

Messianic Prophecy.

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AN article with the above title has appeared in a recent number of *The Churchman*. The following contrasted view of the subject is not offered in any polemical spirit; nor, it is hoped, with undue assurance. We are speaking to one another with a view to understanding the Scriptures, our common authority for faith and hope, specially now as regards what they reveal of the purposes of God concerning His Christ. The subject is too sacred for polemics, too deep and high for over positive assertion or denial.

The view of Messianic Prophecy advanced by Dr. B. F. C. Atkinson in the article referred to is, in brief, that the Old Testament promises to Judah and Jerusalem find their complete and final fulfilment in the Church of Christ, and that "the New Testament knows of no future for Jews as such" (p.11); or again, "the New Testament knows nothing of a national future for the Jews" (p.13); "the New Testament scatters the pretensions of a literal interpretation [of the terms Israel and Judah in the prophets] to the winds" (p.15). The four passages which are adduced as being key-passages in New Testament interpretation, however, hardly support this view.

All that St. Peter says in the first key-passage (Acts iii. 24) is that the prophets told of these Christian days. He does not hint that they have foretold nothing else. Similarly in his Epistle (1 Peter i. 10-12) he declares that the prophets who prophesied of Christian times, when the Spirit of Christ which was in them testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories which should follow them, knew that they were speaking for us in these Christian days, and not for themselves. He does not say that this was the whole subject of their prophesyings, but rather implies the contrary. Again when St. Paul affirms before Agrippa that his preaching of Christ was only what Moses and the prophets had predicted (Acts xxvi. 22, 23), that does not assert that it was all that they foretold. A fourth key-passage adduced later in the article is Galatians iv. 24-29, where St. Paul quotes Isaiah liv. 1, and interprets it of a Jerusalem which is above, our mother in the Christian Church, as contrasted with the literal Jerusalem, which, clinging to the covenant of law, is in bondage with her children. It is manifest, since in Chapter liii of his book the prophet Isaiah is foretelling the atoning death and consequent exaltation of Jesus, that from Chapter liv onwards he foretells the receiving of all peoples to be the people of God in a universal Church of Christ; and so St. Paul interprets the passage, and names the new mother of us all "Jerusalem that is above," in contrast to the mother-city of the Jews, which had rejected the Christ of God, and cut itself off from the salvation that is in Him. In doing so we cannot imagine that he ignored the preceding context (Isaiah xlix-lii. 12), where it is predicted in plain terms that when the Servant of Jehovah is becoming His salvation to the end of the earth, the literal Zion will be rejected, but that it will ultimately be restored. Still less can he be thought to

repudiate that final section of the great prophecy (Isaiah lviii-lxvi), whose whole subject is this latter-day glory of Zion, when its Redeemer comes to it in power, and the people are no longer forsaken, nor its land desolate.

If these are "the most prominent passages in which the New Testament interprets the Old", it cannot be said that they tend to establish the thesis of Dr. Atkinson's article.

Moreover there are other New Testament passages which seem to disprove it, or at least are very difficult to reconcile with it. The New Testament, while concerned chiefly with the proclamation of the Universal Gospel and the establishment of the Universal Church, without any difference between Jew and Gentile in it, yet at times is at pains to emphasize the continuance of the Jewish nation as a separate entity among the nations. Though not its main subject it even contains hints of its corporate restoration to a place among the people of God on earth. St. Peter in the temple at Jerusalem (Acts iii), while calling Jews individually to repent of the national rejection of their Christ, and to believe in Him and enter His Church, speaks also of "times of restoration of all things" spoken of by the prophets; when God shall send the Christ Who has been appointed for them out of the heaven to which He has now gone. And St. Paul, the great apostle of no difference between Jew and Greek in the present era of the Gospel, is specially commissioned to declare that God has not cast off His people whom He foreknew. Even now God has His people among them. But more than this—"God is able to graft them in again". How striking too are the expressions "their loss—their fulness", "the casting away of them—the receiving of them". If their loss and their casting away here spoken of are national, so it is a national fulness and national receiving of them which is in view in these antitheses. Moreover, though a national recovery may be posed as hypothetical, yet St. Paul remarks how natural it would be that they should be so received into fellowship with their Christ. And, to the present writer's mind at least, he goes on to declare that it will be so, "as it is written" (Romans xi. 25ff).

It is to be remarked then, that according to the New Testament view, while in the Church of Christ there can be neither Jew and Greek nor any other like distinction, yet in the world there will always be Jew and Gentile. Actually, after 1900 years, the Jewish nation remains a people apart. Is not this the meaning of our Lord's words, "This generation shall not pass away till all things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away?"

Other New Testament passages which confirm the persistence of the people of the Jews, and foreshadow a national future for them within the Church of Christ are the following :

- "He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever."
- "A Light to lighten the Gentiles and the Glory of Thy people Israel."
- "In the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."
- "A great multitude . . . when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem . . . went forth to meet Him, and cried out, Hosanna : Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord, even the

King of Israel. And Jesus, having found a young ass, sat thereon ; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Zion : behold, thy King cometh."

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord."

"Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

"Jesus stood before the governor : and the governor asked Him, saying, Art Thou the King of the Jews ? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest."

"Pilate wrote a title also, and put it on the cross. And there was written, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. This title therefore read many of the Jews."

"One of the malefactors . . . said, Jesus, remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom."

After forty days instruction of His disciples in what is written in the Law of Moses and in the Prophets and in the Psalms concerning Himself, and concerning the Kingdom of God, they asked Him, "Lord, dost Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel," and Jesus answered, *not* that there is no such restoration to be looked for, *but* "It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father has set within His own authority."

The fact that the gifts and promises of the New Covenant, proclaimed to Zion and Jerusalem by the prophet Joel (ii. 28 ff), and to the houses of Israel and Judah by the prophet Jeremiah (xxxi. 31 ff), coincide with the gifts and promises to the Universal Church of the present New Testament Gospel, does not mean that they will find no national fulfilment in the literal Israel. It simply indicates that the national restoration when it takes place will be on the same terms as are being now offered to them and to all mankind. This is the rationale of the quotations of the prophecies by St. Peter to the Jerusalem multitudes (Acts ii. 16 ff), and by the writer to the Hebrews in his epistle (Hebrews viii. 8 ff). The good tidings which is now the salvation of all the world is that which will then be the salvation of the Jewish nation also (Romans x. 15 with Isaiah lii. 7-10).

The present writer is in full agreement with Dr. Atkinson on the importance of a thorough study of the numerous quotations from the Old Testament to the New, before any attempt to speak or write on the subject of Messianic Prophecy. The late Canon Girdlestone in his *Grammar of Prophecy* (Eyre and Spottiswoode 1901) refers to Gough's *New Testament Quotations* as a book which exhibits these in a compact and convenient form, "a book which might well be reprinted." The *Grammar of Prophecy* contains chapters on such subjects, among others, as Prophecies conditional and unconditional, Prophetic Forms of Thought, Recurrent Prophetic Formulae, The Future expressed in Terms of the Past, The Prophetic Use of Names, and finally one on The New Testament view of the Old Testament Prophecy.

This last is specially apposite to our present subject. The Canon estimates that there are about 600 quotations from the Old Testament in the New, besides constant allusive references. On a survey of these

as a whole he formulates twelve "canons of interpretation", too long for transcription here, but very valuable as a guide to the principles of New Testament quotation. He concludes with the words "To illustrate these twelve canons of interpretation by Christ and His followers would be to write a book. The enumeration of them is based on a careful study of all the known quotations."

The present writer cannot claim to have made such a complete study, but for many years he has endeavoured to examine and understand the principles of each New Testament quotation met with in his reading. Particularly he has made a careful study of all the known New Testament references and quotations from the Book of Isaiah, more than 100 in number, excluding allusions in the Apocalypse, which admittedly, as a revelation given by signs and symbols, stands in a class by itself, separate from the other New Testament books. The conclusion he has come to is that, in the view of New Testament authors, the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Jewish nation are to be taken in their plain and natural sense, and are not to be transferred *en masse* to the Christian Church.

The identification of the Millennium of the Apocalypse with the times of restoration of all things spoken of by Old Testament prophets does no violence to the context in which it occurs. It seems in agreement with a former vision of the Book, in which the kingdom of the world becoming the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ is announced as the finishing of the mystery of God, according to the good tidings which He declared to the prophets (Apocalypse x. 7 ; xi. 15).

The statement in the article which we are reviewing that the New Testament knows of two dispensations only, that of law in the Old Testament and of grace in the New Testament, does not seem to be quite accurate. Taking the word "dispensation" (*ὀικονομία*) in the sense of a method of dealing with men by God, St. Paul speaks of a "dispensation of the fulness of the seasons" which is yet to come (Ephesians i. 10). Jesus Christ, in His last words to the Apostles also refers to "times and seasons" of the future (Acts i. 7), and to an "end" of this present age (Matthew xxiv. 14, comp. xiii. 39 ff). Looking back through Bible history we see an ante-diluvian dispensation with its clearly marked end. God's manner of dealing with men changed also with the Call of Abraham, and a period aptly called the Patriarchal Age followed. When the iniquity of the Amorites was full, the Age of Israel's national history began: and with the Christ was ushered in the Gospel Age, the present Christian era. The times of ignorance in the world God long overlooked, but now He commands men that they should all everywhere repent and believe the Gospel. How frequent in the New Testament is the mention of "ages" in the history of the world! If the recognition of these is "dispensationalism", it is thoroughly Scriptural.

A Divine purpose that all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Jehovah is declared to Moses to be as immutable as the Eternal Being Itself (Numbers xiv. 21). This purpose is reiterated at two later crises in the development of the Divine Plan through Israel (Isaiah xi. 9 ; Habakkuk ii. 13, 14). This then, let us be quite sure, is a part of the revealed plan of God for the world. Such a time as is described in these prophecies will be seen in the world before it finally passes

away. Towards this goal events are infallibly moving, but, so far as we can see into the plan, it will be reached at last not by gradual development into a golden year, but, at the end of a period of preparation, by one supreme crisis, which will deal at once and effectually with the intractable wicked throughout the world, and also—and this is most important to observe—with the age-long Opponent of the way of God, the old Deceiver of the nations, and inveterate Enemy of man, Satan, the Evil One, the Devil. The incoming of such an era upon present conditions would be a new dispensation, and, taught by the Old and New Testament Scriptures, many continue to look for it when God “brings again the First-begotten into the World”.

Canon Girdlestone, in the concluding chapter of his *Grammar of Prophecy*, recalls a passage by Bishop Butler in his chapter on the Moral Government of God (Analogy i. 3), where he “adumbrates the millennial condition and the restoration of the Jews as a leading nation, in words not easily to be improved upon”. His own chapter on The Parousia and The Millennium poses many questions on Millennial life, and closes—“These are not a hundredth part of the questions which occur to us as we contemplate the prospect. But our absolute ignorance need not shake our convictions. Whatever God ordains will speedily seem natural.”

We venture to close this article with some extracts from the closing words of Canon Girdlestone's volume. They are the testimony of the late Dr. Horatius Bonar, after fifty years' study of prophecy, and uttered in the year 1879. He says :

“I speak my own experience in this matter, and I compromise no one in saying what I do except myself—I say I am getting, after fifty years' study, greatly more certain, and I am getting greatly more uncertain, about many things in the prophetic word . . .

“I feel greatly more certain as to the *second coming* of the Lord being the Church's hope . . . I feel greatly more certain, as the years roll on, regarding the *pre-millennial advent*. I feel greatly more certain concerning the first resurrection and the millennial reign. I feel greatly more certain concerning the times of the restitution of all things spoken of by all the holy prophets . . . I feel greatly more certain concerning the new heaven and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. I feel greatly more certain in reference to *Israel's* prospects of glory in the latter day, after their scattering of 1800 years. I feel greatly more certain in reference to the *doom of anti-christ*, whatever that name may include, and doubtless it includes many things. So regarding these things which I have briefly enumerated . . . I would say I feel the power of a demonstration now. They form part of what appears to me a demonstrative creed.

“But then, on the other hand, there are things regarding which I am more uncertain than I used to be . . . I feel uncertain, very uncertain, as to the prophetic *dates* . . . I feel more uncertain in reference to the *Apocalypse* . . . I am waiting for light, and I believe the Holy Spirit will give it, and that we shall ere long, it may be, understand that marvellous book which the Church has been, age after age, trying to comprehend, but

which, I believe, it has hitherto failed in great measure to unravel. I feel also uncertain as to the details of events, and the relations of events, especially regarding Israel's latter-day history. It is not that I do not believe every word that is written concerning Israel in the latter day, but I feel at a loss how to arrange the various things which at first sight seem to conflict the one with the other . . .

“ There is just one thing in connexion with this matter that I should like to add, and it is with regard to the certainties, for it applies to the whole, and I should like to avow it solemnly in these days. *I feel a vastly greater certainty in reference to the Divine authority and verbal inspiration of the Word of God.* If ever a doubt passed through my mind during the last fifty years in reference to these, that doubt has disappeared. And then, in connexion with this, I feel a greater certainty as to the literal interpretation of that whole Word of God—historical, doctrinal, prophetic. ‘ Literal, if possible ’, is, I believe, the only maxim that will carry you right through the Word of God from Genesis to Revelation.”