

JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH

AND THE NAME of the city from that day shall be, Jehovah-shammah” (Ezek. 48:35).

The meaning of the name **Jehovah-shammah is Jehovah is there**. In the light of its setting and significance it is a most fitting name with which to climax the Old Testament revelation of God. By His various names Jehovah had revealed Himself in the power and majesty and glory of His person and as meeting every need of that man whom He had made in His image and for His glory. His name Elohim revealed Him not only as Creator and Ruler, but as covenanting to preserve His Creation. The name Jehovah revealed Him in special relationship to man. For since that name indicates absolute self-existence, and therefore One who is infinite and eternal, it could be revealed only to creatures who could apprehend and appreciate the infinite and eternal. And since the name Jehovah sets God forth in His moral and spiritual attributes, the special relationship between Him and the crowning work of His Creation, the man made in His image, was a moral and spiritual one. That moral and spiritual relationship was broken by man’s disobedience and sin and fall. After that, the names of God compounded with Jehovah reveal Him as providing redemption for fallen, sinful man, and depicting every aspect of that great transaction of redemption by which man is fully restored to God-healing, victory, peace, sanctification, justification, preservation, care, and guidance. Jehovah-shammah is the promise and pledge of the completion of that purpose in man’s final rest and glory, for man’s end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. For, as Paul says, “Whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Rom. 8:30), a past tense, but speaking the language of eternity.

THE OCCASION OF THE NAME

The name Jehovah-shammah is found in the last verse of the Book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel began his prophecies at a time when the nation Israel was at the lowest ebb of its history, spiritually and nationally. The sun of its strength and glory had long set, and the night was fast closing in. Every one of his prophecies was uttered in captivity where he had been taken several years before the destruction of Jerusalem. The last great vision and prophecy was uttered in the twenty-fifth year

of the captivity and fourteen years after Jerusalem had fallen, the Temple destroyed, and only a poor, miserable remnant left in the land. Israel's spirit was broken, and Ephraim's crown of pride was laid low in the dust. It appears they had been delivered from bondage in Egypt only to go into bondage in Babylon. By the rivers of Babylon, the psalmist tells us, they sat and wept, as they remembered Zion. Song had departed from them. They hung their harps upon the willows. "How shall we sing Jehovah's song in a strange land?" they answered their captors when they demanded of them one of the songs of Zion. In the land of their humiliation and sorrow they had time to reflect upon their follies and to realize the pleasantness of their heritage now laid waste and the beauty of Jehovah's sanctuary now destroyed. Then they vow: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy" (Ps. 137:5, 6).

Perhaps with the passing of the years, or with the easing of the conditions of captivity, enthusiasm for Zion was beginning to wane. At any rate, the Ezekiel who twenty-five years before had prophesied to the early captives in Babylon the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, now brings this prophecy of hope and consolation which predicts the restoration of land and people in a measure far beyond anything they had ever experienced in the past, or could have imagined. The pledge of all this is the name Jehovah-shammah, Jehovah is there.

The Jehovah who had departed from the old Temple, desecrated by the abominations of His people (Ezek. 10:18, 19; 11: 22-24) and destroyed by His judgments, now returns by the same way into a new and glorious city and Temple, purged of all the old abominations and oppressions, and characterized by righteousness, justice, and holiness. The glory of Jehovah would fill this new place, and His presence would dwell and abide there forever (Ezek. 43:1-7). Ezekiel heard a voice saying to him: "Son of man, this is the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever." All this vision Ezekiel was commanded to take back from Jerusalem, where he had been taken in spirit, to the captives in Babylon, for their heartening and hope.

THE MEANING OF THE NAME

The uniqueness and glory of Israel's religion as contrasted with the religions of the surrounding nations had always been the presence of a holy God dwelling in their midst.. The condition of His continued presence among them was to be their faithfulness to a covenant by which they promised to be a holy people to this holy God. This again was in striking contrast to the surrounding nations whose worship was as cruel and licentious as their gods.

Jehovah had promised His presence among His people from the beginning. Whatever the outward symbols or manifestation, the Presence was real and felt. "Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared," He said to Moses (Exod. 23:20). In verse 23, this angel is "my Angel." He is the angel of Jehovah who appeared to Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3:2), and who announces Himself to Moses as the "I am that I am"-Jehovah Himself (Exod. 3:14, 15). In answer to Moses' plea to continue with His people in spite of their great sin and provocation, Jehovah says: "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." And Moses continues: "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us?" (Exod. 33:14-16). Moses reminds the children of Israel as they are about to enter the Promised Land, "because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out with his presence" (Deut. 4:37, A.S.V.). And in a wonderful passage of Scripture, Isaiah remarks: "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and pity he redeemed them; and he bare them and carried them all the days of old" (63:9). In a beautiful psalm, which tells of David's desire and purpose to build a house for Jehovah to dwell in, we read: "Arise, O Jehovah, into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy strength. . . . For Jehovah hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest forever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it" (132:8, 13, 14).

Both tabernacle and Temple were the place of His abode and His visible manifestation in Israel. The New Testament makes it quite clear that these Old Testament edifices were figures of the

true, the pattern of things in the heavens (Heb. 9:23, 24). Everything about them was highly typical of God's presence and glory. Of their free and willing gifts the children of Israel erected these costly and beautiful buildings. As soon as the tabernacle in the wilderness was completed and dedicated, we are told that the glory of Jehovah filled it, and the cloud of Jehovah was upon the tabernacle by day, and there was fire therein by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys (Exod. 40:34-38).

David desires to build a "house" for Jehovah to dwell in because all these centuries since they had first entered the land Jehovah had "walked in a tent and in a tabernacle" (2 Sam. 7:5-7). And when that magnificent Temple was built by his son Solomon on the very site of Mount Moriah, where Jehovah had revealed Himself to Abraham as Jehovah-jireh, a great and dramatic scene ensued. At the end of Solomon's great prayer of dedication, the fire, fitting symbol of Jehovah's presence and power, came down from heaven, consumed the sacrifices on the altar, "and the glory of Jehovah filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of Jehovah, because the glory of Jehovah had filled Jehovah's house" (2 Chron. 7:1-3).

The fullness of Jehovah's presence was the hope and end of all prophetic expectation. After the glorious prophecy of Messiah's universal reign in the eleventh chapter, Isaiah pens a beautiful psalm of praise in chapter 12 which ends with the words: "Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee." Also speaking of a future fulfillment, Jeremiah says: "At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord" (3:17). "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God," says the psalmist of Zion (Ps. 87:3). Of the city trodden under foot and despised, Isaiah says: "They shall call thee The City of Jehovah, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel" (60:14). In Psalm 46, that great psalm of confidence, Jehovah is represented as "the indwelling Helper." Here mention is made of "the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her. . . . The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." Whereas all about in the earth is turmoil and tumult, war and ruin, there is safety, security, tranquility, in the city of Jehovah's constant presence.

But to return to Ezekiel's vision and prophecy, was the fullest meaning of the name Jehovah-shammah to be realized in any earthly habitation? "Will God," asks King Solomon on the very occasion of the dedication of the Temple, "will God in very deed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded!" (I Kings 8:27).

The orthodox Jewish interpretation of this vision has always been a strictly literal one. Its fulfillment is to be realized in an earthly Jerusalem, a temple rebuilt and the sacrificial system restored. Then Messiah is to come and reign as the Son of David with Jerusalem as His throne and the spiritual and political center of the earth. So Jehovah-shammah is realized.

Some Christian interpreters have also supported the view of a strictly literal interpretation and as having no other significance. Others have interpreted the vision only in a typical, spiritual sense, as having no literal fulfillment whatever in an earthly Jerusalem and a restored, national Israel. There are still others who combine the two interpretations and declare that the vision has both a literal fulfillment and a wider, spiritual and final fulfillment. Israel will indeed be restored to their land and resume their worship. Messiah, the Prince, will indeed appear for their salvation and the setting up of His kingdom when every knee shall bow before Him and every tongue confess Him as Lord. But there is an even fuller, a final application to be made of this prophecy, that of a new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, a home eternal in the heavens. For it is quite obvious that even though Ezekiel was bidden to carry this vision back to Babylon for the hope and encouragement of the captives there, it had a much larger significance than could ever have been realized by their return. And as a matter of fact, nothing in the program of this vision was adopted by them when they did return.

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE NAME

It has been seen that the fulfillment of this name was limited in the Old Testament both in its manifestation and scope. Every manifestation of God's presence in the midst of His people,

though real, could only be but a shadow of a glorious reality to come. As to its scope, it was limited to the nation Israel.

In the New Testament dispensation it has a wider scope in that it is more spiritual than symbolic, and more personal rather than national. For now it has been fulfilled ideally in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As man and representing the human race “the whole fullness of God was pleased to dwell in him” (Col. 1:19, marg.). He was the effulgence of God’s glory and the very image of His substance (Heb. 1:3, A.S.V.). “The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us,” says John, “and we beheld his glory” (John 1:14). Thus He became “God with us,” the Immanuel of Isaiah 7:14, the Child, the Son, the mighty God, the everlasting Father of Isaiah 9:6. The One who in the Old Testament came in occasional, mysterious appearance as the Angel of Jehovah, the Angel of His Presence, the Angel of the Covenant, the Angel in whom is Jehovah’s name, became in Christ both the Presence itself and the Temple in whom the Presence resided so that in Him and of Him it could be said Jehovah-shammah, Jehovah is there.

This Presence is now in believers as living temples of God. “Know ye not that ye are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you” (1 Cor. 3:16). “What agreement hath a temple of God with idols?” Paul further says to the Corinthians: “For ye are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (2 Cor. 6:16).

Like Israel of old, the Church as a whole, as the Body of Christ, is also called the habitation of God. Of the true Church it can be said, “Jehovah is there.” Speaking of the Gentiles, Paul calls them no more strangers but fellow citizens together with believing Jews, with the saints, and of the household of God, built on the same foundations of apostles, prophets, and Christ the chief cornerstone. He describes it as a building fitly framed, growing into a holy temple in the Lord, a habitation of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22). Christ promised His abiding presence to His

Church (Matt. 28:20), being present even where two or three should be gathered in His name. It will certainly have a larger fulfillment yet for Israel in a millennial kingdom. Of a restored Israel and Palestine, where every man shall dwell safely under his own vine and fig tree, when the mountains of the house of Jehovah shall be established (Mic. 4:1-6), and Messiah, The Branch, the beautiful and glorious Branch of Jehovah, shall build the temple, and bear the glory and rule as prince and priest upon His throne, with counsels of peace (Zech. 6:12, 13), there can be no doubt unless the plainest prophecies are so spiritualized as to rob them of all sense and understanding, and destroy the meaning and integrity of prophecy.

But, as already indicated, the name Jehovah-shammah has a final and eternal fulfillment. This was intimated by the Lord Jesus in His parting discourses to His disciples. He spoke about the many mansions in His Father's house from which He would return to take His disciples to Himself that they should be with Him there (John 14:2, 3). "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory" (John 17:24). The ideal of life even in the Old Testament was never conceived of as being fully realized on earth. "As for me," says the psalmist, "I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness" (Ps. 17:15). "My flesh shall rest in hope," for "in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:9, 11). And the New Testament declares that our "citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20).

The ideal and future life was often pictured under the figure of a city. Even the psalmist must have had in mind something of what Ezekiel saw in his vision, something more than the earthly Zion he knew, when he wrote: "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High" (Ps. 46:4). The great cities of the world are built on the banks of broad, deep streams, but Jerusalem had no river. It is an ideal, a heavenly Jerusalem in which this saying finds its final and fullest realization. Abraham looked for a city which had foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10). He saw the final fulfillment of the promise "afar off." He desired a better country than any earthly Canaan could be, that is, a heavenly country, as his true home, for he confessed himself a stranger and pilgrim

on the earth (Heb. 11:13-16). The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us: “Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven” (Heb. 12:22, 23, A.S.V.). And of that city the Book of Revelation says that there was no temple there. There was no further need of any outward symbol of Jehovah’s presence, “for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb are the temple thereof” (Rev. 21:22).

The ideal and eternal character of this city of God, the place of His full and glorious presence, finds its most sublime expression in Revelation 21 and 22. “I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell [or tabernacle] with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Rev. 21:1-3). In that beautiful city, foursquare with its precious stones, its crystal river, its delectable fruits, and tree of life with its leaves for the healing of the nations, all will be light, and love, and holiness, and worship, and joy, and safety. There shall be no more curse, no adversary, no defilement, no sorrow, for every wicked doer shall be cut off from that city of the Lord or Jehovah. Then will be realized the full and final rest of the redeemed, the Sabbath rest of creation restored. The glory of Jehovah will be fully manifested in the Lamb that was slain. He will be seen and known in the full meaning and beauty of all the names by which He had revealed Himself to man’s imperfect apprehension. And we shall join in saying “unto him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb be the blessing, and the honor, and the glory, and the dominion forever and ever” (Rev. 5:13).