

*Revelation 21:2-3—And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of the heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice out of the heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God [is] with men, and he shall tabernacle with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, their God.*

*Let us pray:*

*Lord, we do praise and thank Thee that Thou hast gathered us together before Thee. We worship Thee. As we stand before Thee, Lord, what dost Thou have to say to us? Speak, Thy servants heareth. We commit this time totally over to You. May Thy Holy Spirit take charge. Speak to us that we may follow Thee. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.*

Thank God for gathering us together, and the theme for this time is: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men.” I was given the assignment of sharing with you a general outline of this subject. So many of the things that I will say you have probably heard already; but the Bible says, “God speaks once and twice;” so probably He will use this to encourage all of us.

“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men.” This is a voice that came down from heaven, and whenever you see the word *behold* in the Bible God wants us to pay special attention. There is something of importance and God wants every one of us to hear it.

### **God's Purpose Before the Foundation of the World**

“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men.” What a tremendous statement this is! If we understand this statement we will see that this is the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. Even before the foundation of the world God had a purpose, and this is the purpose that God has purposed before the foundation of the world: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men.” In spite of all the difficulties and the failures of man, God never fails, and eventually what God has purposed before the foundation of the world will be fully realized. And for this we bow ourselves in worship. There is nothing for us to boast of because it is all of God. It is His doing, and we are the vessels of His mercy. Therefore, it ought to draw from us thanksgiving and praise. And with this attitude we can approach this subject.

## **God Created the Heavens and the Earth**

Now in order to give an outline of this statement we have to go back to the very beginning even before the foundation of the world. When you open the Bible, the first word you hear is: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). That was the beginning of the heavens and the earth. We do not know how long ago it was, but one thing we do know: when God creates He never does anything half done or unfinished. When He created, it *is* created; it is done. So we know that in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, it was done according to His will, and no will is as perfect as God's.

## **The Angels Were Created in the Former World**

The Bible tells us that in the former world God created, and the highest of His creation at that time were the angels because human beings were not there yet. And the Bible tells us in Job: "When God laid the foundation of the world, the morning stars sang together and the sons of God sang in worship" (see Job 38:7). In other words, the sons of God are the angels that God had created and they were there to worship God. And the first and foremost of the angels that were created was Lucifer, the brilliant star. Of course, we know these things from the Word of God because in Ezekiel 28 when God was speaking of the king of Tyre, it was a description that fit no human being.

## **Lucifer, the Foremost Angel**

Ezekiel 28:11-18: "And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyre, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Thou, who sealest up the measure of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty, thou wast in Eden, the garden of God. Every precious stone was thy covering: the sardius, the topaz, and the diamond, the chrysolite, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the carbuncle, and the emerald, and gold. The workmanship of thy tambours and of thy pipes was in thee: in the day that thou wast created were they prepared. Thou wast the anointed covering cherub, (I believe by now we know what this means because in the ark and the mercy seat we find there are cherubim that cover the mercy seat.) and I had set thee [so]: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou didst walk up and down in the midst of stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways, from the day that thou wast created (so this is a description of the archangel Lucifer), till unrighteousness was found in thee. By the abundance of thy traffic they filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned; therefore have I cast thee as profane from the mountain of God, and have destroyed thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thy heart was lifted up because of

thy beauty; thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I have cast thee to the ground, I have laid thee before kings, that they may behold thee.”

In Isaiah 14, speaking about the king of Babylon, suddenly in verse 12 it mentions something that is beyond what any human being could be, and it even mentions the name of that fallen angel, Lucifer.

“How art thou fallen from heaven, Lucifer, son of the morning! Thou art cut down to the ground, that didst prostrate the nations! And thou that didst say in thy heart, I will ascend into the heavens, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit upon the mount of assembly, in the recesses of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High: none the less art thou brought down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit” (vv. 12-15).

### **Lucifer Fell and was Driven Out of the Third Heaven**

So this is the story of the former heavens and earth, and here we find Lucifer, the brilliant star. However, because of his talents and all the power that God had given him, he was corrupted. He was not satisfied with the way God had created him. He wanted to take the place of the Son of God, and because of this he was punished and driven out of the third heaven. And probably at that time the earth was under his control, and after he fell, the earth was in ruin. This is what we find in Genesis 1:2: “And the earth had become waste and void.” The earth was filled with water and it had lost its purpose. We do not know how long this existed, but we call it the “ice age.” Nevertheless, whatever God had purposed in His heart He never gave up. No matter what happened God always overruled.

### **God Creates Again**

We find in Genesis how the Spirit of God brooded over the face of the deep. In other words, God was going to restore the earth to be habitable, and He used six days to do this work. Why did God do that? He wanted to create man. Why did He want to create man? How did He create man? It is really amazing that when God created all things, He spoke a word and it was done; but this is not the way He created man. First, He had this thought within that He wanted to create man according to His own image and likeness.

### **Man Created in the Image of God**

What does the word *image* mean? Probably we will think it speaks of the outward form, but actually the word *image* means an inward quality. God wanted to create man in His own image which means His character would be in them. And in Genesis 2 we find the creation of man. First

of all God used the mother earth to form a body, and then He breathed into its nostrils. The breath of God became the spirit of man. And the Bible says, "The man became a living soul." In other words, the breath of God formed the spirit of man, and then He touched the body of man and produced another element called the soul. So the Bible says that man became a living soul. But in our Chinese Bible it is more than that. It says, "Man becomes a living soul with a spirit." So man is made up of spirit, soul and body. God is Spirit; therefore, how can we communicate with God except we have a spirit?

Many years ago when the Russian cosmonaut went into space and came back, he said, "There is no God; I have gone into space and looked around; I did not see God." This is ridiculous! How can human eyes see God because God is Spirit? We have to use our spirit to contact God the Spirit. So thank God, He made man with a spirit, soul and body.

### **Man was Put in the Garden to Till and Guard**

Then God put man in the garden of Eden to enjoy all the fruit trees. In the midst of the garden there was the tree of Life which symbolized the life of God. Even though God had given man life it was only a human life, and because God had created man with a spirit He wanted to put His own life in the spirit of man. What a glorious thought God had concerning man! He wants us to have His own life that we may have communication with Him and grow in His stature and be a tabernacle for Him. This is the original thought of God.

Then God put man in the garden of Eden. All the fruit trees in that garden were for the food of human bodies and in the midst of the garden was the tree of life which represented God's own life that He was offering to man. But by the side of that tree of life was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and many people say it was a bad tree. Do you think God would plant a bad tree in the garden of Eden? Because we know the story we think it is a bad tree; but actually it is a better tree than all the others, except the tree of life, because it is the food of the soul. The tree of life is the food of the spirit. God put these two ways before man. One is whether you want to eat the tree of life and live by His life for Him and for His glory, or whether you want to choose the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to develop your soul which will make you proud of yourself, independent of God, and even declare yourself as God. So these two ways are always put before man.

God put man in the garden with a purpose. It was not just eating and drinking, but God wanted him to till the garden and guard it. He wanted to use man to maintain the things that He had created, and also to guard the garden. Why is it so? Because outside the garden there was the enemy, Lucifer, the rebellious angel. He was seeking a way to enter into the garden to tempt man; so it was the duty of man to guard the garden because it was without walls and man was to be that wall. How powerful man was created! He could guard the big garden, but God wanted to use man to defeat His enemy. For God to use His breath to put Satan to death was an easy thing,

but He would get no glory from it. It would be like a big man beating a little child. What is the glory of it? But for the glory of God, God wanted to use one a little lower than the angels to beat the enemy, and it is for the glory of God.

### **Man Failed in Their Duty and Was Driven Out of the Garden**

From the very beginning God created man with a purpose. On the one hand He wanted to dwell among men; on the other hand He wanted to use man to defeat His enemy. But unfortunately, they did not do their duty. They did not guard the garden which allowed the enemy to come in. And we know that the husband and wife are supposed to be together, but somehow they were separated. As a result Eve was tempted by the enemy to look at the forbidden tree, and man failed. Man may fail but God never fails.

So God had to punish man. They were chased out of the garden; yet God made provision for them. We who are the descendants of Adam and Eve have inherited their character. No matter how good we may feel about ourselves, we are all sinners in the eyes of God. Nevertheless, God's thought concerning man is so noble. According to human history, in spite of the sinful nature of man, God has again and again tried to restore man to what he should be.

### **The History of Israel and Their Failure**

God used Abraham for His purpose. He commanded him to leave Ur of Chaldea and his home and go to the place that God had called him to. By faith Abraham believed, and he followed the Lord. He had his ups and downs, but God continued to lead his way. Out of Abraham God raised up a family and out of that family God raised up a nation. God used Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. He brought them to the border of Canaan and yet they did not believe God. They refused to go in, so they had to wander in the wilderness for thirty-eight years.

And what is the story of those forty years in the wilderness? God had already commanded them to build a tabernacle for Him because He wanted to dwell with them. God is holy, but they were unholy, and God could not dwell in them, so He commanded them to build a tabernacle for Him. We see how eager God was to dwell among His people and be a blessing to them. But their human condition was such that again and again they rebelled against God and wandered in the wilderness for forty years.

Outwardly they carried the tabernacle of God, but in Acts, chapter 7, the testimony of Stephen tells us where their hearts were: "But God turned and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in [the] book of the prophets, Have ye offered me victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? Yea, ye took up the tent of Moloch, and the star of [your] god Remphan, the forms which ye made to do homage to them; and I will transport you beyond Babylon" (vv. 42-43).

Even in the wilderness when they were under discipline, they did not turn totally to God. Nevertheless, again by the grace and mercy of God, He led them into the Promised Land. But even in the Promised Land we find in the book of Judges the conclusion of the Holy Spirit concerning the hundreds of years under the judges. God said, "Everyone does what is right in his own eyes; there is no king among them."

In spite of such conditions, God, in His mercy, still worked upon them and raised up David, a man according to God's heart who shall do all His will. In spite of the failures of David, yet God raised him up because his heart was towards God. David also had a heart for a place for the ark of God because it represented the presence of God at that time, and when he became king he moved the ark of God to Jerusalem. He also had a heart to build God a house, and God was pleased with his desire. But because he had shed so much blood he would have been a misrepresentation, so God said, "Your son will build My house." And when Solomon was raised up, he built the temple.

### **God's Longing to Dwell Among His People**

Through the history of the children of Israel we can see that God's heart was to dwell among men. This was a great longing in His heart. In spite of man's condition He tried again and again to live among men, but unfortunately man's condition was such that eventually the nation of Israel was taken into captivity by Babylon. Jerusalem was destroyed and the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. From that time onward during those seventy years of captivity God was never called the God of the heavens and the earth. He was only called the God of the heavens because He had no testimony upon this earth. What a tragedy it was!

But after seventy years, in His mercy God allowed the Persian king Cyrus to permit the children of Israel to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. We would think that all Israel would rise up and return, but no, only a remnant responded. The reason was that during the time of captivity the children of Israel were allowed to live peacefully, build their own houses and build up their businesses. Otherwise, why would they want to go back to Jerusalem? It was a ruined city surrounded by the enemy, and the people, thinking of themselves, would rather stay in Babylon in captivity. Only a remnant whose spirit was stirred by God were willing to forsake everything and go back to a ruined city to rebuild the temple of God in order for God to have a name upon this earth. So they went back and in spite of many difficulties they built the temple. That is the story we find in the Old Testament.

### **God Has Left the History of Israel as a Warning to the Church**

When we hear such history, what is our inward reaction? Will it somehow affect our own condition? How often we think of ourselves more than thinking of the testimony of God! How we

think of our own family instead of the house of God! I think the past history of Israel should cause us to reflect on our condition and the condition of the church. I believe God has left this history to remind us that naturally we are no better than the Israel of old. However, God's purpose never changes; it is still His desire to dwell among His people. And by the grace of God we may be the people who have a heart for Him like David, that we may think of His tabernacle, that we are willing to give up everything for that tabernacle, that it may soon be completed. So God said, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with man."

Let us pray:

*Dear Lord, we pray that somehow we may see Thy heart. How long we have thought only of ourselves! We have neglected the glorious purpose You have concerning us. Thou hast created us with a purpose. Lord, we are not here for ourselves; we are here for Thee. May Thy love continue to constrain us. As we think of what happened to the children of Israel, may we not go the same way. By Thy grace may we be a people who return to Thee to build the house of God that Thou mayst be satisfied. Do not allow us to be satisfied before Thou art satisfied. Oh dear Lord, have mercy upon us; we ask in Thy name. Amen.*