

THE HOPE OF ISRAEL

How great is our privilege each time we thus assemble, to hear the voice of God in our midst in the reading of the Scriptures. It was a privilege esteemed even in the days of Christ when *“Moses and the prophets were read in the synagogues every Sabbath day”*: a work in which he was in the habit of taking part (Acts 13:27; Luke 4:16). In our days the voice is larger: it is the voice of *“Moses, the prophets, and the apostles”*—a more comprehensive voice, a more abundant communication of the divine mind than Israel of the synagogues had. We may know more of God’s will and purpose than it was in their power to know. We are less privileged than they only in the singular particular that we have no contemporary inspiration. Even this drawback will shortly disappear. We are about to witness a far fuller and more glorious manifestation of the Spirit than even the apostles beheld; for, with the Lord’s coming will come that pouring out of the Spirit on the whole house of Israel promised from the beginning—yea, when God will pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, and the glory of the Lord will illumine the whole earth—not physical glory, not a visible shining, but glory in the sense of renown, reputation, praise. When all men recognise and serve and praise God (which they will not till Christ reigns), the earth will be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. We are looking for these times of refreshing. Meanwhile, it is ours to prize and use to the fullest our privilege of being able in these times of darkness and disobedience to hear the voice of God.

Today, we have first the word by Isaiah concerning Israel. The prophet’s words are good and comfortable words. They tell of kindness, and blessedness, and well-being to come. They are introduced with a “but,” which gives them greater point by contrast with something having gone before. That something we find in the end of the previous chapter. It is something put before us in the form of a question:

“Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers?”

This question supposes it a matter of controversy as to what Israel’s calamities were attributable—as to who brought them about. Such a controversy as a matter of fact exists. There are two ways of looking at the matter—the natural-man way and the divine way. The natural man, looking at the misfortunes of Israel, sees only the triumph of human prowess. The Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Romans had greater military skill than the Jews; therefore the Jews were overthrown. This is the “profane history” point of view—the view of all who look at occurrences as they appear to the eye of the observer who does not know God’s relation to them. It was the view entertained by the enemies of Israel themselves. Thus the king of Assyria said,

“By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent.”

The other view is presented by God Himself. He says of the Assyrian—

He is “the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge . . . Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few . . . Wherefore it shall come to pass, that, when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks”

(Isa. 10:5-12).

God, working behind, so to speak, strengthened, impelled, and guided the enemies of Israel in Israel’s spoliation. The Assyrians, Babylonians, and the Romans were merely instruments in God’s hands, without their being aware of it. The work done by them was work done by Him.

Hence, the right answer to the question, “Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers?” is the answer immediately following the question:

“Did not Yahweh, he against whom we have sinned? For they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient to his law. Therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle: and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart.”

This is the explanation of the present desolation of all things appertaining to Israel. It is a comfort to know that it is all of God, and that what Jesus said to Pilate concerning himself is true of the whole commonwealth of Israel in relation to the present Gentile ascendancy:

“Thou couldst have no power at all against me except it were given thee from above.”

How cheering also to have God’s recognition of the present state of the Jews. We look on them, and find them not at all what we should desire. They are barren of all intelligent recognition of their present position before God. They are full of a complacent wisdom which is a mixture of human philosophy and Rabbinical superstitions. We do not find the mind of the God of Israel, as exhibited in the prophets, reflected in them. What Paul said still remains true:

“Their minds are blinded unto this day.”

The spectacle would be discouraging if we relied on them in the least for our apprehensions of the ways of God in the earth. But we do not rely on them. There is no more consolation to be had from the Jews than from the gentiles, though the Jews are more interesting than the Gentiles, because of their relation to the work of God in the earth.

*“Darkness covers **the earth** (the Gentiles), and gross darkness the people” (the Jews).*

It is part of this gross darkness that the Jews rejoice in their racial superiority, and explain their dispersion as God’s way of diffusing light among the Gentiles, instead of confessing their scattered state as the punishment of their sins. In the midst of darkness it is comforting to read here in this portion of the word we have read, that God saw it would be so; that although the fire of the divine anger should kindle on Israel and consume him, yet he should “*know it not nor lay it to heart*” (Isa. 42:25).

This is the past: a past retribution: a time of giving to Jerusalem “*double for all her sins*” (Isa. 40:2); but the next chapter gives us the future—the future foreshown us in the gospel—the restoring again of the kingdom to Israel—the times of the restitution of all things:

“But now thus said the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine . . . I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back; bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; even everyone that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him, yea, I have made him.”

In these great and precious promises we are individually interested. We are not sons of Israel by birth, but we have become so by adoption (Rom. 11:17; Eph. 2:19); and our standing in Israel is not less real or valid because we are of Gentile birth and extraction. On the contrary we are more really Jews than those Jews after the flesh who lack the faith of their father Abraham. It is a principle of New Testament doctrine that “*they are not all Israel that are of Israel*” (Rom. 9:6). Jesus did not recognise the Abrahamic relations of those Jews who rejected him, though he admitted their lineal extraction. He denied they were Abraham’s

children in the full and effectual sense, because they were destitute of the character of Abraham (John 8:37-44). Gentiles, though not born of Abraham's blood, are truly the children of Abraham, if having become adopted in Abraham's family, they are characterised by Abraham's faith and works (Rom. 4:11-12; Gal. 3:29). Consequently, we can rejoice in hope of these glorious promises, made in the prophets concerning the seed of Jacob. They belong to the Jews, and we are Jews; for Paul expressly says,

"He is a Jew who is one inwardly."

Here it is not difficult to imagine the orthodox believer exclaiming, "That is exactly my doctrine: spiritual Israel! inward Jews! Certainly; I agree with you—that is the very truth, and consequently I reject the idea of carnal Jews being gathered and restored to their land." What must we say? It is not difficult to answer. The orthodox idea and the scriptural idea are not the same. The orthodox spiritual Jew is no Jew at all: the orthodox spiritual Israel is not Israel at all. Orthodox believers have run off with half an idea. They see the element of adoption; they see the element of spirituality; but they run away from the Judaism—from the Israelism. They recognise that Paul taught that believing Gentiles were adopted, but they reject the thing into which they were adopted; they see a spiritual Israel, but they cannot see Israel for the word spiritual. By their notion, Israelism is blotted out altogether. They substitute immortal invisibility, natural to all men, surviving death, and departing to indefinable bliss among the stars, to a state in which the fortunes of the earth become a matter of supreme indifference. Nay, they abolish the earth by conflagration. They destroy all reason for Israelitishness. They do not know of the promises to Abraham. They deny the kingdom of God to be set up in the Holy Land over all the earth; they are ignorant of the hope of Israel. It is very different with the inward Jew of Paul's teaching. Though inwardly, yet **"he is a Jew"**—a Jew in all points save his birth. He does not practise circumcision; he does not observe days; he is not under Moses, but this is no interference with his Jewishness, for he is exempted from these things by the God of the Jews, under that new covenant which from the beginning He foreshadowed by His servants the prophets He would establish with the Jews, natural and adopted. He is a Jew in all his hopes and relations, and he now waits with strong desire for the fulfilment of the glorious promise to Israel, of which a portion has been read this morning.

It may be objected that these promises cannot apply to adopted Israelites, since they concern an Israel that has suffered judgment in Yahweh's anger—an Israel upon whom has been poured *"the fury of His anger and the strength of battle,"* and who *"knew not and laid it not to heart."* It may be said that neither of these things can be affirmed of the brethren of Christ, and that therefore the promises cannot apply to them. This would be short-sighted in leaving out of account that comprehensive view of Israel which in the Scriptures regards Israel as a whole and its history as one. As a whole, Israel has been scattered, peeled and punished, and as a whole Israel will be gathered, exalted and honoured, and to that Israel as a whole, all Jews, whether natural or adopted, belong; but it does not follow that all individual Jews share either the one state or the other. Myriads of Jews have perished (e.g. in the wilderness for unbelief) who will have no share in the blessedness; and a multitude will share in the restoration who have seen nothing of the afflictions of Israel in times past. In the bestowal of the covenanted mercies, there is a discrimination as to individual desert: but the general descriptions of Israel's lot, past or future, contemplate Israel as a whole; and a genuine Israelite identifies himself with the national experience as a whole. Thus Daniel in *"praying and making confession"* at the end of the seventy years' captivity, uses the comprehensive pronoun *"we."*

"We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets" (Dan. 9:5).

“We are become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to those that are round about us . . . Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name’s sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God? Let him be known among the heathen in our sight, by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed” (Psa. 79:4, 9-10).

Though living in the nineteenth century, and inhabiting a Gentile land, as the brethren of Christ and the adopted seed of Abraham, we can pray these prayers more fervently and appropriately than his circumcised rejectors. On the same principle, we can lay claim to the glorious predictions of blessing, though they do refer to a nation which has been the subject of judgment and desolation. We belong to that nation, and own its history, as well as rejoice in its future.

This Israel, which as a whole is to be redeemed, will, when redeemed, be delivered from all that element, past or present, which though *“of Israel”* is not truly Israel. It will be composed of those only who show forth Yahweh’s praise. The people shall be *“all righteous”* (Isa. 60:21). The carnal element will be purged out and exterminated (Ezek. 20:38; Zeph. 3:11; Matt. 3:12). The purified remnant will be a holy nation (Zeph. 3:12-13)—a great contrast to the Jewish nation at any former period in its history, comparable only with its state when it entered the land of promise under Joshua. We are specially interested in this holy nation—the nation as it will survive after the Lord’s purification of them. In this nation, as the brethren of the Lord Jesus, we shall have a special place. It is written that in that day the feeblest of Israel shall be as David, and *“the house of David as God, as the angel of the Lord before them”* (Zech. 12:8). As the body of Christ, the Son of David, the saints in that day will be the house of David, and to them will belong the special exaltation and glory and honour of the glorious day that will have dawned as *“a morning without clouds,”* in accordance with the covenanted mercies of David, given to them (Isa. 55:3; 2 Sam. 23:4-5).

The very kernel of the blessing appertaining to the hope of Israel is the position of the accepted brethren of the Lord Jesus. This is brought home to us in a special form in the messages to the seven ecclesias, a portion of which has formed the other part of our reading. In those messages are many great and precious promises extended expressly to all who have ears to hear, and who overcome, whether they be dwellers in Asian cities or not. The one that occurs to me particularly in connection with the hope of Israel is the promise of pillarship:

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God” (Rev. 3:12).

This, of course, is the language of symbol; but it is more expressive than a plain statement when the thing symbolised is understood. We know what the temple of God is when used in a figurative sense. There is to be a literal temple, the temple shown to Ezekiel, we know; but there is also to be a living temple, a temple composed of many people, a multitude in whom God will dwell, and through whom He will be manifested to the nations in the age to come. The temple of God in this sense is the community of the glorified saints. The promise to the victor is to be a pillar in this temple. We know what a pillar means used in this figurative way. James, Peter, and John were *“pillars”* in the apostolic community in the first century (Gal. 2:9). They were principal men, upholding men, men upon whom the fabric rested. It was a privilege to be a pillar in that arrangement of things; but what shall it be to be a pillar in the glorious mystical temple of the Deity in the kingdom of God? This is the promise: it is a great and precious promise; it would be such if it meant only a fifty years’ pillarship. Power and honour among men for fifty years, even in the present evil state of things, is considered a great prize, but the man that attains to pillarship in the divine arrangement of things, to be

established on the ruins of the present system, “*shall go no more out.*” A pillar in the mortal system breaks and is taken away: a mortal ruler dies; but a ruler in the divine *aion* is immortal. His position is as stable as the sun in the heavens. When 500 years have rolled away, he will still be found in his place, as strong and joyful and as established as at the beginning. The name of God is written upon him: he is invested with the divine nature: he is immortal; he cannot die any more: he is equal unto the angels. He also bears the name of the new Jerusalem, which at that time will have come down from God out of heaven. He is not an isolated unit. He is part of a system. He is a constituent of the Jerusalem government—the Jerusalem-governed polity—which will have come from God out of heaven, in having been created and established by Christ at his return from heaven. This will be the new Jerusalem as contrasted with the old—new indeed in all senses; for in the old Jerusalem arrangement of things, there was nothing of immortality or stability. It was weak through the flesh, because in the hands of the flesh; but the new Jerusalem is out of heaven and from God, and spiritual, immortal, and invincible in all its characteristics. What an unspeakable honour to be an element of such a *kosmos*. It is considered a great thing now to be in any of Her Majesty’s “services”—to exercise authority under the royal arms. This is to have Victoria’s name written upon a man, and the name of London, and to be a pillar in the Constitutional Temple. But it is a poor affair compared with the commonwealth of Israel. There is none of the stability, permanence, strength, life, efficiency, glory, and gladness that belong to the household of God in the age to come.

In view of these things, it is but the commonest wisdom to ponder the fact that this glorious status is promised with reservations. It is to be bestowed on “*him that overcometh.*” This intimates to us that: -

“There is a battle to be fought,
A victory to be won.”

Where is the battle and when? Can there be any doubt about this? Let us open our eyes and see. The battle is now—in the common-place life of our probation. There is a danger of forgetting this. There is a danger of acting on the common notion that the business now on hand is to get as much enjoyment as ever we can. The battle we have to fight is the battle Paul fought in his day. At the end of his life, looking back he said he had fought it—

“*I have fought a good fight!*”

While the battle was on, he tells how he had conducted it.

“*So fight I, not as one that beateth the air.*”

One that beats the air is a man who goes through the performance of fighting but hits nothing; it is not a real fight, but a sham fight. The man attitudinises beautifully but nothing is done. The fight we have to fight is a real piece of business. We deal blows that hit something, and take the life out of the thing hit. Paul indicates the point in his continuing words,

“*I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection.*”

It is ourselves we have to fight. We incline in certain directions pleasing to the flesh; and we have to stand in our own way, and push ourselves back and say, “No, you must not go in those paths which are forbidden to the sons of God.” The body we keep under is the whole body, not any one part. The lust of the eye is as much a lust of the body as the lust that leads to fornication; the lust of the flesh in all its affections, is as much a lust of the body as that which leads to uncleanness. The pride of life is as much an attribute of the body—of the brain part of the body, as that which is more gross and vile in the estimation of men. The whole category is outside of saintship. A man may keep himself clean in certain directions and be defiled. He may be free from adultery, but a slave to the praise of men and the outside appearances of things. He may be innocent of drunkenness, but given to pride and covetousness. He may be perfectly respectable, according to human ethics, and abominable according to the rule of divine estimation. We must not forget, “Guilty in one point, guilty of

all,” is a rule of divine judgment. We must keep the devil’s whole host at bay. Of what advantage will it to keep off ninety-nine Zulus if the hundredth strikes his assegai into our heart?

We must fight a real fight. Do not let us pose merely. Do not let us go through the attitudes and beat the air. Do not let us profess the name and attend the meetings, and all the while in private life “*walk as other Gentiles walk.*” We are called to be saints, or holy ones, or those who do the will of God—and not those who merely say, Lord, Lord. To be such involves self-denial, cross-taking-up, and cross-carrying. It involves the doing of “things,” and all the things “that he says,” and these relate to the common ways of private life. In this we have to fight ourselves often, for the spirit lusts against the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit. This is the battle in which we have to overcome, upon which so much depends.

How are we to overcome? John answers:

*“This is the victory that overcometh the world, **even our faith.**”*

What is “our faith”? Paul answers:

*“Faith is the substance of **things hoped for.**”*

It is a question of confidence in things to come. Whence comes this confidence? Paul tells us:

*“Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by **the word of God.**”*

It comes to what Paul said to the Ephesian elders in his farewell address:

“I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”

The advice remains good to this day. The diligent, sympathetic daily reading and studying of the oracles of the living God, with prayer to Him who slumbers not nor sleeps, will fortify a man for successful conflict with all the enemies he has to encounter on the road to eternal life; while the neglect of them will certainly ensure his failure, however gifted he may be as a natural man, or however successful in the objects of life which the common run of men set before their eyes.

“All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever.”

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Pages 400-407--By Bro. Robert Roberts