

The Prophets of Israel

ZECHARIAH.

It is usual, with the "Divines" and "Reverend Doctors" of Christendom to refer to certain of the prophets of Israel as "Minor" prophets: and to treat them as of secondary importance. In our opinion this is a gross error — for certainly no message from God can be of "minor" importance. As a matter of fact, the fourteen chapters of the prophecy of Zechariah— one of the so-called "minor" prophets — are so completely charged with God's mind and intention in the affairs of men to the end of time, as to be of utmost use on Christadelphian lecturing platforms.

While comparing Isaac Leeser's translation, according to the Massoretic text, with the work of Gentile translators, we were much moved at the following comment by that Hebrew with reference to the prophecy of Zechariah: —"The prophecy of Zechariah is extremely obscure." That comment is interesting because, in effect, it is just what Christendom says of the book of Revelation—and for exactly the same reason—for both messages reveal so much of God's plan, as to bring rebuke and confusion to Judaism and Christendom.

It is particularly striking that Dr. Thomas, in *Eureka*, in dealing with the subject "Apocalypse rooted in the Prophets," uses no less than thirty pages on the prophecy of Zechariah, while he averages less than one page each for the other prophets on that particular subject.

It is small wonder, then, that the Jews find Zechariah "obscure" and Christendom finds the book of Revelation "unintelligible"—when, as Dr. Thomas says, "Hence, then, I should define the Apocalypse to be a symbolic revelation of the hidden mystery of the Deity, originally declared in the prophets."

It has been truly said that "Thinking is hard work." Actually, very few people, even in the world's affairs, are willing to think hard—to cudgel their brains, until it really hurts: and those few who do, usually reap a rich reward, of such things as the world can give. However, it is much harder than that, to so discipline the fleshly mind, as to compel it to think hard, to meditate upon, to consider, the deep eternal things which belong to God. But then, the reward is not only incomparably greater than the world can give—it is absolutely sure, because God has promised it.

Taking the matter just one step further — the duty of the prophets of Israel, was even more exacting than thinking hard for themselves, upon the deep things of God; their mission was to so deliver a message from God, as would cause *the recipients* of the message to think hard upon the things which belong to God and to eternity: and to think so hard, that they would be willing to sacrifice fleshly desires to prove their faith in God's promises.

Verily, God knoweth our frame: He knoweth that we are but dust, and that our few days swiftly pass. He is very merciful; how patient He has proven himself: "I have sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them. Yet, they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they walked in the counsels and in the imaginations of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward."

From the disobedient hundreds of thousands, who have lived their little day according to the flesh, and left only their rotted bones and blighted hopes—from among those multitudes "one here and one there" have "come out" and have inclined their ear — *through the power* of that message through God's prophets. And how evident is the fact that though centuries divided those prophets, the power of that eternal word of God never diminished. That evidence, of sustained power, is striking indeed, in the prophecy of Zechariah—who appeared very close to the end of Old Testament prophets.

The prophecy of Zechariah is dated 520 - 487 B.C. Only Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi — contemporary, or just a few years later than Zechariah, were to deliver their message — *then appeared* the greatest prophet of all times, the one to whom all the other prophets had pointed and given witness, the very focal-point of God's purpose, the Messiah, the Saviour—but not of the Jews only—Jesus Christ, the Saviour Anointed for the Jews, and for the Gentiles also, who would become Abraham's seed through immersion into Christ.

Contemporary with Zechariah was the prophet Daniel, a man greatly beloved by God, who had been faithfully waiting fulfilment of the prophecy by Jeremiah, that at the expiration of seventy years of captivity there would be a restoration of the Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem. Sixteen years before Zechariah's prophecy there had been in fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy a return of the dispersed Jews under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua. What, then, was *the purpose* to be served by the message through Zechariah?

Considered as a whole, the prophecy was most timely, most appropriately and most forcefully given — at the end of Old Testament times, when Israel appeared forsaken of God—given to thoroughly and completely demonstrate, to all with eyes to see, that there would be a first, *and second*, advent of the Messiah: a tremendous prophecy, so abounding in detailed information and circumstance concerning God's kingdom on earth, that only the lazy-minded, and the moles and bats, could fail to understand.

The first part of the message is an encouragement, and an always needed exhortation, to that "remnant" which had, *voluntarily*, come out of and forsaken Babylon, in order that they might return to Jerusalem, build God's house and serve him in the divinely appointed way. "The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers—turn ye unto me, and I will turn unto you. Be ye not as your fathers: unto whom the former prophets have cried, but they did not hear. Your fathers! Where are they?" Truly the disobedient fathers, and the faithful prophets who had daily protested unto them, all now having written their record for the Day of Judgment, had been overtaken by the Grim Reaper: *but*, God's words and statutes, by the mouth of the prophets, had been completely fulfilled—"Did they not *take hold* of your fathers?"—the destroyed temple, and the ruined cities, gave silent but indisputable evidence, that God's words had taken hold of their disobedient fathers.

But, to the angel who talked with Zechariah, God gave "good words, and comfortable words," for the regathered remnant. How appropriate, indeed, was the very name of the prophet—for the meaning of the name "Zechariah" is, "Whom Jehovah remembers." God then proceeds to give comforting words, indeed, unto this remnant, which had left far behind the ease of Babylon, with its flesh-serving idolatry.

Just as it will be with the *last* little remnant when Messiah comes in his full glory—"the peace and safety cry" (while Israel is terribly afflicted in heathen Germany, blasphemous Russia and elsewhere), so *then* in the days of that remnant from *old* Babylon—God's angel-watchers reported, "The heathen are at ease"; while the Jews were distressed. *But*, "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion, with a great jealousy. And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease. Therefore, I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies."

And the next few verses are especially forceful, when taken into consideration with some verses in the prophecy of Haggai—who wrote at the same time as did Zechariah. These next sentences in *Zechariah* are, "My house shall be built in Jerusalem. My cities through prosperity shall yet spread abroad: and the Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem. In the second chapter of Haggai, to the remnant which had just rebuilt the house of the Lord, God said, "Who is there among you that saw this house in her *first* glory" — God is addressing those who some seventy years before had seen the temple which had been built by Solomon— "and, how do ye see it *now*?" Is not this rebuilt temple "as nothing" in comparison with the glory that was Solomon's temple? *Ezra* shows that the rebuilt temple was, indeed, "as nothing" as compared with the first temple. At the third chapter and tenth verse, we read that "When the builders laid the foundation," to rebuild the temple,

there was great blowing of trumpets and singing, by the younger part: "But," verse 12, "But, many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the *first* house — when the foundation of *this* house was laid before their eyes, *they wept* with a loud voice."

And yet, those comforting reassuring words by God through Zechariah and through Haggai, "The glory of this latter house (when God shall choose Jerusalem again), the glory of this *latter* house shall be *greater than* the former, *and*, in this place I will *give peace*."

Zechariah is then shown nine very remarkable visions. And the purpose of those visions is to demonstrate, by an abundance of detailed information, how God will choose Jerusalem again, and how, in so doing, will bless the whole earth with that unending peace which is now the ardent, but unattainable desire of all nations.

To attempt an adequate exposition of any one of those visions would quite outrun the limits of space now at our disposal, and would preclude mention of the general purpose of the prophecy. There is also an abundance of information concerning the Prophet-Priest-King (by "the blood of whose covenant," "the prisoners of hope," through resurrection shall be delivered "out of the pit") the God-appointed Almighty King, who shall at last "speak peace" to the thoroughly subdued heathen nations: the King whose dominions shall be "from sea to sea, even to the ends of the earth."

How completely, in this so-called "minor" prophecy, is set forth God's whole purpose in Christ.

It was to be but a comparatively short time from Zechariah's day, and then would come to pass the words in the ninth of Zechariah, "Rejoice greatly, oh daughter of Zion, shout, oh daughter of Jerusalem; behold thy king cometh unto thee: he is just, and *having salvation*;" he was to come at that time "lowly," and riding upon a lowly, peaceful, laborious animal.

How humble indeed, and how lowly, was to be God's "servant, the branch," as Christ is called in the third chapter of Zechariah.

Isaac Leeser, to whose translation we have already referred, and almost the whole Jewish nation with him, found the prophets of God "obscure" because they did not comprehend that God's purpose *required* that the Messiah should be "*in all things* made like unto his brethren"—so that later, having been *tempted* in all points like as we are, he would be an understanding, and merciful, High Priest.

Surprising, indeed, at first sight, that is an error which breaks out occasionally *even among Christadelphians*! Some years ago, a number of brethren and sisters were misled by the mistakes of theorists, who concluded that "in nature" Christ was not as lowly as his brethren; that he had "clean flesh," that he had "no sin" in any sense whatsoever — except the sins of others which were laid upon him, and on account of which he was made to suffer under the wrath and displeasure of God. Strange indeed, is it not, that even to-day there are some nominal Christadelphians who teach by printed page, and more who support in fellowship, that doctrine of substitution. It is refreshing, indeed, to turn from such perversion to the Truth as expounded by Dr. Thomas in his dealing with the third chapter of Zechariah, *Eureka*, volume 1, page 108: "Jesus then, like his brethren, is to be considered in *two* states, each state having a nature peculiar to itself. In the *former* state, 'He was crucified through weakness'; in the *after* state, wherein he *now* is, 'He liveth by the power of the Deity.' In the former state, the flesh

was 'the filthy garments' with which the spirit-word was clothed (Zech. iii. 3); 'The iniquity of us all' that was laid upon him— 'the soul made an offering for sin' (Is. liii.); but, as he now is, the filthy garments have been taken away; 'his iniquity has passed from him,' and he is clothed 'with a change of raiment'." Now he is the *perfected* high priest, who once offered for himself: he is now made higher than the heavens, and *everliveth*—Now he is "holy, harmless

and *undefiled*." If only brethren would leave that "holy, harmless and undefiled" in the *light* of its context, in that beautiful seventh chapter of Hebrews!

Zechariah ix. 9, prophesying Christ's lowly first appearance to Israel, was fulfilled as related by all four Gospel writers. But, much indeed was to take place between fulfilment of that ninth verse, and the tenth verse, in the ninth chapter of Zechariah; for the tenth verse prophesies Christ's *second* appearance—the time of his *power*: we are still awaiting that fulfilment: he will then *prove* that he "had salvation" as a gift to men from God, for, "by the blood of his covenant," he will deliver the prisoners out of the pit—he is the resurrection and the Life: he will then subdue the nations and "his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth."

Many and great indeed will be the blessings of that day. One of the greatest will be that recorded in the fourteenth chapter of Zechariah at the ninth verse — universal knowledge of the one true God—no *triune* god of Rome in those days: reading from Leeser's translation, "And the Lord will be king over all the earth: on that day the Lord shall be acknowledged *One*, and his name shall *be* one." "Surely," as Jeremiah says, in that day "the gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, *surely* our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit. Shall a man make gods unto himself and they are no God?"

But, *before* all that rejoicing, and prospect of everlasting happiness, there are *two* great Days of Reckoning.

First, we will speak of God's reckoning with the *Jews*, as set forth by Zechariah in the twelfth chapter. "In *that* day, there shall be great *mourning* in Jerusalem." What can be the cause for *mourning*, amidst such great cause for songs of rejoicing? It is even on the day that the Lord has "saved the tents of Judah": when he is "a shield around the inhabitants of Jerusalem," "and the feeblest among them shall be, on that day, like David, and the House of David (those who have been immortalized) shall be like Divine Beings, like an angel of the Lord before them."

What, then, can be the cause for such great mourning on that day? —for, "on that day will the lamentation *be great* in Jerusalem."

It is because the Jews will be absolutely convinced, in that day, that in their ignorance and fleshly pride they had *crucified* their Messiah! "One shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thy hands?" "Then shall he answer, Those with which I was wounded, in the house of my friends." Verily, "They shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and mourn as one mourneth for an only son." How they shall remember that, in the words of Zechariah, at the eleventh chapter, "They weighed for my price, thirty pieces of silver." The devil had purchased for the price of a slave, him who now was leading every form of "captivity—*captive*."

Secondly, and in conclusion at this time, shall we speak of that other great Day of Reckoning—the day which so greatly concerns ourselves, who are Israelites *by adoption*.

We know that, as recorded in the last verses of this prophecy by Zechariah (Leeser's translation), "In *that* day, there shall be no more *the traitor* in the house of the Lord of Hosts."

And the fateful question which will be answered, in that day, is: have *we* been traitors? Have *we* crucified the son of God the second time? Have *we* put him to an open shame? Have *we*, in practical effect, "Counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith we were sanctified (set apart), an unholy thing?"

What the *answer* will be to that question, which will be surely asked in that great day of reckoning, what the answer *will be*—is in our own power TO-DAY.

Have we denied Christ? Have *we* sold our birthright for a mess of the world's pottage? Each one of us, in our innermost heart, can answer that question day by day. *We know*, each one of us, whether we have denied the *flesh*. Upon each and every occasion that we have denied ourselves some *fleshly* craving, therein have we "by works" proven our faith in God and in Christ. *But*, every time we have yielded to the *flesh*— whether it be in *great sins*, or in such sin as surrendering to the appeal of a comfortable chair at home when we should be in attendance at the Meetings — *all* such acts, are *a denial of Christ*; and, if we deny him now, and continue in disobedience, *then* our own heart will condemn us, at the Judgment seat of Christ.

Many and great are the assurances God has given that he will never leave nor forsake those who trust in Him. "*No weapon* that is formed against thee shall prosper: and *every tongue* that shall rise against thee in judgment *shalt thou condemn*. *This* is the heritage of the servants of the Lord." God's mercy is as great towards those who fear Him in these latter days as it was in the days of the prophets when that assurance was given.

Let it then ever be our desire to cultivate the attitude of mind exhibited by Nehemiah—who also laboured with Zechariah on behalf of *the remnant*; for it was a continually recurring theme in Nehemiah's prayers (strongly reminiscent of, and perhaps even inspired, by the meaning of the name of Zechariah, "Whom Jehovah remembers").

"Remember *me*, oh my God, *for good*." H. DEAKIN. Union, NJ. (U.S.A.). 2-3/1936 Berean