

THE EXAMPLE OF ISRAEL'S HISTORY

It is our undoubted privilege to be of the number of those who know and believe the truth. The value of this privilege will principally be manifest when the Lord, returned to the earth, shall proceed to the great and interesting work of making a selection from among such as have known his name for the everlasting and blessed association of the ages to come. But its value is a matter of experience, even now. Who that has apprehended, and accepted, and made daily companionship with "*the glorious gospel of the blessed God*," does not feel that "*godliness is profitable even for the life that is now*"? It may not be profitable as regards eligibility for "getting on" among men; but as regards those mental conditions that make life desirable—as regards peace, satisfaction, hope, rational aim, friendship and purifying purpose—its profitableness is beyond question, when it finds congenial soil.

Especially at such a time as the present, do we experience the truth of this. The clouds of tribulation are gathering thick over the world, and men are everywhere wistfully scanning the still-threatening heavens. Such as know not the truth are liable to be heavy-hearted at the aspect of things around them. A contrary effect is experienced by those who have been taught to look at things as God sees them. They lift up their heads with a hopeful expectancy where the hearts of men in general fail them from fear. The increasing darkness is increasing comfort to those who are able to recognise it as the characteristic indication of the approach of the hour of judgment upon the Gentiles, and the manifestation of the glory of God to all the nations of the earth for their chastisement and blessing in Abraham.

How comes it that we are in this privileged position? —we, who by nature and historic extraction, are without an inheritance of hope? We learn the answer in the parable of the supper (Luke 14:17). The guests first invited—the men and women of the Israelitish nation—declined the proffered favour on various excuses. The master of the house, being angry, sent his servants into the streets and lanes of their polity to bring in the poor and maimed, the halt and the blind. The result was a partial filling of the tables; but the servants' report was,

"Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room."

The master of the house answered,

"Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled."

In obedience to this command, the servants went forth to call the Gentiles to the kingdom first offered to the Jews and accepted by only a few of them. Paul, one of those servants, said to the originally-invited guests:

"Be it known unto you, that the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" (Acts 28:28).

Jesus, in prospect of the result, said:

"Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom (the Jews, belonging to the kingdom by natural descent) shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

A Roman centurion's faith was the occasion of this allusion to the destined presence in the kingdom of God of many native-born Gentiles. He refers to them in the words:

"Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold (not of Israel after the flesh) them also I must bring . . . and there shall be one fold and one shepherd" (John 10:16).

He prays for them also:

“I pray not for these (the twelve) alone, but for them also that shall believe on me through their word” (17:20).

It is comforting thus to know that the Father’s work in Christ extends to the Gentiles. Israel meanwhile and for a long season are *“blinded till the fulness of the Gentiles be come in”* (Rom. 11:25). They are given over to perversity because they knew not the time of their visitation. When the number of the called among the Gentiles is complete, God will return in favour to the people whom only He has *“known of all the families of the earth”* (Amos 3:2). That will be a glorious event for the world. Through their fall, salvation came to the Gentiles. What good may not be expected from their rising again? So Paul enquires:

“If the casting away of them be the reconciliation of the (Gentile) world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?” (Rom. 11:15).

But we have not yet reached that glorious issue. Events are trembling on the verge of it, but the morning as yet lingers on the mountains. While we wait the vision, as commanded, though it tarry (Hab. 2:3), let us make profitable use of the delay. Let us consider the terms of our standing. Let us look again at the conditions of our call to inheritance amongst the fathers, for there is nothing more conspicuous in the apostolic expositions of the matter than this one feature, that our ultimate acceptance turns stringently upon an “if”—yea, many “ifs.” Whether it be Peter, James, John, Paul or Jude, the doctrine is uniformly that believers will only be chosen if they walk in the present evil world so as to please God (2 Pet. 1:8; Jas. 1:22-27; 1 John 3:7,20; Gal. 6:8). Jesus also, as you know, constantly affirmed the same thing in various ways, of which Matt. 7:24-27 may be taken as a typical example.

Let us look for guidance in the direction where it is to be found. It is not fashionable to seek example on a question of this kind in the history of Israel. Yet this is where the apostles direct us to find it, and in truth it is where almost alone it is to be found. Paul enumerates incidents in that history and says:

*“These things happened unto them for examples; and they are **written for our admonition**”* (1 Cor. 10:11).

He refers the Hebrews specifically to the failure of the whole generation that came out of Egypt under Moses and makes this application of it:

“Let us therefore fear.”

Jude refers to the same matter (verse 5). We cannot follow this cue in a more satisfactory manner than by taking the line of argument employed in Romans 11. It is the more satisfactory because it contains a direct application of the principles involved in the rejection of Israel and the call of the Gentiles.

“I speak to you Gentiles,” says Paul, *“inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles.”*

What has he to say as the apostle of the Gentiles? Does he say, “As the apostle of the Gentiles I preach the divine brotherhood of all Gentiles everywhere and the fatherhood of God to all men”? Does he say, “Ye Gentiles are as much the heirs of promise as the Jews and more so, because the Jews have rejected their birthright”? Does he say, “I congratulate you, ye Gentiles, on the proud position of privilege and security to which you have attained, and in which you are established and exalted: I rejoice with you in the security of your calling and election: I call you to witness the great reversal in the providence of God by which ye have become the chosen of God, and the seed of Israel; your humble suppliants to eat of the crumbs that fall from your table”? Nay, nay, such is not the tenor of Paul’s deliverances as the apostle of the Gentiles. They run in a contrary vein altogether, and we do well to mark the fact. He says,

“If some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not

the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear; for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee . . . continue in his goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off."

(Rom. 11:17-22).

From this it follows, that we are not in a scriptural or acceptable attitude before God unless we recognise that we Gentile believers of the gospel have only become **conditional fellow-heirs** with the approved in Israel, and that apart from a deeply humble and eager observance of the conditions we have no hope at all. The observance of those conditions is called "*continuing in his goodness*," because the bestowal of the goodness is predicated upon our continuance in the conditions or in the rendering of that which He requires. It was because Israel had long ceased to render that which He required, that they were cut off.

What was it that He required of them? Moses told them plainly:

"What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul?" (Deut. 10:12).

As a nation, they failed to render this thorough and continual service. They did that against which Moses warned them when he told them to beware, when they would have attained to great wealth and plenty in the land to which God was taking them:

"Beware lest thou forget the Lord, who brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt" (Deut. 6:10-12).

This is just what they did; they forgot God, and they did so because they neglected the precaution which Moses enjoined upon them at the very same time, as the means of preventing forgetfulness:

"These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (verses 6-7).

Neglecting that of which the equivalent, in our day, is the daily reading of the word, they lost all interest in the exercises and institutions related to the service of God—an interest which can only exist where there is a lively recognition and a living interest in God, who requires them. They said:

"Behold, what a weariness is it! And they snuffed at it"
(Mal. 1:13).

Their state of mind led them to exclaim,

"When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the Sabbath, that we may set forth wheat?" (Amos 8:5).

They did observe the new moon: they did keep the Sabbath, in a way; but they had more interest in temporalities; and what they did, in the way of religious observance, was out of mere conformity to the custom around them. It was not done intelligently and lovingly to God. Thus God says to them, by Zechariah:

"When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years (in Babylon), did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did ye not eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?" (Zech. 7:5).

If they took part in the work of the Temple, it was for gain.

"Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? Neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand" (Mal. 1:10).

It will strike every one of a reflecting mind at all, that there is a wonderful resemblance to this sketch of Israel's condition, in the state of things around us. We have a State Church system—a nation professedly subject to God—going through, from time to time, a variety of ceremonies and exercises, nominally constituting a divine service, under the leadership of a hierarchy set apart for the business; but where are those things that God required of Israel, and which requires not less, but more, at the hands of Gentiles who may draw near to Him in the adoption offered through Christ, the seed of Abraham? Where is the lively recognition of God? Where is the unaffected love of His name, "*with all the heart and all the soul*"? Where are the people, given to speak of the things of God when they sit in the house and walk by the way—whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditate in His law day and night? Where are those who are more interested in the testimonies and the institutions of the Creator than in the buying and selling, and eating and drinking, and honouring and pleasuring of this animal condition of existence? Where are those who, even if in an ignorant way, render sincerely to God the acts of their devotion? Where are the men who open the doors of the truth and kindle its altar-fire without fee or reward, taking upon themselves the burden and the cost, the responsibility and the cross divinely associated, in this age of probation, with the service of the Father?

They are not to be found as a class. There may be individuals, scattered here and there, who have aspirations and endeavours after a sincere service, even if "not according to knowledge," but even they are checked and repressed, and in most cases extinguished by the universal apathy, formalism, and man-seeking. They do not exist as a feature of the system. Stagnation and death are the order of the day. The fact is visible to all who have had their eyes sharpened by the Scriptures to discern the world as it appears in the light of the divine standard. It is not to be expected that any other state of things should be discoverable in the world which has been from the beginning the enemy of God; least of all, at such a time as this, when "*the harvest (of earth's wickedness) is fully ripe*" for the Avenger's sickle. Yet it is well to refresh and renew our perceptions on the subject, that we may not be influenced to our destruction by the counsel of the wicked which surrounds us on every side. We cannot expect to find the characteristics of godliness in a society which is based upon "*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*": let us, at all events, estimate the state of society at its true character, and not be corrupted by false views into a fatal assimilation to it. Let us not be of those who call good evil and evil good, the darkness light, and light darkness. Let the house of God, at all events, be a temple of holiness. Let brethren and sisters—saints of God—at all events, keep themselves unspotted from the world. Let them deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, at all events, and live soberly and righteously and godly in the present world, hoping and praying to be delivered from it, and only sojourning in it meanwhile as strangers and pilgrims, in patience, as part of their required probation.

Well may it be so; for what do we see when we face the facts? Why, that what John tells us is true—that "*the world passeth away.*" Conciliate the world as you may; secure its favour in its best form; realise, in the most successful manner, its objects and its aims, its honours, and its comforts, its friendships and its fame—yea, "*all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them*"—to what does it all come? The collapse of the prismatic-hued soap-bubble in the hands of an admiring child, is not more complete than that which befalls the friend of the world when he is stretched on his back—six feet of cold clay. His glory shall not descend after him.

"Though while he lived he blessed his soul; and men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself; he shall go to the generations of his fathers; they shall never see light. Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish."

And who shall tell the horrors of the judgment process, by which, where responsible, he is chased away? While he lives in this time of liberty, he arrogantly appropriates and rejoices in the good that comes to his hand. He does not understand that God sends rain and sunshine without discrimination, for a purpose. He does not know that God “*defers his anger for his name’s sake*” (Isa. 48:9), because He has a purpose which requires the toleration of the wicked for a season, that His people may be developed and prepared, and the earth’s inheritance brought to fitness for their possession. He has not marked the voice of wisdom, which warns him by Solomon that, where responsible, as everyone is who “knows the right and yet the wrong pursues,”

“God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil,” namely, when “*the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed*” (Jude 14-15).

They may comfort themselves, in their generation, with the idea that they may snatch from God, so to speak, a lifetime of lawless enjoyment, and then escape, sated, into a sweet oblivion. They will bewail their infatuation when they find themselves alive again, to experience the truth of what Paul tells us, that—

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”: that God is not mocked: and that tribulation, wrath and anguish, await “*every soul of man that doeth evil, in the day when God judges the secrets of men by Jesus Christ*” (Heb. 10:31; Gal. 6:8; Rom. 2:9, 16).

The end of these things is death; but the passage to death, through the terrors of the judgment period when the wrath of God will be poured out, without mixture or measure, will be an experience which the most adamant of men will feel to be a terrible price to have paid for the fleeting and very uncertain pleasures of negligence and indifference to God in the day of liberty and opportunity.

The day that witnesses these manifested “*terrors of the Lord*” will bring “*glory, honour and peace*” to every one who has patiently rendered to God what He requires at his hand. Have we not, therefore, every incentive to choose the things in which Yahweh delights, and to continue steadfast therein as long as He may appoint for us a continuance in the present evil state? Every wise man will say Amen, and will show his wisdom by acting in accordance with his excellent understanding.

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