the transgressors" (Mark 15. 28).



The very "superscription of His accusation," which was nailed to the cross above His holy head was written in **three languages**—"in Hebrew and Greek and Latin" (John 19. 19).

During His ministry the Saviour had foretold His death and resurrection, speaking of "the temple of His body" and saying, "Destroy this temple, and in **three days** I will raise it up" (John 2. 19—21). And, as He hung upon the cross, those around Him said, tauntingly and sneeringly, "Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in **three days**, save Thyself, and come down from the cross" (Mark 15. 29—30). Yet, though those scoffers little credited it, the time for the accomplishment of the Lord's words was even then at hand, and His prediction was fulfilled when the temple of His body was raised again "**on the third day.**"

And, during the interval, ere that third day dawned, there was fulfilled that other prediction uttered by the Lord during His ministry, that "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of Man be **three days and three nights** in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12. 40). It has often been pointed out that, in counting a number of consecutive days, it was customary to reckon any portion (whatever its length) of the first day or of the last day of the period as a complete day of twenty-four hours; thus the interval, between the Saviour's death and His resurrection, is described in some passages as lasting for "three days," or even for "three days and three nights," while other passages speak of "**the third day**" as the resurrection day.

Again and again, during His ministry, the Lord foretold that He would rise on the third day. And so it came to pass. The angels in the empty tomb declared, "He is not here, but is risen; remember how He spake unto you when He was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and **the third day rise again.**" And the two disciples, to whom "He showed Himself alive after His passion" as they journeyed to Emmaus on that resurrection day, when they sorrowfully told the story of His condemnation and crucifixion, declared, "To-day is **the third day** since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre; and when they found not His body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that He was alive" (Luke 24. 5—7, 21—23 and Acts 1, 3).

Thus the number three is plainly imprinted upon every part of our Saviour's passion; it is clearly connected with each of the three great facts of the Gospel (namely, the death, the burial and the resurrection of our Lord) to which the Apostle Paul refers in I. Corinthians 15. 1—4: "I declare unto you the gospel which I preached—that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

But the number three is emphasised still more by the fact that, although the history of our Saviour's cross and passion is recorded in four Divinely-inspired accounts, several important particulars are recorded in **three only** of

those accounts. For example, the crown of thorns is mentioned only by Matthew, Mark and John; the three hours of darkness are chronicled only by Matthew, Mark and Luke; and the rending of the veil of the Temple is recorded only by the same three Evangelists.

Further, the number three, which in connection with the Saviour's death is plainly imprinted upon the sacred story, is also used to form a watermark, as it were, on the page of Scripture. Thus, in this connection, the number three is emphasised yet more in the following way. Once in the Old Testament and twice in the New, **three times** in all in the Bible, the Holy Spirit has recorded the Saviour's cry of bitterest anguish—"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" The words first occur in Psalm 22 (that psalm which so touchingly foretold the suffering of the Saviour upon the cross), they are next recorded in Matthew 27. 46, and they occur for the third and last time in Mark 15. 34. We see then that the Holy Spirit inspired the psalmist and two evangelists, two only of the four, to pen that terrible cry, in order that those affecting words (so expressive of that which caused the most intense anguish to the Saviour when He bore our sins in His own body on the tree) might be recorded three times and only three times in the Word of God.

Again, in a similar way, and still in connection with the Saviour's cross and passion, the number three is further emphasised by the fact that the amazing truth, that "He was numbered with the transgressors," is referred to **three times** in God's Book (Isaiah 53. 12, Mark 15. 28 and Luke 22. 37).

What can we think of this constant recurrence of the number three? Is it only undesigned coincidence? Surely not. The number is introduced so often and in such a variety of ways as to preclude absolutely the thought of mere chance or accident.

Is there not, in this use of the number three, ample evidence of design and of the careful and purposeful carrying out of every detail of the design? Is there not also ample and convincing evidence of design in the record of the happenings, as well as in the happenings themselves? And is it possible, after weighing fairly the volume and variety of the evidence, to escape the conclusion that in each case the design must necessarily have been formed by God?

Three is the number of the Persons in the Godhead, the number of Divine perfection, the number of Divine manifestation in redemption, the number of the revelation of God our Saviour; and the constant introduction of that number into all things relating to the Saviour's death, burial, and resurrection, may well serve to strengthen our conviction that the plan of salvation, the payment of the price of redemption, and the record of that sacrifice were entirely the work of God.

Verily, it was "the God of all grace" Who formed the plan of redemption; it was the Son of God Who "loved me and gave Himself for me"; and it was the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Triune Godhead, Who inspired every detail of the record of the redemptive work.

## Chapter Three.

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### THE PATHWAY OF THE SAVIOUR.

**WE** next turn to some of the references to the number three in connection with the pathway of the Saviour from His baptism to the cross; and we quickly discover that this number, which was so greatly emphasised in relation to the Lord's death, was also much in evidence throughout His pathway to Calvary—particularly at those points where His death and resurrection were foreshadowed, or foretold, and at that point where, "the hour" having come, the narrative of the pathway is merged into that of the passion.

In Matthew 3. 16—17 we read, "Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The baptism of the Saviour (His immersion in and emersion from the waters of Jordan) was a foreshadowing of His death and resurrection—He endured in reality at Calvary that which

was prefigured when He was immersed in Jordan. As He emerged from the water, the Spirit of God descended upon Him and the voice of the Father was heard, saying, "This is My beloved Son." Thus, there was a manifestation of all **Three Persons** of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—when the Saviour was baptized at "about thirty years of age" (Luke 3. 23). This symbolic act divided the thirty years of His private life from the three years of His public ministry; and God marked its importance by three significant things—the heavens were opened, the Dove descended, and the Divine Voice was heard.

Immediately after His baptism, the Lord Jesus was "led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" (Matthew 4. 1); and the number three is again in evidence in connection with the Lord's temptation, to which, as to very many other incidents, reference is made in **three Gospels only**. He could never have been the Saviour of fallen men if Satan could have caused Him to fall; the Lamb which would bear the sin of others must of necessity be without spot or fault. And His suitability for that work, His faultlessness and incorruptibility, were clearly manifested by His threefold victory over the tempter. The Holy Spirit has recorded the details of the last **three** assaults of the enemy at the close of the forty days of temptation, and He has recorded also that each one of the three was repulsed by the Saviour's loyal obedience to the will of His God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. "It is written. . . it is written. . . it is written. . .," He said; and thus He won His threefold victory by a **threefold** appeal to the Word of God (Matthew 4. 1—11).

The Gospels tell us of **three** occasions during the Saviour's ministry on which there came "a voice from heaven," as God the Father bore testimony to the pleasure and glory which He derived from the work of His Son. If we consider these three occasions, we shall find that on each of them there was something in the circumstances calculated to cause our thoughts to turn to Calvary.

On the first occasion the voice was heard at the Lord's baptism; as He was raised up from the figure of death, "there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased" (Mark 1. 11). The voice was heard again at the transfiguration; Moses and Elias appeared and talked with the Lord of "His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem"; one of the three disciples who were with the Lord said, "Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias"; but almost immediately "there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son: hear Him" (Luke 9. 30—35). The voice was heard once more shortly before the Lord's death. He said, "Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'; but for this cause came I unto this hour. 'Father glorify Thy Name.'" Then came there a voice from heaven saying, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again" (John 12. 27—28). This was the last of the **three** occasions on which God's voice was heard speaking from heaven during the Saviour's pathway to the cross.

We know that ere long the Lord will descend from heaven with a shout and will gather His people to Himself; "the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed; for this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality; so when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (I. Corinthians 15. 52—54). As we look back over the pathway of the Saviour, we see how He foreshadowed the full and final victory over death, by calling back to life some who had died. The Gospels tell us of **three** cases, and only three cases, in which He recalled to the land of the living those who had passed through the portals of death.

The three individuals, who were thus miraculously brought back to life, were the daughter of Jairus (just after her death), the only son of the widow of Nain (as he was about to be buried) and Lazarus of Bethany (after he had been dead four days). Thus, the number three was again exhibited, by Divine design we doubt not, in that **triple** manifestation of the Saviour's power over death, by which He foreshadowed that glorious victory which enables His people triumphantly to sing, "O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I. Corinthians 15. 55—57).

The Lord Jesus also brought the number three into prominence by choosing **three disciples**—Peter, James and John—to accompany



Him at certain special times. And the Gospels tell us of **three occasions**, and three only, on which only the chosen three accompanied Him. Of those three occasions, two have been mentioned already, in different connections, namely, the raising of the daughter of Jairus and the transfiguration of the Lord; the **third** was on the night of His betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane when "He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here, and watch with Me" (Matthew 26. 37—38).

In the Saviour's words, as well as in His works, the number three is brought to our notice again and again. For example, on one occasion, the Lord spake of His **three days** of walking and working thus: "Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk to-day, and to-morrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem" (Luke 13. 32—33). We need not enter into the vexed question of the exact meaning of these words of our Lord; it is sufficient for our present purpose to note the reference to the end of the pathway on the **third day**—"the third day I shall be perfected."

Again, when speaking of His approaching death, the Lord several times, and in various ways, assured His disciples that He would arise on "the third day." In this connection let us observe His references to three and to the third in the following verses (some of which we have already mentioned):—Matthew 12. 40; 16. 21;

17. 23; 20. 19; Mark 8. 31; 9. 31; 10. 34; Luke 9. 22; 18. 33; and John 2. 19.

Further, it was surely not by accident that the number three occurred in such a noticeable way in some of the Lord's parables. For instance, in the parable of the man who fell among thieves, the Saviour speaks of the robbed and wounded man being seen by two persons (a priest and a Levite) who left him helpless, and by a **third** (the good Samaritan) who succoured him and saved him; and the Lord asks, "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?" (Luke 10. 36). How clearly this third one in the story—the good Samaritan—pictures the Lord as the Saviour of the stricken and helpless sinner.

Another instance of the use of the number three in the Lord's teaching is found in the three parts of His great parable of the finding of the lost (Luke 15). In that **threefold parable** of the recovery of the lost sheep, the lost silver, and the lost son, we may discern the action of the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity—the seeking shepherd picturing God the Son, the woman with the lighted lamp searching for the silver picturing God the Holy Spirit, and the father welcoming the lost son picturing God the Father. And in the **thrice pictured** rejoicing over the finding of that which was lost (verses 6—7, 9—10, 23—24) we get a glimpse of the delight of God our Saviour in the recovery of the lost; there is rejoicing also as we well know in the hearts of those thus recovered, but the emphasis here is on the joy of our Saviour-God. We do not wonder that, when thus illustrating God's joy

in the recovery of the lost, the Saviour should plainly stamp upon His picture the number three—the number of Divine completeness and perfection.

In reading the Holy Gospels, as we near the end of the Saviour's path to Calvary, and the shadow cast by the coming cross becomes more distinct, we find the number three imprinted very plainly upon the sacred page.

We read that, on the very night of the betrayal, He crossed the Kedron and entered Gethsemane with His little band of eleven followers; and then, leaving eight of them behind, He went further into the Garden with the remaining three (Mark 14. 32—33). And these three were Peter, James, and John, **the chosen three**; and this sad and solemn night was the third of the three special occasions on which the chosen three were specially near Him. But the Saviour withdrew a little way, even from them, ere He uttered the prayer which has so often and so deeply touched the hearts of those for whose salvation He was about to drink the bitter cup, in loyal and loving obedience to His Father's will. With deep reverence we note that the Holy Spirit, in describing this sacred scene, has thought it well to point out that the Saviour prayed **three times** in that hour of bitter trial and of soul-inspiring victory. The disciples slept, even the chosen three and even at such a time; and though He awakened them, and bade them watch and pray, yet they slept again; "and He left them, and went away again, and prayed **the third time**, saying the same words" (Matthew 26. 44). Only three of the Gospels tell us of that hour of the Saviour's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane; and those

three Gospels also tell us of the kiss with which the traitor Judas betrayed the Lord.

Earlier in the evening, as they walked towards the Garden, the Saviour had told His disciples that Zechariah's prophecy of the smiting of the Shepherd and the scattering of the sheep was to be fulfilled that night. "Smite the Shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered," the prophet had said (Zechariah 13. 7); and the prophecy is quoted by Matthew and Mark and thus appears **three times** on the pages of Holy Writ.

In spite of the Saviour's statement that all would be offended because of Him that night, Peter declared that he would follow the Lord even to prison and death; but the Lord said to him, "This night before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice" (Matthew 26. 34). And the Saviour's sorrowful prediction was presently fulfilled when Peter **three times** denied his Lord in the palace of the high priest.

Thus the number three was inscribed again and again on the records of the night of betrayal. And in the early morning of the day of the cross the number was again emphasised, when, during the Saviour's trial, His innocence was **three times** declared by Pilate; for we read that "he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath He done? I have found no cause of death in Him" (Luke 23. 22).

Thus and thus has the number of Divine manifestation been written upon the records of that which the Lord did and said and suffered on the way to the Cross.

“The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world”; that was the purpose for which He came, hence His pathway led inevitably to that dread day on which three crosses were upreared at Calvary, and He was crucified on the middle one, at the third hour, “for us men and our salvation.” As we have seen, the number three has been introduced again and again by the Holy Spirit into the descriptions of the pathway along which the Saviour travelled to that third hour; it has been plainly inscribed here and there, it has been delicately interwoven elsewhere, and nowhere is it very far distant from any part of the narrative which points to the third hour on the cross and the three days in the tomb.

Further evidence might be adduced; but, surely, enough has been given to prove to any unbiased mind that every page of the record of the Saviour’s passion, and of the ministry which preceded it, has been designedly water-marked and imprinted with the number three. The number occurs far too often, and in too many ways, in this connection, to be accounted for by accident or chance. This cannot be the work of the long arm of coincidence; it must surely be the work of “the finger of God.”

Verily He Whose pathway to the cross we have been considering was indeed the Son of God; that which He accomplished at the cross was the work which His Father had sent Him to perform; and the records of His service and sacrifice are in every particular the work of the Spirit of God.

## Chapter Four.

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### EARLY PICTURES OF THE SAVIOUR'S WORK.

**WE** have seen with what care the Holy Spirit has emphasised the number three in the records of the death, burial and resurrection of our Divine Saviour, and therefore it will not surprise us perhaps to find that number inscribed also upon some of those Old Testament Scriptures which foretold, or foreshadowed, the work which He accomplished and the salvation which has resulted from it.

The Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul has told us that the three cardinal facts of the gospel of our salvation are, (1) "That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and (2) that He was buried, and (3) that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (I. Corinthians 15 3—4). Thus we are informed that the Lord's death and resurrection were foretold in the Old Testament; and our attention is called to the fact that the number three will be found therein in this connection, for we are told that "**He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.**"

But, in spite of all that has just been said, it is with no little wonder that we discover how numerous and how varied are the references to the number of Divine manifestation and perfection in those Scriptures which predict the coming of the Saviour and depict the work of salvation.

An early and unmistakable, if faint, foreshadowing of salvation is found in Genesis 1. 9—13. Several times in the Word an overwhelming flood is used as a figure of judgment, and deliverance from such a flood is consequently a figure of salvation; in the verses just mentioned, we read that the waters, beneath which the whole earth had been submerged, were "gathered together unto one place" and the dry land appeared. Earth thus emerged from its watery grave, by Divine command, and the Holy Spirit has placed on record the fact that the day on which this occurred was "**the third day.**"

Again, in chapters six to eight of the book of Genesis there is the inspired account of the flood, and there we see salvation clearly pictured in the deliverance of Noah and of those with him in the Ark. Now let us observe how the number three has been inscribed many times and in many ways upon this foreshadowing of salvation. The Lord gave Noah precise instruction concerning the dimensions of the ark, saying, "The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits"; here we have the number **three** in combination with other numbers the significance of which is outside the scope of our present study. The Lord also directed that the ark was to contain **three**

**stories**—"with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it" (Genesis 6. 15—16). At various points in the account mention is made of Noah's **three sons** and also of the **three wives of his sons**; our attention is again called to Shem, Ham, and Japeth in Genesis 9. 19, and we are reminded of the fact that the whole earth was repopled by the descendants of these three oft-mentioned men—"these are the three sons of Noah, and of them was the whole earth overspread." It is recorded also that Noah **three times** sent forth the dove out of the ark. Finally, let us observe that, in the list of the heroes of faith in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, the **third** one mentioned is Noah.

Leaving the story of the ark, and passing on to the fourteenth chapter of Genesis, we find another type of Christ in the person of the priest-king Melchisedec, who blessed Abram in the name of the Most High God after he had provided for Abram "bread and wine"—those things which are for us memorials of the Saviour's death and symbols of His precious body and blood. Is it not remarkable that this man Melchisedec—who was "made like unto the Son of God"—is mentioned in **three books**, and three only (i.e. Genesis, Psalms, and Hebrews) of the Divine Library?

Let us next turn to the account of Abraham, whom Melchisedec thus blessed, and note some of the threes which the Holy Spirit has marked upon the story of this man who is **three times** spoken of in the Bible as the friend of God (2 Chronicles 20. 7, Isaiah 41. 8, James 2 23). "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," God said to Abraham; and the Holy



Spirit, through the Apostle Paul, has assured us that the promised Seed, who should bestow the world-wide blessing thus foretold, was none other than Christ (Galatians 3. 16). We need not be surprised, therefore, to find the number of Divine manifestation occurring frequently in the story of this man, who had such implicit trust in God, to whom such wondrous promises were given by God, and from whom "as concerning the flesh," was descended the Saviour—"Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham" (Romans 9. 5, Matthew 1. 1).

In the fifteenth chapter of Genesis we have the account of God's covenant with Abram respecting his promised descendants and the promised land; two birds and three animals were used for the confirmation of the covenant (see in this connection Jeremiah 34. 18—19) and God made the remarkable stipulation that each of the **three animals** should be **three years** old: "He said unto him, Take Me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon" (Genesis 15. 9). Doubtless the explanation of this peculiar stipulation concerning the age of the three animals is to be found in the significance of the number three; the covenant was made by God Himself and He caused the number of Divine perfection to be thus clearly marked upon it.

In the opening verses of the eighteenth chapter of Genesis we are told how "the Lord appeared" to Abraham and renewed the promise of the birth of Isaac, and we find the number three inscribed several times upon this passage of Scripture. Note the reference to

the "**three men**," note also the "**three** measures of fine meal" which Sarah prepared, and the **three** other things ("butter, and milk, and the calf") which Abraham provided for these "**three men**."

We read in the twenty-first chapter of Genesis of the birth of Isaac, and we are told in verse twelve that God said unto Abraham, "In Isaac shall thy Seed be called." This Divine statement appears **three** times in the Book of God—in Genesis 21. 12, in Romans 9. 7, and, finally, in Hebrews 11. 18.

There are **three things** which Abraham did "by faith" enumerated in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews :—

1. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out not knowing whither he went." (verse 8).

2. "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise" (verse 9).

3. By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure" (verses 17 to 19).

As the Divine promise, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called," is three times recorded in Holy Scripture, so also are there **three references** to

the offering up of Isaac, which is the **third** of the three things enumerated in the eleventh of Hebrews as being done by Abraham "by faith." The record of the incident is found in Genesis 22, it is referred to again in Hebrews 11, and it is mentioned for the third and last time in James 2. 21.

The account in the twenty-second chapter of Genesis, of the offering up of Isaac is a familiar but ever wonderful story full of predictions and prophetic pictures. It tells of a father and a son who "went both of them together"; it tells of a prophetic assurance that God would "provide Himself a Lamb for a burnt-offering"; it tells of a substitutionary death (an "in the stead of" sacrifice); it tells how the son was "in a figure" raised from the dead. This story is very dear to the believer's heart, because it is such a clear foreshadowing of the Person and work of the Saviour, and because it is a Divinely-erected finger-post pointing to Calvary and to the emptied tomb in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea.

Having received the command to offer up Isaac, Abraham commenced the journey to Mount Moriah accompanied by his son and some of his servants. They journeyed on together until Abraham caught sight of the appointed place in the distance; then he said to the servants, "Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, **and come again to you.**" Abraham and his son went onward together to "the place which God had told him of"; and some time later they returned together, as Abraham had promised, to the spot where the servants were waiting for them. But wondrous things had happened

to father and son, and things still more wondrous had been pictured and promised, during their brief absence from the servants. During that time Isaac, unresisting, had been bound by Abraham and laid upon the wood on the altar; surely, this pictured the Father who "spared not His Own Son but delivered Him up for us all," and pictured also the Son who was "obedient unto death even the death of the cross." And, during that time also, Abraham's uplifted hand had been stayed, by a voice from heaven, and a ram had taken the place of Isaac and had been offered up by Abraham for a burnt offering "in the stead of his son." (Surely, not by Isaac alone, but by the ram also, Christ was pictured; for none could take His place at Calvary; He Himself "died for us") So, on that day, Isaac, over whom the sacrificial knife had flashed as he lay bound upon the altar, was "in a figure" raised from the dead, and he returned safely with his father to their waiting servants. But on what day did these significant and typical events occur? Probably, after all that we have already seen, no one will be surprised to observe the time note which the Holy Spirit has given (in verse 4) indicating that these things took place on **"the third day."**

It is clear that this "third day" (of Genesis 22. 4), on which Isaac was raised from the dead "in a figure," was a foreshadowing of that other "third day" on which the Saviour was raised from the dead in actual fact. And, doubtless, this "third day" Scripture, is one of those referred to in I. Corinthians 15. 4, where it is affirmed that Christ "rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

Turning now to Genesis 24, we read again of the same two men, Abraham and Isaac, and a **third** man is also brought to our notice in the person of Abraham's "eldest servant of his house that ruled over all that he had." This chapter discloses the purpose of Abraham the father that Isaac his son should have a bride, and relates how that purpose was successfully carried out by the servant who sought the bride "appointed" by God for Isaac (verse 14) and safely conducted her to him. Here then we have: (1) Abraham, the father, planning that a bride should be obtained from a distant land for his son; (2) Isaac, the son, the man who had been raised from the dead "in a figure," waiting in his father's house until the moment came to meet his bride from the far country; and (3) the unnamed servant, who, in all he says and does, carries out the will of that father and acts in the interests of that son, who seeks and finds the bride for that son, bestows precious things upon her on his behalf, and brings her safely to the place where the bridegroom himself meets her.

In each of these **three men** we may perceive, "in a figure," one of the Three Persons in the Godhead; for there is, doubtless, in this chapter a picture of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—a picture drawn by the pen of the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity depicting the work in which He is even now engaged.

Let us pass on now to the story of Moses, though in so doing we must leave unmentioned several interesting instances of the use of the number three.

“Moses wrote of Me,” our Saviour declared (John 5. 46); and very numerous are the predictions of the coming of the Saviour and the pictures of His work which may be found in the first five books of the Bible, which were written by Moses. Moreover, in many ways the work of Moses foreshadowed the work of Christ whose coming he foretold. It would seem strange therefore, after all we have observed of the use of the number three, if we did not find that number connected in some remarkable way with this man who both prophesied and pictured the Saviour’s work. Consequently, we are not surprised when we discover that the Holy Spirit has indeed connected this number in several striking ways with the person and career of Moses.

Moses could trace his ancestry back through **three** generations to Levi, the **third** son of Jacob. Through his father, Amram, he was descended from Kohath, one of Levi’s **three** sons; and through his mother, Jochebed, also he was directly connected with Levi. Amram and Jochebed had **three** children—Miriam, Aaron, and Moses—of whom Moses was the youngest. So Moses was the **third** in this family of **three**, who traced their lineage back through **three** generations to Levi, the man with **three** sons, who was the **third** son of Jacob.

When Moses was born, Aaron was three years old and Miriam was evidently some years older still, since she was old enough to perform the delicate task entrusted to her when the infant Moses was placed in the ark of bulrushes upon the waters of the Nile (Exodus 2. 1—8 and 7. 7). The story of that ark and its precious freight has doubtless been dear to us

all from our childhood; but it is possible that we have not noticed the fact that Moses was **three months** old when he was placed in the ark. Yet this apparently unimportant fact is one which the Holy Spirit has considered it essential to record in Holy Writ; and, furthermore, He has recorded it once in each of three different books, penned by three different men, so that this seemingly trivial fact (that Moses was three months old when he was placed in the ark) is stated **three times** in all in the Word of God (Exodus 2. 2, Acts 7. 20, Hebrews 11. 23). Can we be wrong in thinking that all this is proof positive of the purpose of God to associate the number of Divine manifestation with the history of this man who prophesied and portrayed the work of Christ?

Much additional evidence might be adduced in further proof that by Divine design the number three was stamped in marked and unmistakable fashion upon the life and work of Moses. Note, for example, the **three signs** by which he was to convince the Israelites that God had sent him (Exodus 4. 9). Note, also, that the whole life of Moses was divided into **three** clearly-defined periods of forty years each—forty years in Egypt, forty years in Midian, and forty years in the wilderness (Acts 7. 23, 30. 36, Deuteronomy 34. 7). Only one further example can be noted before we turn to that portion of the story of Moses which deals with the plagues, the Passover and the Tabernacle. In Deuteronomy 18. 15 we read that Moses said, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, **like unto me.**" This prophecy is repeated in Acts 3. 22 and again in Acts 7. 37; so that this statement, which shows

that Moses both foretold and foreshadowed the coming Christ, has been recorded **three times** altogether in the Holy Scriptures.

When God first commanded Moses to go to Pharaoh and demand the release of the Israelites, He instructed him to say, "Thus saith the Lord, Israel is My son, even My firstborn: and I say unto thee, Let My son go, that he may serve Me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy first-born" (Exodus 4. 22—23). But, before God inflicted that terrible judgment upon Pharaoh, He inflicted upon Egypt several preparatory strokes, in which He gave proof both of the utter helplessness of the gods of Egypt and of His own mighty power, which He was prepared to manifest for the deliverance of His people. These plagues—these preparatory strokes—which preceded the final terrible judgment were nine in number; and upon them the number of Divine manifestation was imprinted by God in a peculiar way. The **third** plague, the **sixth** plague, and the **ninth** plague came upon the Egyptians without warning; whereas the first and second, the fourth and fifth, and the seventh and eighth were all announced beforehand. Thus these nine plagues were divided into **three groups of three each**—the third plague in each of the three groups of three being sent by God without any previous announcement or warning being given to Pharaoh. How simply, yet strikingly, the number three was thus stamped upon those judgments which led up to the ever-memorable night, in which the last terrible judgment fell upon the land, when the Lord smote the first-born of Pharaoh, and delivered Israel, of whom



He had said, "Israel is My son, even My first-born."

Let us turn next to the inspired account of the Passover in the twelfth chapter of Exodus. The Passover lamb was a very plain type of our Saviour; the slaying of the lamb for the salvation of the firstborn foreshadowed the Lord's vicarious and sacrificial death—for "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" (I. Corinthians 5. 7). Realising that the Passover lamb was one of God's prophetic pictures of Christ and remembering that all the details of the Passover arrangements were ordered by God Himself, we are prepared to find in them some indication of the number **three**, that number of Divine manifestation and perfection, which was, as we have seen, so often and so plainly stamped upon the walk and work of Him Who was the great Antitype of the Paschal lamb. And indeed that number was indicated; it was indicated in a most remarkable and striking way upon every house in which the firstborn was not slain on that night of terror. For God had said, "They shall take of the blood and strike it **on the two side posts and on the upper door post** of the houses" (Exodus 12. 7).

So, by Divine command, the blood was placed upon each of the three posts ("on the two side posts and on the upper door post") of the door of every house where, while the destroying angel passed through the land, the inmates feasted in perfect security upon the lamb which had been slain for the salvation of the firstborn. Thus all places of safety on that Passover night had the number three conspicuously displayed upon them for there were

**three blood-marks** at the entrance to each one; and these blood-marks were in every case three in number, not by chance, nor by the caprice of Moses, but by the command of God Himself, Who thus plainly imprinted the number of Divine perfection upon that which typified the sacrificial death of His Beloved Son.

But this is not the only indication of the number three in connection with the Passover, for, in the inspired record of the directions given by God to Moses, "the blood" is mentioned exactly **three times**; further, "the blood" is also mentioned precisely **three times** in the record of the instructions given by Moses to the people (see verses 7, 13, 22, 23). And even this is not all, for the fact that the blood-marks on each doorway were three in number is also mentioned **three times** and only three times (verses 7, 22, 23).

Is it possible for any unprejudiced mind to imagine for one moment that these varied occurrences of the number three are the outcome of mere chance?

## Chapter Five.

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### TABERNACLE PICTURES.

**W**E must pass on now to those chapters of Holy Scripture which speak of the Tabernacle—God's first earthly dwelling-place—which was in many ways the most wonderful building ever erected. God Himself desired it: "Let them make Me a sanctuary," He said to Moses, "that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25. 8). God Himself designed it; and Moses was repeatedly enjoined that there must be no departure from the Divine pattern (Exodus 25. 9 and 40). God Himself described it; chapter after chapter of His Word being devoted to the details of this subject.

The reason for all this becomes obvious when we learn that "the holy places made with hands" were "the patterns of things in the heavens," "the figures of the true," "a shadow of good things to come," "a figure for the time then present" (Hebrews 9. 9, 23—24, 10. 1). The Tabernacle itself, its contents, and the ordinances connected with it, formed a series of Divinely-designed types and symbols illustrating the person and work of the Lord

Jesus Christ our Saviour, and the way of approach and access through Him to the presence of God in the Holiest; illustrating also the position, walk, and work of God's children who are "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit," and who are also "an holy priesthood," and "strangers and pilgrims" passing through this world to the land of promise (Ephesians 2. 22, I. Peter 2. 5 and 11).

Now, if we are right in regarding three as the number of Divine manifestation and perfection, we may reasonably expect to find that number connected in some way with the Tabernacle, which was God's dwelling-place, which plainly pictured the person and work of the Son of God our Saviour, and which was desired, designed, and described by God Himself. And, although other numbers (five and multiples of five) are conspicuous in the dimensions of the building, the Holy Scriptures show us that the number three was unmistakably marked in a variety of ways upon the building itself and upon the things connected with it.

The **Tabernacle threes** are indeed very numerous; we cannot mention all of them now, but the instances given below should be sufficient to prove the prominence given to the number in this connection. The whole sanctuary was divided into **three distinct parts**—the Court, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies. The gate of the Court was a beautifully-coloured linen curtain; a second curtain of the same material and exhibiting the same colours formed the door of the Holy Place; and between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies there was a third curtain, "the veil," of the same material and displaying the same colours as

the other two, but ornamented in addition with representations of cherubim. These **three entrance curtains** were all of the same size; for the gate of the Court was twenty cubits broad and five cubits high, while the door and the veil were each ten cubits broad and ten cubits high. Evidently these three curtains, all of the same material, all of the same size, and all with the same colours, prefigured the Lord Jesus; we know that the veil typified the Incarnate Son of God (Hebrews 10. 20), and doubtless the gate and the door also pointed to Him as the only Way to the Father (John 10. 9, 14. 6). Although all three curtains were of the same size, the gate was four times as broad as its height, while the door and the veil were each as high as they were broad; and these facts may be intended to remind us of the width of the Gospel invitation ("whosoever will," "if any man," etc.) on the one hand, and the height of the believer's privileges as worshipper and priest on the other hand.

The colours which were displayed on each of these three curtains were three in number—blue, purple and scarlet. These **three colours**, in the three entrance curtains which typified Christ, were probably intended to represent Him as :—

(1) God—the thought being suggested by the blue, the heavenly colour.

(2) Man—the thought being suggested by the scarlet, the colour connected with the earth and with man.

(3) God and Man in One Unique Person—the thought being suggested by the purple, the colour formed by the combination of blue and scarlet.

The **three Tabernacle colours** which were used for the three entrance-curtains were also exhibited in three other ways:—(1) The three colours were displayed in combination on the set of ten curtains which formed the Tabernacle proper; (2) the three colours were also displayed in combination on the high priest's robes; and (3) the same three colours were used for the cloths which covered the holy vessels when the Israelites were on the march—each cloth was of a single colour, there were several cloths of blue, one of purple, and one of scarlet; thus all these three colours were used for the coverings of the vessels, and no colours other than these three were so used (see Numbers 4. 4—15).

There were representations of cherubim on the veil, as we have already mentioned, cherubim were pictured also upon the set of curtains which formed the Tabernacle proper, and there were golden figures of cherubim upon the Mercy-seat; thus the cherubim appeared in **three** places and three only.

There were **three coverings** over the ten curtains which formed the Tabernacle : (1) A set of eleven curtains of goat's hair, called the Tent, (2) a covering for the Tent made of rams' skins dyed red, and (3) an outside covering of "badgers' skins." Thus animals of **three** kinds (goats, rams and "badgers") were necessary for the provision of these three coverings.

The metals used in the construction of the Tabernacle and its vessels were also **three in number—gold, silver, and brass.** (1) The silver used was "the atonement money" of the

children of Israel, that which by Divine command they gave to God as "a ransom" for their souls (see Exodus 30. 11—16 and 38. 25—28); the foundation sockets of the Tabernacle were formed of this silver, which speaks to us of Him Who came "to give His life a ransom for many," and we are reminded by it that we "are not redeemed with . . . silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ." (2) The fire-enduring brass of the altar speaks of Him Who at Calvary endured the righteous judgment of a thrice-holy God against sin. Brass is used to represent strength, particularly enduring strength, strength to withstand; and, as the altars of sacrifice were of brass, in the Tabernacle and in the Temple, the thought of judgment borne is also closely connected with it; it is thus that the brass reminds us of Him, "Who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God." (3) The gold speaks of the Divine glory that belongs to the Risen Christ at the right hand of God; there was no gold in the holy vessels of the Court of the Tabernacle and no brass in those of the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies.

Only two of these three metals entered into the composition of the holy vessels, as no silver was thus used; but it is noticeable that, nevertheless, the materials used in their construction were **three** in number, for some were of wood covered with either brass or gold, while others were of brass or gold only. All the holy vessels pictured the work of the Lord Jesus; but, speaking broadly, the vessels which were composed of both metal and wood

typified the Lord's person and the work performed by Him in person (the metal and the wood in the one vessel symbolising that He was both God and Man in one Person), while the vessels which were only of metal (i.e. the laver and the lampstand) typified the work which He accomplished by the Holy Spirit. The laver and the lampstand were distinguished from all the other vessels in **three** ways: (1) there was no wood in either of them, (2) their measurements are not recorded, and (3) their efficacy depended upon the liquids they contained—water in the one case, and oil in the other. These three peculiarities all remind us of the work of the Holy Spirit.

The six holy vessels of the Tabernacle were so designed, arranged, and used, that the number three was connected with them in a variety of ways. Each of the three parts of the Tabernacle contained some of the holy vessels—the altar of burnt-offering and the laver were in the Court; the lampstand, the table of shewbread, and the altar of incense stood in the Holy Place; the ark of the covenant was in the Holy of Holies; thus, of the six holy vessels three were in the Holy Place.

**Three of the vessels were of wood and gold** (viz., the table of shewbread, the altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant), and these three vessels, and only these three, had crowns of gold. Surely, these **three crowned vessels** pictured Him Who is the Son of God and is also the Risen and Glorified Man at the right hand of His Father, and, "in a figure," in them "we see Jesus . . . crowned with glory and honour" (Hebrews 2. 9).



It is remarkable that, although the number three is evidenced and suggested in so many ways in connection with the Tabernacle, it only appears once in the dimensions of the holy vessels; and that one instance is found in the measurements of the altar of burnt-offering of which the height was **three cubits**. It was this particular measurement which led the writer to "search the Scriptures" to ascertain the significance of the number three in Holy Writ and to discover why that number was prominently connected with the altar of sacrifice.

We must remember that, as in the case of the three blood-marks on each house of safety on the Passover night, so in the case of the three cubits in the height of the altar, the number was not determined by chance, nor by the caprice of Moses, but by the definite command of the Lord; we should observe also that the height of the altar was evidently not fixed at three cubits for the sake of convenience only, since the heights of the altar of incense and the shewbread table both differed from it, but rather because of the significance of the number three.

The altar of burnt-offering stands out prominently among those ancient sign-posts which were erected by Divine decree, here and there along the pathway of time, to point toward the place called Calvary, and toward the central cross of the three which were there set up at the third hour of that fateful day on which, after three long hours of portentous darkness, the Saviour died. What could be more fitting than that the number, which was connected in so many ways with the death of the Lamb of

God, should be connected also with the altar of sacrifice which foreshadowed it?

At Calvary was fulfilled the prophecy, "Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin"; and at that place, and in that act, the perfect righteousness and the absolute justice of the thrice-holy God were clearly manifested. And at Calvary also the boundless grace and the infinite love of God were revealed as clearly as His justice and righteousness, for we read, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world . . . to be the propitiation for our sins." There the Saviour died, "Who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God"; and of that sacrifice we read, "Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour" (Isaiah 53. 10, 1 John 4. 9—10, Hebrews 9. 14, Ephesians 5. 2).

It was, doubtless, because of all these things that the number which speaks of the Three Persons in the Godhead, of Their manifestation in redemption, and so of Divine completeness and perfection, was evidenced again and again in connection with Calvary. And therefore also, when the Lord gave commandment concerning the altar of burnt-offering, which should foreshadow these things, He said, "The height thereof shall be **three cubits**" (Exodus 27. 1).

Let us observe, in the next place, that the altar-grate was a cubit and a half from the ground (being in the midst of the altar), and that this was also the height of the shewbread

table and of the ark of the covenant (Exodus 27. 4—5, 25. 10, 23). Only these **three things** are stated in the inspired account of the Tabernacle to have been of this particular height; and we cannot doubt that there was a reason why **the ark, the table, and the altar-grate** should all be made of the same height, and a reason also why only those three things were of that height.

The ark of the covenant which stood in the Holy of Holies was Jehovah's throne; within it was the law written upon two tables of stone; on the top of it, between the cherubim, rested the Shekinah glory which told of the Divine presence.

The brazen altar which stood in the Court of the Tabernacle, just within the gate, was called the altar of burnt-offering because the whole of that offering was consumed upon it; but all the other offerings were also connected with that altar in some way—it was the altar of sacrifice and of the shedding of blood. Many think that the "grate" was a network of brass inside the altar, and that upon it the bodies of the burnt-offerings were placed to be consumed by the fire; others favour the view that the network was on the outside of the altar and that the priests stood upon it (or possibly upon a ledge which it supported) when they placed the offerings upon the devouring flame. In any case, it is clear that there was a very close connection between the sacrifices and the altar-grate. And, doubtless, this explains why the ark was of the same height as the altar-grate; the thought thus beautifully expressed in picture language being that all the claims of the throne against the sinner were completely satisfied by the sacrifice.

The ark was no higher than the altar-grate, for the throne made no claims, and the sinner had no needs, which the sacrifice did not meet. The top of the ark, which was on a level with the altar-grate, was called the Mercy Seat; for the throne of the Just and Holy God was indeed a mercy seat; but it could only be a mercy seat because there were upon it blood-marks which bore mute but eloquent testimony to the fact that a sacrifice had been offered, and a spotless and unblemished substitute had taken the guilty sinner's place. Nay, more, in strict justice it could only be a mercy seat because God saw beyond the blood-stains upon it and beheld that to which they pointed, even "the precious blood of Christ," Who, at Calvary, "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." And so we read of the Saviour as the One "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation (i.e., mercy-seat) through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare at this time His righteousness: that He might be just and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3. 25—26). Thus, realising that every claim of the throne of the Just and Holy God was fully met at the cross, we are enabled to understand something of the fitness of having the altar-grate of the same height as the ark.

But, as we have seen, there was another thing of the same height as the two just mentioned, and the **third in this group of three** was the table of shewbread. How wonderful is the truth which our gracious God has here expressed so beautifully in the symbolism of the

sanctuary! In His house there was a table, prepared and spread, from which His priests were fed. Upon the table in the Holy Place were twelve loaves of unleavened bread with frankincense upon them—all speaking surely of our blessed Lord—and, as week by week the bread was changed, the priests were privileged to eat of that which came from the table. How wonderful that men should have been permitted to feed upon that bread which had been in God's Holy Place upon His table, and how beautiful is the picture thus given of communion and fellowship! How it reminds us of the blessed fact that "our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ!" But, had there been no sacrifice, there could have been no table; the claims of the throne must be settled at the altar before there could be any fellowship between men who had sinned and a Holy God.

We should ever have remained afar off had not Christ "once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God"; we could never have had fellowship with Him had we not been "made nigh by the blood of Christ." Surely when the Lord ordained that the table must be of the same height as the altar-grate and the mercy seat, He did so in order to show the close connection between those three things, and to emphasise the fact that there could only be a table because the claims of His throne had been met at the altar.

But we must now note a second way, equally remarkable, in which the ark, the table, and the brazen altar were grouped together and distinguished from the remaining holy vessels. It will be remembered that the Tabernacle

colours were blue, purple, and scarlet, and that, when the Israelites were on the march, the holy vessels were covered with cloths of one or more of these **three colours**. The Divine directions concerning the coverings of the vessels are found in the fourth chapter of Numbers; and a study of that chapter shows how remarkably, by means of these coverings, God grouped together the **three vessels** we are now considering. We find that, although several vessels had blue coverings, the only one which had an outside covering of blue was the ark of the covenant; we find also that the only purple covering was used for the brazen altar, and that the only scarlet covering was placed upon the shewbread table. Thus the Lord has linked together these three vessels by causing one of the three Tabernacle colours to be connected in this special way with each of them, and by so ordering the coverings that no other vessel was connected with any of these colours in exactly the same way.

We may well admire the beauty of the Divine picture-language which thus markedly connected the blue with the ark, the purple with the altar, and the scarlet with the table. The blue which speaks of heaven and of God was peculiarly appropriate to the ark which was His throne and mercy-seat. The purple, combining in itself the heavenly blue and the scarlet which speaks of earth and of man, was specially suitable as a covering for the altar of sacrifice at which was pictured the death of Christ, Who is called the "Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus"—that Peerless Person Who was indeed Man, and Who was also, and as really, God. The scarlet covering of the table symbolised in an equally

suitable and beautiful way the truth that, because of the accepted sacrifice, man could be a partaker of the bread from that table; and the thought of fellowship between God and man, represented by the eating of the shewbread by the priests, was emphasised by the fact that, before the table was covered with the cloth of scarlet, it had a cloth of blue spread upon it (Numbers 4. 7—8). Blue was the outside covering of the ark which represented the throne of God; purple covered the altar which pictured the sacrificial work of Him Who was both Son of Man and God the Son; scarlet as well as blue covered the table which symbolised the fellowship between man and God which has been made possible by that sacrificial work.

There was also **a third way**, the reason for which may not be so apparent, in which the ark, the table, and the brazen altar, were grouped together and distinguished from all the other holy vessels. Each of the three vessels named had four rings, through which were passed the two staves by means of which it was carried from place to place; and the possession of four rings for this purpose was peculiar to these three vessels (for, although the altar of incense also was carried by two staves, it is remarkable that the Lord commanded that it should be constructed with two rings only—not with four like the ark, the altar of sacrifice, and the table).

Thus **these three vessels**, which, as we have seen, were so closely related in the symbolism of the sanctuary, were linked together in three distinct ways. It must surely be evident, to any unbiased mind, that it was not by chance, but by Divine design, that these three vessels,

one of which stood in each of the three parts of the Tabernacle, were grouped together in these three different ways and were distinguished from the remaining three holy vessels in each of these three ways. And, when we learn how clearly these three vessels represented the perfection of the redemptive work of God our Saviour, we learn also why the number of Divine completeness and perfection was connected with them so repeatedly and remarkably.

The number three may be observed again in the fact that the Holy of Holies was a cube—its **three dimensions**, “the length and the breadth and the height of it,” being equal. This fact applies not only to the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle, but to the Holy of Holies in the Temple likewise, and also to the holy city New Jerusalem (Revelation 21. 16).

The number three may be distinguished also in the contents of the ark of the covenant—“wherein was (1) the golden pot that had manna, and (2) Aaron’s rod that budded, and (3) the tables of the covenant” (Hebrews 9. 4).

The number three was also connected with the servants of Jehovah who were privileged to minister in and about His sanctuary, for they were all descendants of the **third** son of Jacob, and, further, they were divided into **three distinct orders** :—

(1) The High Priest, the only one who could enter the Holy of Holies—and that only on one day in the year, and then “not without blood” (see Hebrews 9. 7).



(2) The Priests, the sons of Aaron, who were permitted to minister in the Holy Place, but were not allowed to enter the Holy of Holies (see Hebrews 9. 6), and

(3) The Levites, who were not privileged to enter either the Holy of Holies or the Holy Place. Again the number three was emphasised in connection with the Levites for they were divided into **three classes**, according to their families, each class having its own peculiar duties which are specified in the fourth chapter of Numbers.

We said at the beginning of this chapter that, if we were correct in considering three to be the number of Divine manifestation and perfection, we might reasonably expect to find that number connected in some way with the Tabernacle; and we have now seen that the number three was so employed many times and in many ways. The list we have given of the Tabernacle threes is not exhaustive; but it is, we trust, sufficiently comprehensive to prove beyond a peradventure that this frequent connection of the number three with God's first earthly dwelling-place must have been the outcome of design and of set purpose. If it be granted that the design and the purpose were Divine, all is clear; but, if Divine design be deemed inadmissible, what explanation of the facts can be offered?

Assuredly, it was God Himself Who thus designed that the number three should be evidenced and emphasised in the symbolism of the sanctuary. God's foreknowledge is perfect and complete; the future is as clear as the past

to Him Who "knoweth the end from the beginning"; He foreknew that the number of Divine manifestation and perfection would be connected with all the work of the Saviour, and He, of set purpose, caused that same number to be inseparably connected also with the Tabernacle types by which that perfect work was so clearly foreshadowed.



## Chapter Six.

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### LATER PICTURES AND PROPHECIES.

**L**EAVING unnoticed many other interesting instances of the use of the number three in the Pentateuch, let us devote this chapter to the consideration of a few of the numerous references to that number in the other old Testament books.

At the time when the book of Joshua takes up the story of the Children of Israel, Canaan had almost been reached; the River Jordan, however, swollen by floods and apparently impassable, still rolled sullenly between the pilgrims and the Promised Land. But the Lord was about to bring His people into that Land of Promise notwithstanding the obstacle which confronted them; He was about to deliver them from "the swellings of Jordan" by an act which would furnish unquestionable evidence of His Divine power. So the Lord divided that swollen river and caused His people to pass over on dry land; He delivered them in such a fashion, as Joshua said afterwards, "that all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever" (Joshua 4. 24).

If we think how plainly the Divine hand was manifested when the Lord brought His people dry-shod across the place where the waters of Jordan habitually rolled, and if we consider also how frequently the waters of Jordan symbolise judgment and death, we shall expect to find the number of Divine completeness and perfection, the number of the manifestation of God our Saviour, connected in some way with the crossing of the Jordan. Accordingly, it will not surprise us to discover Joshua's words, "Within **three days** ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the Lord your God giveth you to possess it." The Holy Spirit caused these words to be recorded in Holy Writ, and He has also caused it to be placed on record therein that "it came to pass after **three days**, that the officers went through the host; and they commanded the people saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place and go after it; yet there shall be a space between you and it . . . come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore" (Joshua 1. 11, 3. 2—4). A further instance of the remarkable connection of the number three with the crossing of Jordan is reserved for mention in a later chapter.

We will turn now to the thirtieth chapter of the first book of Samuel, and look at the account which is given there of a beautiful incident in the life of David—an incident which has been used again and again by preachers of the Gospel as an illustration of the blessing bestowed by the Saviour upon the sinner who trusts in Him. The story is that of the young

man who, having been forsaken when in a dying condition by his master, was found by David's men and brought to David. The desperate plight of that young man may well illustrate the position of the sinner who has never been brought to the feet of the Saviour. He was a native of Egypt and the slave of an Amalekite; he was an enemy of David; he had taken part in the capture of David's city and his loved ones; he had shared in that which had caused David such suffering and distress "**on the third day**" (verse 1); and when he was found in the field by David's men he was helpless and hopeless—sick, starving, deserted, well nigh dead. Is it not a plain picture of the sinner who is enslaved by Satan, an alien at enmity with God, dead in trespasses and sins, without hope and without God in the world? The young man is brought to David, the beloved, the Lord's anointed—who is surely here a picture of our Lord Jesus, the Beloved One, the Christ of God—and David cares for him, tends him, feeds him, so that consciousness returns ("his spirit came again to him"), and life opens out anew before him. And how different is this new life—he who, as the slave of the Amalekite, had helped to cause David's suffering, being now saved by David, becomes David's servant and shares in David's victory over his old master (verses 11 to 19).

Here we see several details of the gracious work of God our Saviour very clearly pictured. Now let us observe that the Spirit of God has thought fit to cause the young Egyptian's statement, "**Three days** ago I fell sick," to be inscribed upon the sacred page, and there also He has recorded the fact that neither bread nor water had passed the young man's

lips for **“three days and three nights.”** Thus plainly the Holy Spirit has imprinted the number three upon the account of these illustrative facts which He has caused to be preserved in the imperishable Word; and we dare not regard the facts as purely accidental, nor the record as purposeless.

Let us now turn to some other instructive events in the history of David with which also the number three was specially connected. King David in his old age directed Joab to ascertain the number of the hosts of Judah and Israel, and we are told that this numbering of the people displeased the Lord (I. Chronicles 21. 7). Doubtless the Lord saw that pride filled David's heart as he thought of the vastly increased number of his subjects, and that the king desired this census to provide fresh food for his vanity, and was entirely forgetful of his indebtedness to God by Whose grace alone he occupied his position; doubtless the Lord saw that David, who of old had dared to face Goliath in simple dependence upon God, was now relying upon the arm of flesh, upon the men of war of Judah and Israel, instead of putting his trust in the Lord of Hosts; doubtless also the Lord saw that David so looked upon the people as his people, and was so forgetful of the claims of God upon them, that he completely ignored the Divine instruction given to Moses that when the people were numbered every man should give a ransom for his soul unto the Lord (Exodus 30. 12).

What a lapse on the part of David was betokened by this numbering of his armies; surely he had changed sadly since that day when, with simple trust in the Divine power

and with strong desire to uphold the Divine honour, he had gone forth to meet Goliath after saying to Saul, "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." On that day, David full of faith in God's goodness and greatness, had said to Goliath, "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts. . . this day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand. . . and all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hands" (I. Samuel 17. 37, 45—47). How greatly changed must David have been when he desired Joab to sum up the military strength of his kingdom. Joab protested, and in his protest delicately reminded David that the people were not his, but the Lord's; yet the king insisted, in spite of the warning protest, and the work was accomplished.

No wonder we read that "God was displeased with this thing" (I. Chronicles 21. 7). Man—his vainglorious pride, his fancied prowess—had the pre-eminent place in this work; God's protecting power in the past was forgotten, His precepts and promises were disregarded, His rights were overlooked, the need for the payment of a ransom price (faintly foreshadowing the work of the Redeemer) was not even mentioned and seems to have been completely forgotten or deliberately ignored.

But God intervened; and we cannot but notice the prominence given to the number three in the

Lord's message, which the prophet Gad conveyed to David who had already commenced to realise his sin. "The Lord spake unto Gad, David's seer, saying, Go and tell David, saying, Thus saith the Lord, I offer thee **three things**: choose thee one of them that I may do it unto thee. So Gad came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, choose thee either **three years'** famine: or **three months** to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee; or else **three days** the sword of the Lord, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel. Now therefore advise thyself what word I shall bring again to Him that sent me" (I. Chronicles 21. 9—12).

It is very remarkable that, when the Lord thus intervened in chastisement, He set before David three forms of punishment—three years of famine, three months of defeat, three days of pestilence—and bade him make choice of one of these **three threes**. Any of the three forms of chastisement would necessarily reduce the very numbers in which David had gloried, and any of the three would show how the safety of David and of all Israel and Judah depended upon the Divine pleasure and protection; for if, in His just displeasure, God withdrew His protecting hand and permitted either famine, or defeat, or pestilence, then David and his "men that drew sword" (I. Chronicles 21. 5) would be made to realise, through that calamity, how helpless they were without the help of Him Whose rights they had so largely disregarded. Although remarkable, it is not surprising, after what we have already



seen, that the number of Divine manifestation should appear again and again in this message which indicated the Lord's displeasure and His determination to inflict the needful disciplinary chastisement.

David's reply to the Divine message was, "I am in a great strait; let me fall now into the hand of the Lord; for very great are His mercies; but let me not fall into the hand of man." Then the pestilence broke out and many people died; but soon God's grace was manifested as clearly as His government, and the prophet Gad was sent again to David, to bid him build an altar on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, on Mount Moriah, and offer sacrifices to the Lord upon it. David's heart had been humbled, he had realised his sin, and had repented of it, so he bought from Ornan both the threshing-floor and the whole place, and obediently erected an altar and offered sacrifices there, as he had been directed, "and called upon the name of the Lord; and He answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt-offering . . . So the Lord was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed" (I. Chronicles 21. 26 and II. Samuel 24. 25). Thus these incidents, with which the number of Divine manifestation and perfection was so prominently associated, ended with the Divine acceptance of burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, which, like all other accepted sacrifices, foreshadowed the death of our blessed Lord.

Before leaving these incidents, let us notice that there is a connection between them and the long past events which are recorded in the twenty-second chapter of Genesis; for we cannot doubt that the threshing-floor of Ornan was

upon the very hill where Isaac had been laid upon the altar, and where he had been received from the dead in a figure, when Abraham had offered up the ram "in the stead of his son." Let us notice also the connection between these incidents and the Temple of Solomon. When David saw that the Lord had accepted the sacrifices which he offered on the threshing-floor of Ornan, on Mount Moriah, he decided that this must be the site for the Temple, which was shortly to be erected; and he said, "This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt-offering for Israel" (I. Chronicles 22. 1). Soon after this, "Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem in Mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite" (II. Chronicles 3. 1) and within a few years the completed Temple stood upon this remarkable spot which had been thus remarkably selected.

In the structure and services of the Temple, as in those of the Tabernacle, there were many things which pictured the person and work of the Saviour but we cannot mention them here (the subject is considered in the author's book, "Concerning Solomon's Temple"); nor can we deal in detail with the special prominence which was given to the number **three** in the Temple as in the Tabernacle. Many of the Tabernacle threes, to which reference was made in the last chapter, were reproduced in the Temple; and the number was also introduced in other ways—for example, the great court was constructed "with **three rows** of hewed stones," the inner court was likewise

constructed "with **three rows** of hewed stone," and there were **three tiers** of chambers on three sides of the Holy House (I. Kings 6. 5—6, 36, 7. 12).

How wonderful is the history of that hill to which David, humbled and repentant, was directed after his choice of the **third** of the **three threes** of Divine chastening! It was there that Isaac, the son of Abraham, was laid upon the altar of sacrifice; it was there also, upon that rock foundation, upon the place where sacrifice had been offered and accepted, that Solomon, the son of David, erected the Temple which the Lord called "an house of sacrifice" (II. Chronicles 7. 12). How remarkably, therefore, this place was associated with both the son of Abraham and the son of David! The number **three** was, as we have noticed, connected with each of these happenings upon Mount Moriah; and each of these things foreshadowed the work of our blessed Lord and Saviour—Who is described in the opening words of the New Testament as "Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham."

Passing on rapidly to the days of Elijah we find repeated instances in Holy Writ of the association of the number **three** with the manifestation of the power of God through the ministry of that prophet (see, for example, I. Kings 17. 21, 18. 1, 18. 34, II. Kings 1. 13 and 2. 17). Let us glance now at the first only of these instances—that of the bringing back to life of the widow's son. In this incident we have a very clear manifestation of Divine power, and in it we have also a foreshadowing of the raising of the dead by the Son of God, our Saviour. Notice carefully the record of Elijah's action after the widow had

entrusted to him the dead body of her boy. "He stretched himself upon the child **three times**, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray Thee, let this child's soul come into him again. And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother; and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth" (I. Kings 17. 21—23). Surely, after what has been brought before us, we shall not be disposed to imagine that it was by mere chance, by accidental coincidence, that Elijah stretched himself upon the body of the child **exactly three** times before life returned. On the contrary, we shall be disposed to conclude that, whether Elijah did or did not understand the reason, it was because of the significance which the Lord attached to the number three that He caused the prophet's threefold action; and, further, that the Holy Spirit for the same reason caused that threefold action to be recorded in the Word of God.

Leaving the period of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, let us pass on to that little group of three historical books (Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther) in which we get the Divinely-inspired record of certain instructive incidents in the post-captivity history of the Jews. Because of the sins of God's ancient people, He permitted Jerusalem to be captured, the Temple to be burned, the protecting walls of the city to be overthrown, and the people to be carried away to Babylon as captives in the days of Nebuchadnezzar; and when the book of Ezra opens there was only a mass of blackened ruins upon the ancient foundation-platform on

Mount Moriah where the "exceeding magnificent" Temple of Jehovah had once stood in all its glory.

The earlier chapters of the book of Ezra record the restoration of many of the captive nation to their own land, under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the re-erection of the altar, the resumption of the sacrifices, and, after opposition and delay, the re-building of the Temple. The later chapters of the book relate the story of the restoration (about sixty years after) of a further large company, under the leadership of Ezra himself, and give an account of the reformation which followed the arrival of this faithful servant of God at Jerusalem. (The remarkable incidents recorded in the book of Esther apparently took place during the period of about eighty years between the restoration under Zerubbabel and that under Ezra). The book of Nehemiah, who arrived in Jerusalem about twelve years after Ezra, tells of the reconstruction of the walls and the gates of the city, in spite of considerable opposition, and describes the reformation and the renewal of the covenant at that time—Ezra's reading and exposition of the Word of God being again much used—and a further reformation, about twelve years later still, which followed Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem once more after a period of absence.

Both Ezra and Nehemiah were men of much prayer and realised dependence upon God, and their books contain many instances of the display of God's power in answer to their prayer of realised need and humble dependence. Each step in the work of restoration and reconstruction evidenced the goodness and greatness of

God; and the hand of God may be traced in all these happenings. Both writers speak of "the good hand of their God upon them"; and it is, therefore, not surprising to find the number **three** appearing in the books and in the lives of these two men of God.

The number occurs first in association with the House of Sacrifice (as the Temple of Jehovah at Jerusalem was called by God Himself); we have noticed the prominence given to the number three in the Tabernacle and in Solomon's Temple, and now we find in the book of Ezra that a prominent place was again given to this number in connection with the re-building of the Temple. For it is there recorded, by the Holy Spirit, that Cyrus said, "Let the house be builded, the place where they offer sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof three score cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits; with three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber" (Ezra 6. 3—4).

God permitted the destruction of the first Temple because of the people's sins; but, after a long interval, by the power of His good hand He caused this second Temple to arise upon the same site to take the place of the first. While the Temple was thus being re-erected, the Lord declared, through His prophet, Haggai, "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former" (Haggai 2. 9). Doubtless the Divine promise pointed forward to the time when the Son of God Himself should be seen and heard in that Temple (which, although redecorated and greatly enlarged by Herod, was still known as the

Second Temple). Now let us note that it is recorded in the Word of God, no detail of which is either uninspired or unimportant, that this re-building of the Temple was completed "on **the third day** of the month Adar" (Ezra 6. 15). There must be a reason why the Holy Spirit thus chronicled the fact, which at first sight may seem trivial, that it was "on **the third day**" of a month that the re-erection of the Temple was finished; and the reason may well be that here also the Holy Spirit had in view the coming of the Saviour, and that He would thus direct our thoughts to that other Temple (even "the Temple of His Body"), and to that other "**third day**" (even the day of His resurrection), of which the Lord Jesus said, "Destroy this Temple, and in **three days** I will raise it up" (John 2. 19—22).

The Holy Spirit has also recorded **three** periods of waiting, each period lasting **three days**, in the lives of Ezra and Nehemiah before they commenced their work of renewal and restoration: for we are told that Ezra and his company "abode in tents **three days**" before making the final preparations for the journey to Jerusalem, and that after he reached Jerusalem he again waited "**three days**" before taking the next step; we read also that Nehemiah after his arrival at Jerusalem likewise waited "**three days**" before he proceeded with the work he had been sent to carry out (Ezra 8. 15, 32, Nehemiah 2. 11). Having regard to the prayerful and dependent lives of these two men, and to the display of the power of the Divine hand in the work they accomplished, these three waiting periods of three days each are surely further evidences of the connection of the number three with Divine manifestation.

In this same connection, let us note the number of times that God's hand is mentioned in these two books, and let us observe also the number of times that the Divine hand is therein called the "good hand" (Ezra 7. 6, 9, 28, 8. 18, 22, 31; Nehemiah 1. 10, 2. 8, 18).

Turning next to the book of Esther, we look in vain for any mention of the Divine hand there—indeed God is not once mentioned throughout that book—but, although unmentioned, the hand of God was very clearly manifested in the deliverance of His people as therein recorded; and, accordingly, we find the number three standing out prominently at the crucial point in the history. No doubt we all remember the story of the doom which was overhanging the Jews, and of the way in which they were delivered as the result of the appeal made by Queen Esther at the risk of her own life. It was contrary to the law for anyone to enter the king's presence without being summoned; and even Esther by appearing before the king unbidden would be liable to the penalty of death, as we learn from her own words to Mordecai. "All the king's servants," she said, "do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days" (Esther 4. 11).

The queen, however, loved her nation and was willing to risk her own life in attempting to save the lives of her people; but she made an important request in the message which she



sent to Mordecai, announcing her decision to make the heroic and self-sacrificing attempt. "Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan," said she, "and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink **three days,** night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4. 16). The Jews in the city did as she had requested, and "it came to pass **on the third day,** that Esther put on her royal apparel; and stood in the inner court of the king's house"; and soon the good hand of God, unseen and unmentioned but active and all-powerful, wrought a wonderful deliverance from the impending doom.

This story of the deliverance of his people is very dear to the Jew; and it has found a place also in the heart of the Christian, who has seen in that deliverance, which involved the risking of Esther's life for her people, a faint foreshadowing of his own deliverance from sin and Satan—a deliverance which involved the giving (not the risking, but the actual laying down) of the life of the Divine Deliverer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we come across those who doubt the inspiration of the book of Esther, and deny its right to its place in Holy Writ, because of the absence from it of the name of God, let us remember that the number of Divine manifestation is present in the book, and that here, as in so many other parts of the Bible, this number is clearly and closely connected with Divine deliverance and with that which foreshadows, however faintly, the sacrificial and redemptive work of our Saviour and Lord,

A few instances of the occurrence of the number three in the lives and writings of the prophets must suffice to bring to a close our present study of the Old Testament portion of our subject.

In the third chapter of the book of Daniel we read that, because of their faithfulness to God, some of His servants were cast into a "burning fiery furnace" but were saved by Him from death, and even from injury, in such a miraculous way, that Nebuchadnezzar was forced to declare, "There is no other God that can deliver after this sort." Let us observe that, although four servants of Jehovah are frequently mentioned in the book, those who were so wondrously delivered on this occasion were **three** in number. The Lord in His wisdom and providence, in a way which He has not revealed, kept Daniel out of that trial of faith altogether, with the result that three only of the four faithful friends were doomed to that fiery death from which He saved them, displaying both His greatness and His graciousness in the method of their salvation; so that, then and thus, the number three was once again associated with Divine deliverance.

In the sixth chapter of the book we are told how Daniel himself was cast into a lion's den because of His faithfulness to God, but was preserved by Him in so miraculous a fashion that Darius declared, "I make a decree, that in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for He is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and He worketh

signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, Who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions." On this occasion, Daniel alone of the faithful four was doomed to death and was wondrously delivered by the Lord Whose loyal and beloved servant he was; but, although only one man was endangered and preserved in this instance, nevertheless the number **three** is connected with this Divine deliverance also, for the Holy Spirit has associated that number with Daniel in various ways—for example, it is recorded that he prayed "**three times** a day," and **three times** he is described in the Word as a man "greatly beloved."

In the prophecy of Hosea there is an invitation to Jehovah's straying and scattered people to return to Him; and there is, in connection with this invitation, a prophetic intimation that the Lord will revive them and raise them up on "**the third day.**" This remarkable prophecy, which again emphasises the number of Divine manifestation, reads as follows: "Come, let us return unto the Lord: for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up. After two days will He revive us: in **the third day** He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight" (Hosea 6. 1—2).

Turning now to the book of Jonah, we find it written there that "Jonah was in the belly of the fish **three days and three nights**" (Jonah 1. 17). Here again we have the number three connected in an unmistakable way with Divine deliverance. In this deliverance of Jonah from the great fish on the third day, many have seen a prophetic picture of the revival and raising up of Israel on the **third day** in accordance with the prophecy of Hosea, which

is quoted above. Certainly the number **three** is here related, not only to the deliverance of Jonah, but to a far greater deliverance; for our Saviour connected the three days of the prophet's entombment in the fish with His own death, burial and resurrection, saying, "As Jonah was **three days and three nights** in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be **three days and three nights** in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12. 40).

The resurrection of Jonah from the deep on the third day was a foreshadowing of the Lord's resurrection from the dead on the third day; and doubtless Jonah 1. 17 is one of the passages of Scripture referred to in I. Corinthians 15. 4, where we are told that Christ "rose again **the third day according to the Scriptures.**"

One other point from the book of Jonah should be noticed here : the second chapter of the book reveals the spiritual state of the prophet during his three days in the belly of the great fish, and it records how he prayed to Jehovah while in that strangest of oratories; and we learn that the crowning and concluding words of Jonah's prayer were "Salvation is of the Lord!" This is the last recorded expression of the prophet during those three days; and the truth of the words was then and there strikingly exemplified, for, on that **third day**, "the Lord spake unto the fish and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land." And not only was this deliverance of Jonah an illustration of the truth that "Salvation is of the Lord," it was also a noteworthy example of that association of the number three with salvation which is characteristic of so many Scriptures,

With this example we must conclude this portion of our subject. Instances of the use of the third and of three might be multiplied; but those already given have been sufficiently numerous and varied, it is hoped, to prove beyond a doubt that **the number three** is not employed in haphazard fashion in the Old Testament, but is systematically and methodically linked with manifestations of God's greatness and grace, and is particularly associated with those passages which foretell or foreshadow the Divine work of salvation.

Almost invariably, if not in every instance, the Old Testament types and predictions of the Saviour's cross and passion have **the number three** connected with them; sometimes it is stamped upon the type itself, sometimes it is mentioned in the wording of a prophecy, sometimes it appears in the number of references to a type, in the number of repetitions of a prophecy, in the colours of a curtain, in the height of an altar, in the date of an event, in each of these ways, and in other ways also, the number three is linked with the pictures and predictions of the Saviour's work which appear in all **three parts** of the Old Testament.

In earlier chapters we saw that the number three was frequently and closely connected with the Saviour's pathway and passion; and now we have seen that, from the very beginning of history, the same number has also been associated no less distinctively and unmistakably with the predictions and prophetic pictures of the service and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour. What shall be said of these undeniable facts? Those who believe that there are Three Persons in the Godhead;

those who believe that the Lord Jesus was God the Son, that He came to do His Father's will, that He "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself," that He "made peace through the blood of His cross"; those who believe all this was done "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God"; those who believe also that every detail of the Word of God is inspired by the Holy Ghost; those who believe, as we do, all these great truths, will readily find in them the explanation of the peculiar use of the number three which we have been considering.

But, to those who doubt or deny these great truths, this peculiar use of the number three throughout Scripture presents a problem more easily shelved than solved.



## Chapter Seven.

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### THE PROCLAMATION OF SALVATION.

**I**N previous chapters we have noticed some of the many remarkable ways in which **the number three** is associated in Holy Writ with our Lord's cross and passion, with the pathway which led to the passion, and with the Old Testament promises, prophecies, and pictures of the Saviour; let us now, in this present chapter, continue our consideration of the use made in Scripture of this number of Divine manifestation and perfection, by observing the manner in which the Holy Spirit has stamped it upon the inspired accounts of the apostolic proclamation of the good news of salvation.

Luke tells us that the Gospel which bears his name is a record "of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up"; and from this we may correctly infer that the Lord, after His ascension, still continued "to do and teach" by His Holy Spirit. From the Gospel of Mark we may learn the same lesson, for in it we read of the Lord "working with" His disciples, who in obedience to His command went forth and preached everywhere, after He had been "received up into heaven" (Acts 1. 1—2, Mark 16. 19—20).

Bearing in mind these intimations of the continued working of the ascended Lord, and of His co-operation with His servants, through the Holy Spirit, we need not be surprised to find that **the number three**, which is so plainly imprinted upon the accounts of the Saviour's work before His ascension, is also closely connected with the proclamation by Divinely-gifted messengers of the Divinely-given message of salvation.

Turning to the book of the Acts of the Apostles, we find that Peter and Paul are the apostles whose preaching is brought most prominently before us: and a little consideration will show us that **the number three** has been stamped in a most remarkable way upon the story of the life and labour of each of these "ambassadors for Christ."

The number **three** was associated with Peter's career from the very day on which he first came to the Saviour; for we learn from John 1. 35—42 that Peter was **the third man** who became a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. These verses tell us that two of the disciples of John the Baptist, who heard his declaration that the Lord Jesus was "the Lamb of God," immediately left John and followed the One to Whom he had borne witness; and the Scripture then adds, "One of the two which heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus."

We see, therefore, that Peter was the **third** disciple of the Saviour; and we know that he



was also one of the **three** disciples who were chosen by the Lord to be with Him on those **three** special occasions to which reference has been made in a previous chapter. It will be remembered that the **third** of the three recorded instances of the granting of this precious privilege to the chosen three occurred on the night of His betrayal, when He permitted Peter, James and John to be nearer to Him than the other disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Earlier in that same night the Lord had said to Peter, with solemn emphasis, "Verily, I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crows, thou shalt deny Me **thrice**" (Matthew 26. 34). And the record of the way in which Peter **three times** denied his Lord upon that sad, sad night is inscribed upon the pages of the Book of God—a warning, to all who think they can stand in their own strength, to take heed lest they fall.

But the Lord, who had foretold Peter's lapse from loyalty, had foretold his restoration also; and when the blessed Master turned and looked upon him after his third denial, Peter was filled with contrition, his real love for the Lord, Whom he had thrice denied, asserted itself anew, and he "wept bitterly." That which followed (after the Lord's resurrection) is full of interest and instruction; each step displays clearly and beautifully the wonderful grace and tenderness of the Risen Lord in His dealings with His penitent disciple. We are told how Peter was specially named by the angel who conveyed the Lord's message to His disciples on the resurrection morning (Mark 16. 7). We are told also of what appears to have been an interview between Peter and his Master, of so

private and sacred a character that the Lord has graciously concealed every word spoken, and kept secret every detail, revealing only the fact that "He was seen of Cephas" (I. Corinthians 15. 5).

Finally we are told of the **threefold** avowal, made in the presence of many of the disciples, by him who had been guilty of the threefold denial. John says of the occasion on which Peter three times avowed his love for the Lord, "This is now the **third time** that Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after that He was risen from the dead" (John 21. 14).

How thoroughly, yet tenderly, the Lord searched the heart of Peter on that memorable morning, as He **thrice** asked, "Lovest thou Me?" The three questions differed somewhat from one another; and even the slight change in the wording must have been an additional searching of the heart of him who had thrice denied his Lord, after his boastful assurance, "Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee."

How those three questions must have probed the heart of Peter, and what grief must have been his, as he realised that his threefold denial had necessitated them. The Lord "saith unto him the **third** time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me? Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou Me? And he said unto Him, Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee."

Yet, how gracious it was of the Lord thus to give to Peter, after his three denials, the opportunity of **thrice** answering, "I love Thee,"

and of thus expressing in the presence of the others something of his undoubted love for his Lord. How graciously also, on this occasion, the Lord intimated Peter's restoration, and future usefulness in the service of the Good Shepherd, by **three** times telling him to feed His flock.

If we turn now to the second chapter of Acts we shall find that it was Peter, this man of many threes, who was first used by the Holy Spirit to proclaim, on the day of Pentecost, to "Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven," that the Lord Jesus was the Christ of God. What remarkable evidences of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit were given that day, when, for the first time, the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, the remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, were publicly proclaimed by Peter at Jerusalem.

It is stated in the inspired record, and the fact is surely not without significance, that this first proclamation of the Risen Lord was made at "the **third hour** of the day" (Acts 2. 15). Only a few weeks before, outside the walls of that same city, before the eyes of many of those same people, the Lord had been crucified "at the third hour"; it was, surely, not by accidental co-incidence, but by Divine design, that "the third hour" was also the time at which the risen and ascended Saviour was first proclaimed by Peter to "the house of Israel" as Lord and Christ.

Without doubt, both that third hour and that man of many threes were deliberately chosen by the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, for the commencement of the

proclamation of salvation through Him Who was crucified at the third hour and was raised from the dead on the third day. Some idea of the power of the Holy Spirit, which was then manifested, may be gathered from the recorded fact that "about three thousand souls" gladly received the word and were baptised on that day of Pentecost. Thus the Lord worked by the Holy Spirit through Peter that day; and thus, at the very outset of the proclamation of the Good News of salvation, He stamped upon it the number of Divine manifestation and perfection.

Passing from the second chapter of Acts to the tenth chapter, we find the scene changed from Jerusalem to Cæsarea; but, though the place is different, the preacher is the same, for Peter, who was chosen to be the first to proclaim the risen Christ to the Jews in Jerusalem, was also chosen by God to be the first herald of the Gospel to the Gentiles in Cæsarea. Peter afterwards reminded the other apostles of this, when he said, "Ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel and believe" (Acts 15. 7).

The story of that fresh step in the proclamation of the gospel has been recorded by the Holy Spirit at considerable length, and with much detail, in the tenth and eleventh chapters of Acts. No part of that detailed account should be considered unimportant or unimportant; and we should be very ill-advised to ignore the emphasis which is once again placed upon the number **three** in that inspired narrative.

Our attention is first called to a devout Roman soldier, named Cornelius, a centurion

of the Italian cohort stationed at Cæsarea; this man is visited by an angel of God, at "the ninth hour of the day," who bids him send to Joppa for Peter from whom he shall hear the way of salvation. Accordingly Cornelius sends messengers to Peter, choosing for this purpose two household servants and one soldier. Was it by chance that Cornelius sent **three** messengers? Was it by chance that Luke **three** times recorded that the messengers of Cornelius were three in number? (Acts 10. 7, 19, 11. 11). Surely not. We find it easier to believe that we have here further evidence of the hand of God stamping the number three upon the happenings we have been considering and also upon the record of those happenings.

Our thoughts are next directed to the remarkable way in which Peter, all unconscious of the approach of the three messengers from Cæsarea, was being prepared by God to receive and accompany them to the house of the Gentile centurion. As the men were nearing Joppa, "Peter went up upon the house-top to pray about the sixth hour." Peter's own account of what then took place is as follows: "I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But the voice answered me again from

heaven, 'What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.' And **this was done three times**: and all were drawn up again into heaven" (Acts II. 5—10). How remarkable was the setting thus given to the impressively-spoken words, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common!" And how remarkable that "this was done **three** times!"

Here we have the direct action of the Lord—all possibility of mere chance being thus excluded—bringing again into prominence the number of Divine manifestation in redemption. While Peter was still wondering what all this might mean, the messengers from Cæsarea arrived at the house where he was staying and enquired for him. And "while Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, **three** men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, nothing doubting: for I have sent them" (Acts 10. 19—20). Peter accordingly went with the three men; and his subsequent words to Cornelius show that he had then arrived at the right conclusion, namely, that the Lord's thrice-given message meant that the good news of salvation through Christ was to be proclaimed to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. The sequel proved the correctness of the conclusion and the truth of the assertion, "that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins"; for the Holy Ghost came upon Cornelius and those gathered with him, as soon as they believed this message of salvation. And when the news of the salvation of these Gentiles came to the believing Jews in Jerusalem, they glorified God, saying, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 10. 43, 11. 18).

Further evidence might be given of the association of the number three with the proclamation of the gospel by Peter; but enough has been said to show that the number, which was stamped upon Peter's life when he was brought into contact with the Lord Jesus, was emphasised in many ways in the record of his labours as the first herald, to the Jews at Jerusalem, and to the Gentiles at Cæsarea, of salvation through his risen and glorified Saviour.

If we now proceed to consider the life and work of Paul, we shall find that the Holy Spirit has imprinted the number **three**, again and again, upon the record of his career as disciple and apostle of the risen Saviour. We may observe in Paul's case, as in Peter's, the marked way in which the number three was linked with his life from the very day of his conversion, and the recurrence of that number at frequent intervals throughout the story of his subsequent service and suffering as a preacher of "the gospel of the grace of God."

It is a remarkable fact that we have been given **three** detailed accounts (Acts, chapters 9, 22 and 26) of the wonderful way in which the Lord saved this man, who, up to the very moment of his conversion, was a bitter persecutor of those with whom the Lord graciously identified Himself in His declaration, "I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest" (Acts 9. 5). Paul's realization of what he had been, and of what God had done for him, may be gathered from one of his letters to Timothy. "This is a faithful saying," he wrote, "and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting" (I. Timothy 1. 15—16).

The mighty change which God had wrought in Paul was soon manifested in his work and words; and the disciples gave glory to God as they heard the good news, "That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed" (Galatians 1. 23). Paul's conversion was indeed a wondrous work of God, a work which evidenced His matchless grace and mighty saving power; it is not surprising, therefore, to find the Holy Spirit inspiring Luke to write **three accounts** of it, thus linking with it the number which speaks of Divine manifestation in redemption.

There is also another noteworthy instance of the connection of the number three with Paul's conversion; for it is recorded that after the risen and glorified Lord appeared to him, as he neared Damascus on that ever memorable day, he "could not see for the glory of that light" and had to be led by the hand into the city where "he was **three days** without sight and neither did eat nor drink" (Acts 22. 11, 9. 9). His old life was at an end, and a new life was just opening out before him—a life received from, and lived for, the risen Lord—a life which Paul later described thus, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2. 20). How fitting is the introduction just at this point in Paul's career



of this period of **"three days!"** Surely nothing could be more suitable and significant than this fresh appearance of the number three, which, as we have seen, is repeatedly linked with Divine manifestation in connection with salvation, resurrection and "newness of life."

After his conversion, instead of returning at once to Jerusalem, Paul went from Damascus to Arabia. Our meagre knowledge of his sojourn there is derived from the letter he wrote long after to the Galatian believers, in which he says, "I conferred not with flesh and blood; neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after **three years** I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter" (Galatians i. 16—18). Thus the Lord, Who had called Paul, took him aside for a time, not leading him to return to Jerusalem to be instructed in the faith by the apostles, but leading him away into Arabia; and, doubtless, during that period of absence, of which no details have been disclosed, the Lord Himself taught and trained the man whom He Himself had called, and whom He was about to send forth to proclaim that gospel which He Himself revealed to him; for of that gospel Paul afterwards said, "The gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians i. 11—12).

Now let us observe that, in connection with all this, we are once again confronted with the number three; for the period of absence was three years—"after **three years,**" Paul says, "I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter." What a wonderful change had been wrought

in Paul between the time when he left Jerusalem as a persecutor and the time when, three years later, he returned as a preacher of the faith he had sought to destroy. This mighty work was, as we have just noticed, entirely the work of the Lord Himself; how eminently fitting then is the appearance here of the number of Divine manifestation.

The three accounts of Paul's conversion, the three days of his blindness, the three years of his absence—how wonderfully **these three threes** harmonise with all that we have already seen of the Holy Spirit's use of the number three in other parts of the Word!

When Paul went back to Jerusalem he met Peter, that other man of many threes, in whom also, and through whom also, the Lord worked in a wondrous way. Clear evidence of design is surely observable in all we have already seen of the association of the number three with each of these men, who took such a prominent part in the proclamation of salvation through Him Who was crucified at the third hour, and was raised again on the third day.

The evidence of design, of Divine design, becomes still more clear, as we proceed with the story of Paul and note the further references made in it to **the number three**—that number which derives its significance from the Three Persons in the Godhead; that number which directs our thoughts to Calvary and to the person and work of the Son, "Who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God"; that number which speaks also of the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, by Whom every detail of the Word of God has been inspired.

The Holy Spirit has recorded that, at Thessalonica, Paul went into the synagogue of the Jews, "and **three Sabbath days** reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, Whom I preach unto you, is Christ" (Acts 17. 2—3). It is recorded also that, at Ephesus, Paul "went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of **three months**, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts 19. 8); and those three months were the beginning of Paul's remarkable work in that city, which extended over a period of **three years**. "Remember," Paul said later to the elders of the church at Ephesus, "that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20. 31).

This last reference occurs in the chapter which tells of the apostle's arrival in Troas, after a stay of **three months** in Greece, and of the extraordinary case of Eutychus who fell out of the window of the third story room in which the disciples had gathered for the breaking of bread. "There were many lights in the upper chamber where they were gathered together. And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the **third loft**, and was taken up dead. And Paul went down and fell on him and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him . . . And they brought the young man alive and were not a little comforted" (Acts 20. 8—11).

Thus we see the number three appearing at several points in the account of the proclamation of the gospel by Paul, the man who speaks of being "caught up to the **third** heaven," and who "besought the Lord **thrice**" for the removal of "the thorn in the flesh" (II. Corinthians 12. 1—8).

When we turn to the end of the book of Acts, and read of Paul's journey to Rome and his imprisonment there, we find the number three brought to our notice again in a variety of ways. How wonderfully the Spirit of God worked through Paul the prisoner in Rome! How greatly He used that "ambassador in chains" for the furtherance of the proclamation of salvation, both in Rome itself (where the good news was believed even by many of the Pretorian Guard and of Cæsar's household), and in those regions beyond, to which messengers and letters were frequently sent by Paul from his prison, and for which the imprisoned apostle still laboured fervently and constantly in prayer! How remarkable are the epistles which the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write in that Roman prison; and how wonderfully the Spirit has used them (both for the edification of believers, and for the furtherance of the gospel) from that day to this! When we remember all these things, we are not surprised at the frequent appearance of the number of Divine manifestation in the last chapter of Acts, which gives the account of the closing stages of Paul's journey to Rome.

Verse seven of that chapter mentions that, after their shipwreck on Melita, Paul and his companions were lodged courteously for "**three** days" by Publius the chief man of the island. Verse eleven records that Paul remained on

Melita for a period of **"three months"** altogether; he then sailed for Italy on an Alexandrian vessel, bearing the sign of Castor and Pollux, which was the **third** and last ship he made use of on his long journey from Cæsarea to Rome. Verse twelve states that, after landing at Syracuse, they tarried there for **"three days."** Verse fifteen tells how some brethren came to meet Paul at a place called **"Three Taverns,"** about thirty miles from Rome. Finally, from verse seventeen we learn that, **"after three days"** in the city, Paul called the chief men of the Jews together and said unto them, "Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Cæsar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain."

Thus the final chapter of the book of the Acts, the last historical book of the Bible, the book which contains the inspired history of the early proclamation of the message of salvation—is stamped throughout with **the number three**. Is all this nothing more than a curious coincidence? Is it not rather an evident part of the carrying out of that Divine plan, by which the Saviour's work, the predictions of His work, and the proclamation of His work, all had the number three plainly imprinted upon them?

At the beginning of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah (that chapter which so wonderfully foretells the Saviour's death as the Sin-bearer, His burial, and His resurrection) there stands the question, "Who hath believed our report?" In John 12. 38 we read of the Lord repeating Isaiah's question, "Who hath believed our report?" And we get the same words for the third and last time in Romans 10. 16, when we find Paul also repeating the prophet's question, "Who hath believed our report?" Thus this question, concerning the proclamation of salvation, appears **thrice and only thrice** upon the pages of Holy Writ. Is this also nothing more than a curious coincidence, undesigned and without significance, the result of mere chance?

In the eleventh chapter of Acts we have the inspired record of the God-given success which followed the proclamation of the good news of salvation in the great city of Antioch in Syria. One of the many interesting things connected with the work in Antioch is the fact that the names of the men who first preached the gospel in that city have not been revealed to us. Paul and Peter both visited Antioch, but not until after the Holy Spirit had worked mightily through those unnamed messengers and had crowned with success their proclamation of Christ. We do not know the names of those pioneer preachers in that city; but we do know that, ere long, both the messengers and those who believed their message were given a new name, a name which told of their connection with Him Whom they loved and served, for "the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch" (Acts 11. 26).

The term "Christian" which was thus first applied to the believers at Antioch—whether derisively or descriptively matters not—appears again in Acts 26. 28, where we read of king Agrippa saying to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." The name appears for the **third** and last time in I. Peter 4. 16, where we have the injunction, "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."

Thus this name—the name by which those who believed the message of salvation were soon known everywhere—the name which publicly labelled them as belonging to Christ—the name which should be, not merely a label, but a true description of the loyal and loving servants of Christ, who delight to bear His Name, and to acknowledge His ownership—the name Christian—appears **three times and only three times** in the Word of God. Is this too, nothing more than a curious coincidence, unplanned, accidental, without meaning, the result of mere chance? Is it not rather very evidently the work of the Holy Spirit?

These numerous threes may well help us to realise that even the most minute details of the Bible, its words, its numbers, its repetitions, were all inspired by the Spirit of God, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. Through these numerous threes, He would surely lead our thoughts to that day when three crosses were upreared at the third hour on Mount Calvary, to the third day thereafter on which He Who had died upon the middle cross was raised from the dead, and to the ever-blessed Triune God, Who is in truth the God of our salvation.

## Chapter Eight.

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### "THE FINGER OF GOD."

**W**E will devote this final chapter to the consideration of some further facts, which will show that the number three has been used, in the statements, and even in the very structure, of the Bible, in a manner which confirms the conviction that there is Divine design in this remarkable usage, and which causes us to say, "This is the finger of God."

In the beginning of the sixth chapter of Exodus, we read of the way in which the Lord encouraged Moses, after the disheartening sequel to the petition to Pharoah to let the Israelities go "**three days** journey into the desert" to sacrifice unto Jehovah. "Then"—at the time when Moses, in deep distress, had turned unto the Lord, saying, "Wherefore . . . Why?"—in that moment of His servant's discouragement and depression, "the Lord said unto Moses, Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharoah" (Exodus 5. 22—6. 1). And, at that trying and critical time, the Lord gave to Moses words of promise and assurance for his own encouragement, and gave to him also a new and very striking message to deliver to the enslaved people.

"Say unto the children of Israel," said the Lord to Moses, "I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the



Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage; and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: and I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the Lord" (Exodus 6. 6—8).

This remarkable message, which Moses was thus commissioned to deliver, contained a wonderful sevenfold assurance of deliverance and blessing; seven times the "I will" of Jehovah's promise appeared in this brief announcement of His gracious purposes for Israel. Now let us observe, (1) that this message began with the declaration, "I am the Lord"; (2) that this is repeated in the body of the message, where we find the statement, "I am the Lord your God"; (3) that the message ends with the same declaration, made for the third time, "I am the Lord." Thus the number of Divine manifestation in redemption was linked with this message of emancipation and subsequent exaltation as the people of God: for, the Giver of the seven promises of blessing **three times** proclaimed Himself as the Lord (i.e. Jehovah). In connection with our present subject, there are two other interesting points in the structure of this wonderful message; namely, that, of the seven promises which the message contained, all **the first three** related to the deliverance of the enslaved people, and that the **third** of these promises was, "I will redeem you with a stretched-out arm."

We have already noticed, in an earlier chapter, the simple but striking way in which the plagues which preceded the Passover were divided into three well-defined groups, each of the three consisting of three plagues; let us now turn our thoughts to the **third** plague in the first of these three groups of three. The magicians of Pharaoh, by their curious arts, succeeded in imitating the first and second plagues; but, when the third plague came they found themselves utterly unable to produce an imitation of it, and they had to own their powerlessness to Pharaoh and to exclaim "This is the finger of God." (Exodus 8. 19).

We have already seen one method by which the number three was stamped upon those plagues, which were such manifestations of the power of God exercised for the deliverance of His people, and now what shall we say of this further instance of the prominence of that number in this connection? Was it by chance that the plague which the enemies of Jehovah had to own as "The finger of God" was **the third plague**? Was this merely undesigned coincidence? Surely not!

Again, if we turn to the description of the ninth plague, the third plague in the third of three groups of three each, we shall find that it was a plague of dense darkness which lasted for three days. "Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt **three days**; they saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days: but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings" (Exodus 10. 22—23). Plague number nine (three times three) is thus still further associated with the number three by the period of

its duration being fixed at three days. What can we think of this? Can we imagine that this happened by chance? Can we suppose that this was nothing more than accidental coincidence? Surely not! Surely there is here clear evidence of design and of a Designer Who can be none other than God Himself.

Let us proceed next to the book of Leviticus, which in a great variety of ways foreshadowed the work of the Saviour. Here we find the God-given directions for those sacrifices and offerings, which all pointed forward to Him Who 'put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself'; the descriptions of the offerings include a wealth of minute details, and we can understand the necessity for such particularity and exactitude, when we realise that in these offerings, even in their smallest details, we have pictures of the matchless Person and priceless work of the Saviour. In Leviticus we find also God-given directions for the ceremonies of the great Day of Atonement; the sacrifices of that day, the entrance of the High Priest into the Holy of Holies, the sprinkling of the blood upon and before the Mercy Seat, are all described in detail. And we can surely understand the reason for these detailed descriptions, when we turn to the ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and there discover how the work of the Lord Jesus was prefigured by all those happenings on the Day of Atonement. Further, in the book of Leviticus we find also the particulars of the ceremonies and offerings connected with the cleansing of the lepers; and in these again we get many precious types of the Lord's person and work. There are in this same book many other things (such as the Jubilee Year and the Feasts of Jehovah) which also pointed forward to the Saviour's work,

but we have mentioned enough to show how plainly Calvary was foreshadowed and depicted in Leviticus. In no other book do we find the Lord's work upon the cross, and the blessed results of that work, typified and foreshadowed so clearly, and with such wondrously illuminating detail, as we do in this book of Leviticus. Is it then mere chance that Leviticus is the **third book** in the Bible? Is it not rather another indication of God's design to inscribe the number of Divine manifestation in redemption—the number of God our Saviour—upon all these things, which point so clearly to the sacrifice offered and the precious blood shed at the place called Calvary, by thus causing them to be recorded in the third book of the Bible?

We have seen that, by its height of **three cubits**, the very structure of the brazen altar was made to point to Him Who was crucified at the third hour, on the central cross of the three erected at Calvary. And now we notice also that the sacrifices, which were offered upon that altar, are described in detail in the **third book** of the Bible; and thus the structure of the Bible, like the structure of the altar, has been made to emphasise the association of the number of Divine perfection with the sacrifice of Him Who was crucified at the third hour, and was raised from the dead on the third day.

We can here give only a few other examples of the numerous ways in which the sacrifices were connected with the number three. The first seven chapters of Leviticus are devoted to a description of the offerings and their law; these chapters consist of nine (three times three) separate utterances of Jehovah, and they are thus divided by the Lord Himself into

nine distinct sections, each of which commences with the statement that "the Lord spake unto Moses" (see 1. 1, 4. 1, 5. 14, 6. 1, 6. 8, 6. 19, 6. 24, 7. 22, 7. 28).

The **three** "sweet savour" offerings (namely the burnt-offering, the meat offering and the peace offering) are all described in the first of these nine sections (1. 1—3. 17). The description of the two remaining offerings (the sin offering and the trespass offering) occupies the next **three** sections (4. 1—5. 13, 5. 14—5. 19, 6. 1—6. 7). Thus, although there were five principal offerings (corresponding to the five cubits length and breadth of the altar), the Holy Spirit connected each of them with the number three (corresponding to the three cubits height of the altar) by their peculiar arrangement in the nine sections which are devoted to them in the book of Leviticus. The first section comprises **three** offerings; the other two offerings occupy the next **three** sections. How simply, by this structural division of sections, the Holy Spirit links all the offerings with the number three.

This linking of the number three with each of the offerings has also been accomplished by grouping together **the descriptions of three** offerings (the burnt, the meat, and the peace offerings) in the first of the nine sections, and by grouping together **the laws of three** offerings (the sin, the trespass, and the peace offerings) in the seventh section (6. 24—7. 21).

In these two groups of three, the peace offering was linked with all the other offerings; in some ways it was the culmination and climax of all the offerings, for in it alone the offerer was allowed to partake of the offering, of which part had been accepted by Jehovah as a

“sweet savour” (a savour of rest, or of satisfaction) upon the altar. This offering, in which both God and the offerer found satisfaction, thus speaks of communion as the result of peace having been made.

Let us now observe that the number three, which is connected in several ways with all the offerings, is very particularly emphasised in the Scriptures relating to the peace offering. The peace offering is **the third of the three** offerings mentioned in Jehovah’s first statement (1. 1—3. 17), the peace offering is also **the third of the three** mentioned in the seventh statement (6. 24—7. 21), and it has in addition a supplementary statement (the ninth, 7. 28—38) devoted to it. The peace offering was thus described in **three** separate utterances of Jehovah, **the third of the three** being section number nine (three times three); and, in each of the first two Divine statements (sections one and seven) in which the peace offering is described, it is the **third** offering in a group of three. Further, **three** kinds of animals might be offered (of the herd, of the sheep, or of the goats),—and the ritual is **three** times described in almost the same words (see 3. 1—5, 3. 6—11, 3. 12—16). Again, the peace offering might be of any of **three** varieties (for thanksgiving, for a vow, or for a voluntary offering), and the flesh of the peace offerings must always be eaten before the **third** day (see 7. 11—18).

Thus, and in many other ways, the number three is connected with the offerings, by which the Person and the work of the Saviour are so clearly pictured, in the **three times three** utterances of Jehovah at the beginning of the **third** book of the Bible.

It may perhaps be thought that some further evidence of the Holy Spirit's use of the number three should be obtainable from the book of Psalms, since in that book each Psalm forms a natural and proper division, unlike the forced and often faulty division into chapters which man has made in most of the books of the Bible.

Let us therefore consider **Psalm number three**, and see if we can find in it any indication of the reason why it has been put in the third place, thus bearing the number which is so often connected with God our Saviour and with the manifestation of God in redemption. In the last verse of the Psalm, we find the striking and significant declaration, "Salvation belongeth unto the Lord." Further, in the second verse, the Psalmist says, "Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God"; the word here translated "help," is the word which is usually translated "salvation," and which is so translated in the phrase just quoted from the last verse—"Salvation belongeth unto the Lord." Again, in the seventh verse, we find the Psalmist's prayer, "Save me, O my God." Thus in this third Psalm there are **three** references to God as Saviour—(1) the statement of David's enemies, "There is no salvation for him in God"; (2) the confident prayer of David, "Save me, O my God"; and (3) David's joyful declaration, "Salvation belongeth unto the Lord; Thy blessing is upon Thy people."

It is indeed remarkable that there are these three, and only these three, references to salvation in this third Psalm; this must surely be something more than mere chance. But these facts seem still more remarkable when we observe that, although there are many references

to salvation in the book of Psalms, it is not mentioned at all in the first and second Psalms; so that the first reference to God our Saviour occurs in the **third** Psalm and in that Psalm, as we have seen, the subject is referred to exactly **three** times. Surely "the finger of God" is once more in evidence here!

Another fact in connection with the book of Psalms may be noticed before we pass on. In the twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus we read, "Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family. A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you." The fiftieth year therefore was to Israel the year of the joyful sound, the year of the proclamation of liberty, the year of jubilee. Now the point about the book of Psalms which we wish to notice is that the book contains exactly one hundred and fifty ( $3 \times 50$ ) psalms. Thus, it is an interesting and noteworthy fact that, when the number of Divine manifestation in redemption is multiplied by the number of jubilee, the result gives us the number of psalms in this book of praise.

Great emphasis is laid upon the number three in the 'structure' of the little book of Lamentations. That book is composed of five distinct poems, five separate Laments, each of which forms one of the five chapters in our version. The first chapter is a poem with a perfect alphabetical arrangement; each of its



twenty-two stanzas or verses commences with one of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, the first with Aleph, the second with Beth, and so on through the entire alphabet. The second and fourth poems also each have a similar alphabetical arrangement; but the fifth has not this complete and regular alphabetical structure. The **third** poem is alphabetically arranged, but it has a remarkable peculiarity of structure which differentiates it from all the others.

Let us now turn to this **third poem** and see whether there is any discoverable reason why the Holy Spirit should have connected it with the number three by causing it to occupy the third place in the book of Lamentations. Without doubt we have ample evidence of the required character in such verses as the following: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord . . . I called upon Thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice: hide not Thine ear at my breathing, at my cry. Thou drawest near in the day that I called upon Thee: Thou saidst, Fear not. O Lord, Thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; Thou hast redeemed my life" (Lamentations 3. 22—26, 55—58). There is surely a very clear and very close relationship between these wonderful verses and all that we have seen of the meaning of the number three.

How peculiarly fitting it seems, therefore, that the poem which contains these verses should be the **third** in the book; and this fitness becomes the more marked, when we observe that there are no such references to deliverance and redemption in any of the other four poems.

But, when we study the peculiar structure of this third poem, we discover that the Holy Spirit, Who has marked it with the number three by putting it in the third place, has emphasised its connection with that number by causing it to be composed of **a series of threes**. The structure, as we have said above, is alphabetical, as in the first, second and fourth poems; but, instead of twenty-two verses only (as in each of those poems), there are sixty-six verses in this third poem—three verses for each letter of the alphabet. These sixty-six verses are so written that each of the first three begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, each of the second three begins with the second letter, and so on, through the poem and through the alphabet, in groups of three verses for each letter, until each of the last three verses begins with the last letter of the alphabet.

Thus, in the third poem, the Holy Spirit calls our attention both to the number three and to a combination or grouping of threes. Let us continue this combination of threes by grouping the letters themselves into threes, and let us turn to the verses which begin with the ninth ( $3 \times 3$ ) letter of the alphabet, that is to the three verses which each begin with the third letter in the third group of three letters. The three verses which each begin with the ninth letter are of course verses twenty-five to

twenty-seven; turning to these three verses we find in the very heart of them these words, "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." Here then we find a poem occupying the third place, which is also the central place, in the book of Lamentations, three of its verses being grouped under each letter of the alphabet; and when we combine those groups of three verses each into larger groups of three letters each, we find, at the centre of the third unit, in the third group of three letters, the expression "The salvation of the Lord." If this be mere accidental coincidence, then how very extraordinary is that coincidence!

We have referred, in a previous chapter, to the way in which the River Jordan was divided by God to permit Joshua and all the people to pass over dryshod into the land of Canaan; let us now observe that there were two other occasions on which the Jordan was divided by God for His servants. In the second chapter of the second book of Kings we read that, on the day on which Elijah was to be taken up into heaven, the waters of Jordan were divided in order that Elijah and his companion, Elisha, might cross over. "They two stood by Jordan; and Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground." Then, on that same day, after the translation of Elijah, the river was again divided before Elisha to enable him to re-cross to Jericho. "He took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over" (II. Kings 2. 7—14).

It is surely a noteworthy fact that this River Jordan (so often associated with death and judgment) is recorded to have been divided by God exactly **three times**. What a significant action was the dividing of those waters so that God's people might pass over dryshod as though for them the river no longer existed! And how very remarkable that this significant action should be performed three times!

Very noteworthy also, in this connection, are the names of the men before whom the Lord thus divided the Jordan—Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha; whose names mean respectively, "Jehovah is salvation," "Jehovah is my God," and "My God is salvation," or, according to another translation, "Jehovah saves," "My God is Jehovah," and "God is Saviour." The fact that such a typical action as the dividing of the Jordan was performed three times, in connection with men bearing such significant names, surely precludes the possibility of mere accident, and furnishes yet another proof that God has designedly associated the number three with the manifestation of Himself as Saviour.

In the fifteenth chapter of Exodus we have the first recorded song of the people of God; it is the song of thankfulness in which Moses and the Israelites praised the Lord for their deliverance from the Egyptians. In this song of Moses we find the words, "The Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation" (Exodus 15. 2). Turning to the fourteenth verse of Psalm 118 we find it written again, "The Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation." And in the second verse of the twelfth chapter of Isaiah

we find, for the third time, "The Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; He also is become my salvation." Here then we have the statement **three times** made that the Lord is **three things** to His people—their strength, their song and their salvation. The order of these things is the same in each of the three statements; and the fact that "salvation" occupies the **third** place is in itself remarkable. Further, it will be remembered that the Lord, after His resurrection on the third day, said to His disciples, "All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me" (Luke 24. 44). Thus the Lord treated the Scriptures as consisting of **three parts**, namely, the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms; and it will be observed that one of these threefold declarations (that the Lord is the strength, the song, and the salvation of His people) has been recorded in each of these three divisions of the Old Testament.

Let us glance for a moment at a well-known type which we have not yet mentioned, namely, "the cities of refuge"; what wonderful foreshadowings we get in connection with these cities, of the safety which the Saviour provides for all who have "fled for refuge" to Him! In Deuteronomy 4. 41—43 we read that, while the Israelites were still on the east of Jordan, Moses appointed "**three cities on this side Jordan** toward the sunrising; that the slayer might flee thither, which should kill his neighbour unawares, and hated him not in times past; and that fleeing unto one of these cities he might live." In Deuteronomy 19. 1—3 we read of the command given by Moses that, after the Israelites had crossed Jordan and conquered Canaan, they

should set apart a second group of three cities to be cities of refuge—"Thou shalt separate **three cities for thee in the midst of thy land**, which the Lord thy God giveth thee to possess it. Thou shalt prepare thee a way, and divide the coasts of thy land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee to inherit, into three parts, that every slayer may flee thither." Then, in verses eight and nine of the same chapter, we read of **a third group of three cities** of refuge, which were to be added to the three east of Jordan and the three in the land, if and when certain conditions were fulfilled: "If the Lord thy God enlarge thy coast, as He hath sworn unto thy fathers, and give thee all the land which he promised to give unto thy fathers; if thou shalt keep all these commandments to do them, which I command thee this day, to love the Lord thy God, and to walk ever in His ways; then shalt thou add three cities more for thee, beside these three."

The three cities of refuge in the land of Canaan and the three east of Jordan are mentioned in the twentieth chapter of the book of Joshua; but there is no record of the appointment at any time of **the third three**; and, indeed, we should not expect to read of their appointment, since Israel fell very far short of fulfilling the stipulated conditions. But how significant are these repeated threes in connection with this remarkable type!

Without doubt, the Mercy Seat which rested upon the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle, and later in the Temple, was one of the most evident and most eminent of the numerous Old Testament types which foreshadowed the Saviour's work. Several other important types were closely

connected with that blood-stained Mercy Seat; indeed, in many ways, it was the culminating point of the whole system of substitutionary sacrifices which prefigured the One Sacrifice of "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." That blood-stained Mercy Seat clearly foreshadowed both the need for the sacrifice of the Saviour and the nature of the outcome of that sacrifice; and something of the importance which God attached to that outstanding type may be gathered from such Scriptures as Romans 3. 21—26 and Hebrews 9. 1—28. Having regard then to the extraordinary importance of that blood-stained Mercy Seat, and to the wonderful manner in which it pictured the work of our Saviour, and pointed to the law of God and also to the love of God, it is interesting and instructive to notice that the word Mercy Seat (Kapporeth) occurs exactly twenty-seven times in the whole of the Old Testament. Now, as the number twenty-seven is, of course, **three times three times three**, is it at all probable that the connection of this significant number with this unique type is nothing more than a meaningless accident?

Turning again, from the numerous Old Testament prophecies and pictures of the Saviour, to the New Testament, of which every part proclaims the peerless Person and perfect work of that same Saviour, let us observe that the Books of which that New Testament is composed are precisely twenty-seven in number. In this way our attention is once more called to this remarkable number twenty-seven, which is three cubed, three raised to the third power, **three times three times three**. Thus the Mercy Seat which so wonderfully pictured the Saviour is named twenty-seven times

in the Old Testament, and the sum of the Books of the New Testament (which all proclaim Him Whose saving work the blood-stained Mercy Seat pictured) is likewise twenty-seven.

If the number three is indeed the number of Divine manifestation (particularly of Divine manifestation in connection with salvation and redemption), and if the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the ever-blessed Trinity, has Himself inspired every part of the Bible, then it is easy to believe that three times three times three is a number designedly associated with the whole of the New Testament and with the Mercy Seat in the Old Testament; and it is easy also to understand the reason for such a significant connection. But if Divine inspiration and the significance of the number three are ruled out of court, it will be no easy task to find a satisfactory explanation of all the facts just noticed; for it can scarcely be imagined that these repetitions of the number three, and these multiplications of the number three by three and then again by three, in such significant connections, are nothing more than the outcome of mere chance.

The following extracts from the last chapter of the first epistle of John will serve to show how the number three is markedly associated therein with the statement that "Jesus is the Son of God," and with the Holy Spirit's witness to the Saviour's death and its wonderful results: "Who is He that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit



is truth. For there are **three** that bear record . . . the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these **three** agree in one. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which He hath testified of His Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (I. John 5. 5—13).

One of the tenderest and most beautiful words in the New Testament is the little Aramaic word *Abba*, which means *Father*. "*Abba*"—it is a sweet and simple word easily framed by the lips of the little ones—a word which on baby lips expressed the joy of the loving little heart at the coming of the fondly-loved father; or which expressed the longing of the troubled little heart for the presence and help of the strong and trusty father in times of fear and distress.

Precious and sacred is our Saviour's use of this word, which the Holy Spirit has disclosed to us by the pen of Mark; for this was the word which our Lord used in the awful hour of His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. "*Abba, Father,*" He cried, "all things are possible unto Thee; take away this cup from Me: nevertheless not what I will, but what Thou wilt" (Mark 14. 36). Thus the Son of God prayed, addressing His Father as "*Abba,*" on the very

eve of His death; on the eve of the accomplishment of that wondrous redemptive work which has made it possible for the thrice holy God, in purest grace, yet in perfect righteousness, to be the Saviour of sinners, and to make such saved ones His own children—redeemed by the precious blood of Christ and regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

The second occurrence of the word *Abba* in the New Testament is in the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, in which we read that, because of what God has done, through His Son and by His Spirit, those who have trusted the Lord Jesus have become God's children, and can call upon Him as Father, and can even cry "*Abba*," thus being privileged to use the same precious word by which our Lord addressed His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. This wonderful proof of the perfection of salvation is set before us in the following words: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. 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: and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8. 14—17).

The third and last occurrence of the word is in the Epistle to the Galatians, where we read: "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. 4—7).

Thus this beautiful and tender word, by which the Lord Jesus addressed His Father, also sweetly expresses the wonderful relationship which exists between God and the redeemed and saved sinner as the result of the perfect work of our Saviour. It is a remarkable fact that this word Abba appears **three times**, but only three times, in the New Testament; and surely this is no accident, no purposeless coincidence; on the contrary, we believe that this is a planned and purposeful three-fold use of this significant word, and that in the linking of the number three with this word "Abba" we may once again discern "the finger of God."

We must now bring to a close our study of the wonderful use made throughout the Word of God of the number three—that number which doubtless derives its importance from the fact that it is the number of the Persons in the ever-blessed Trinity. We have seen some of the remarkable ways in which the number is connected with the manifestation of God, particularly with His manifestation in redemption and salvation. We have seen that the passion of the Saviour, the pathway which led to His cross and passion, the Old Testament prophecies and pictures which foretold and foreshadowed the Saviour's work, and the proclamation by the Apostles of the good news of the Saviour, were each and all indelibly marked with the number three. We have seen that the number, which was so clearly stamped upon these things, was also stamped in an equally plain way upon the records of these things.

We have seen that the words, and even the very structure, of the Book of God bear witness in several places to the association of the number three with the truths relating to God our Saviour.

Now, in view of the number and variety of the instances we have observed in the Scriptures of the connection between the number three and the manifestation of our Saviour-God, it is believed that no unbiased mind can consider these facts without coming to the conclusion that this connection cannot be accidental but must be the outcome of a carefully planned and executed design; further, it is believed that many of these varied evidences of design are of such a character as to prove beyond question that the design must necessarily have been formed and carried out by God Himself.

To the mind of the believer, this Scriptural use of the number three presents no difficult problem; but appears, on the contrary, to be singularly appropriate and beautiful. Believing, as we do, (1) that Christ verily was, and is, God the Son, as well as Son of Man; (2) that His death upon the cross was the vicarious sacrifice of Himself, the Lamb of God, our Sin-bearer, freely offered for our redemption and salvation "according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," and (3) that every part of Holy Scripture has been inspired by the Spirit of God, we are able to perceive and admire something of that Divine wisdom and power which so ordained, ordered, and over-ruled the happenings we have been considering, as to bring the number three into close connection with everything which related to the sacrifice of the Son of God.

But, to the mind of the unbeliever, who doubts or denies the full verbal inspiration of the Bible, the facts concerning its use of this remarkable number, if fairly considered, must present a problem not easily solved; for the evidence of design is, as we have seen, so voluminous that it cannot possibly be explained away by any suggestion of accidental coincidence; and that evidence also includes many facts which were spread over such a long period of time, and many which were of such a peculiar character, that they could not have been accomplished by any one man, nor could they have been brought about by the united scheming of any number of men.

We might add many more links to the chain of evidence, and, unlike the adding of links to chains of any other sort, the addition of each link would strengthen the chain as well as lengthen it; but the facts already adduced are surely sufficient to form a chain of evidence strong enough to be likened unto that "**three-fold cord,**" of which it is written, "a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4. 12).

We trust that our brief study of this number of Divine manifestation may be used of the Holy Spirit to help some of God's children, by stabilising and strengthening their faith in the inspiration of His precious Word, and by increasing their knowledge of the Son of God, our adorable Saviour, of Whom that Word everywhere speaks.

May we all "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen."

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