

# THE PROPHETIC WORD

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*“When the lion roars, who does not shudder ?  
When the Lord Eternal speaks, who can but prophesy ?”*  
(Amos iii. 8).

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

The information given in the chapters that follow is more suited to the lecture room than the pulpit. Its main purpose is to give a background and a right historical approach to the subject as a whole. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the material supplied will prompt many to teach and to preach on the great themes of the Faith: THE GOD WHO RULES IN HISTORY; THE PROVIDENCE THAT OVERRULES; SOVEREIGN POWER AND SOVEREIGN GRACE; MAN'S PROGRESSIVE SPIRITUAL DISCOVERIES SEEN AS GOD'S UNFOLDING REVELATION; GOD'S REDEMPITIVE PURPOSE REVEALED IN ISRAEL TO THE WORLD; MISSIONARY FERVOUR IN THE OLD TESTAMENT; THE DEADLY PERIL OF NATIONAL AND RELIGIOUS EXCLUSIVISM; RIGHTEOUSNESS BEFORE RITUAL; FAITH VICTORIOUS THROUGH SUFFERING; RIGHTEOUS MINORITIES AS THE MORAL AND SPIRITUAL LEAVEN OF THE EARTH; THE DANGERS OF WORSHIP DIVORCED FROM MORAL ENDEAVOUR; THE JUDGMENTS AND MERCIES OF GOD IN ISRAEL; THE COMPLETION THAT IS IN CHRIST: - PROPHET *and* PRIEST *and* KING; THE DIVINE INITIATIVE.

Such high themes are inexhaustible and prove an abiding inspiration to believing people. Where men will dig deep down to the rock and speak from their souls of these truths, men and women listen eagerly and are nerved to nobler endeavour in Christian discipleship and churchmanship. There is urgent need of such teaching again to-day, when the minds of many have succumbed to the fallacious idea that God is unable to act in His own universe.

My sincere thanks are due to the Reverends H. J. Dale and R. W. Cleaves, B.A., B.D., to Mr. H. L. Hemmens, Editor of the Baptist Missionary Society, and to my wife, for their valued help; to the Reverend E. F. H. Knight, B.A., B.D., for his suggestions with regard to *Deutero-Isaiab* and *Daniel*; and to my nephew, Gordon Rose, for his help in the preparation of the Index.

W.E.B.T.

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## TO MY MOTHER

whose courageous faith through years of adversity early gave me an appreciation of the spiritual power and moral strength of the great Prophetic characters of the Bible, and by whose life and teaching I came early to understand that the true end and purpose of all Scripture is to bring men to say :

“Beyond the sacred page  
I seek Thee, Lord . . . ,”

and, finding Him, to labour by His Spirit, with increasing zeal for His Kingdom and Righteousness.

"The hopes to which Hebrew prophecy gave currency were fulfilled. The promised Ruler and Saviour came, as they foretold, out of the House of David. And it was no matter of chance that the expectation of the Messiah had thus been fostered ; its existence in Palestine when Christ came provided material upon which He worked. In the activity of the Prophets the operation of the Spirit of God makes itself manifest, preparing long beforehand the conditions requisite for the revelation that should come in the fullness of time."

Dr. G. C. JOYCE  
(*Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, p. 429).

## FOREWORD

THE aim of this book is to give, in a simple and straightforward way, a picture of the Old Testament Prophets, to set them against the background of their own day, to portray their characters and to shew that which was central in their teaching, to set forth the chief end and purpose of prophetic writing and utterance, to shew the continuity of the Prophetic word in Israel's historical development to the time of Christ, and to discover the attitude of the Prophets towards the varied problems—religious, moral, social, political and national—of their own age.

The study is not exhaustive. It is, in fact, little more than an introduction to a vast subject. Further and more detailed information must be culled from the larger works and commentaries.

Although the study of prophetic life and teaching is still a live one and many problems still remain fluid, there are now certain general conclusions commonly accepted by all competent scholars, and a knowledge of these is necessary for any wider study of the prophetic books.

In attempting this small work I have in mind particularly those who have not the time to study the larger works, and who have little knowledge of the religious and political background of Israel during Old Testament days.

It is the lack of such knowledge that all too often leads to the many strange and, in some instances, fantastic interpretations of certain prophetic writings. The Prophets themselves, could they but know some of the uses to which their utterances are put, would be "astonied beyond measure!"

I hope especially that this study will prove helpful to lay preachers, to senior Sunday School teachers, to Day School teachers and others who are interested in the subject of religious instruction, and to all who, not yet versed in



the subject, desire to bring a sanctified intelligence to the consideration of Old Testament Scriptures and to discover that which is of abiding worth in the prophetic teaching.

I have thought it well to touch upon various problems that are raised by the faith and teaching of the Prophets, for, in our day, the religious and moral issues involved still call for hard and consecrated thinking. The great themes of "Job," "Jonah," and "Daniel" have a spiritual significance for every age.

A further personal word may help those to whom the facts set forth in this study may come as something quite new.

It is a good thing always to bear in mind that the *main end and purpose* of the prophetic writings, as of all Scripture, is to bring men to a knowledge and experience of God's power and love in Jesus Christ; to point men, that is, beyond the words of Scripture to Him who is the Word made flesh, Who dwelt among us, Whom we acknowledge to be the Saviour of mankind, the Light and Hope of the world. We may know the Bible from cover to cover but, if, with all that knowledge, we do not *know Him*, the Lord of Life, to Whom the Old Testament points and Whom the New Testament portrays, then, whatever else the Scriptures may have done for us, they will not have achieved for us their *main end and purpose*.

To bear this truth in mind is to be saved from much fruitless discussion and much unprofitable speculation on some of the more "obscure and difficult" passages of Scripture. The essential thing is to know the Lord "in the power of His resurrection," to find our deepest satisfaction in the sanctified service of His kingdom within the fellowship of His Church.

Saint Paul's words to Timothy speak also to us: "remember . . . the sacred writings that can impart saving wisdom by faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for amendment, and for moral discipline, to make the man

of God proficient and equip him for good work of every kind." (II Timothy iii, 15, 16, 17).

If we have thus learned God in Christ we have no need to fear for the Scriptures or for God! We need not "tremble for the ark." We may always draw encouragement from the fact that whatsoever is true cannot be false to Him who claimed what history and experience have proved Him to be: the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We may rejoice in the fact that to him who seeks with open, reverent, and sincere mind there is always "more light and truth to break forth from His word"; we may wholeheartedly believe,

"Our God! our God! Thou shinest here,  
Thine own this latter day:  
To us Thy radiant steps appear;  
We watch Thy glorious way.  
Not only olden ages felt  
The presence of the Lord;  
Not only with the fathers dwelt  
Thy Spirit and Thy word."

We may answer with an emphatic affirmative,

"Doth not the Spirit still descend  
And bring the heavenly fire?  
Doth not He still Thy Church extend  
And waiting souls inspire?"

Some words of the late Dr. John Clifford will remain as an abiding inspiration to all who seek the truth as it is in Jesus Christ—especially to all young seekers.

"When I went to college my mother said to me, 'John, find out the teaching of Jesus, make yourself sure of that, then stick to it no matter what may come.' " 1855.

"If ever I have been in any moral difficulty, if I have had any spiritual or ethical crisis to face, if I have come to a point where the roads of life have diverged, and I have been compelled to ask 'Which way must I take?', I have never appealed to the teaching of Jesus Christ in vain. Not once. And I have had some crises." 1923.

"Looking back upon my past, upon these sixty years spent in Jesus Christ's school, I see many lessons badly learned, many blunders, innumerable faults, yet, scientifically interpreting the

whole of that past, I say with the full assurance of understanding, that all that there is in me, and has been in me, throughout these years, of any good, is due to Jesus Christ . . . Whatsoever of value there has been in my life is due entirely to Him, whatsoever of service I have been able to perform for my generation owes all its inspirations, all its strength, to His indwelling. All the conceptions I have formed of God, the answers I am able to give for myself as to what is religion, human duty, human destiny, all that man may hope for, I get from Him Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”<sup>(1)</sup>

It is to that Christ, and to the final consummation of life in Him, that the main line of Prophetic teaching leads. “The long spiritual pilgrimage was nearly over. Jesus came. The old age ended in far other fashion than that which popular eschatology had expected. The Kingdom of God was inaugurated, yet so different was it from that to which men had looked forward, that they failed to recognise it, and by their very failure revealed its true character. For its spiritual nature and universal bearing, its moral implications and its racial salvation, its emphatic exposure of human sin and its transcendent revelation of Divine Love, its earnest of communion with God and its pledge of the life everlasting—these things became manifest only in the Cross. That is the radiant centre of all man’s knowledge of God. Up to Calvary led all the religious history of Israel; from it has flowed all the truest spiritual life of later ages. It may well be that the human race stands as yet near the beginning of its career. There may be before mankind æons of progress in the understanding of the life and death of Jesus. *One thing is sure: all that came before Him led up to Him, all that comes after Him must start from Him, ‘that in all things He might have the pre-eminence.’*”<sup>(2)</sup>

(1) Dr. John Clifford. Sir James Marchant, LL.D., pp. 21, 222.

(2) *Prophecy and the Prophets*. Dr. T. H. Robinson, pp. 209, 210. (Italics mine).

## 2

INTRODUCTION

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"I AM sure that the writings of the Old Testament Prophets have an abiding worth. I am sure, as I once heard it said, 'that the stamp of the Eternal is upon them.' I confess, however, that much in the Prophetic writings is an enigma to me. I cannot bring myself to put upon them some of the strange interpretations which appeal so strongly to some people. I would like very much to know their true significance and their real spiritual meaning."

The words are those of a Sunday School teacher and lay preacher about twenty years of age. They express, I believe, the unspoken thoughts of many intelligent young Christian people.

The writer recalls his own early difficulties in these matters. He remembers, too, the joy which came to him when that knowledge which reveals "their true significance and spiritual meaning" helped to make the Bible a new and *living* book for him.

It is necessary, first of all, to understand that the Prophets can say with Paul, "We also are men of like passions with you." Christians of New Testament days were reminded of this fact. "Elijah was a man with a nature similar to ours . . . ." (James v, 17).

The Prophets spring to life as we see them against the background of the religious, social, political and national life of their day. Their words live for us as we relate them to Israel's reaction to the life of the pagan nations about her.

The Prophets should never be thought of as dreamy visionaries detached from the stern realities of life.

"The Books of the Prophets constitute the most original and influential contribution of Israel to religion. At the highest point, in Jeremiah, we find personal religion, consciously articulate and not dependent on national cult, yet this personal relation of

the individual to God did not issue in the decay of national worship : it was used to purify and strengthen that worship. The nation itself adopted the utterances of the Prophets, and as Matthew Arnold so justly said : 'Instead of remaining literature and philosophy, isolated voices of sublime poets and reforming free-thinkers, these glorifications of righteousness became Jewish religion, matters to be read in the synagogue every Sabbath Day.' "(1)

Dr. John Oman has written : "Nor was there ever any body of men, more than the prophets, to whom utter dependence upon God gave more utter independence of men in thought as well as action . . . . A prophet is precisely one whom the Lord takes with a strong hand and instructs not to walk in the way of this people, and not to be shadowed by their suspicions, or afraid with their fears." (2)

Thus we are to see the Prophets as men who spoke to their own day, but who spoke, in fact, with such spiritual insight and power, that much of what they said *is relevant for all peoples for all time*. That is the glory of the Prophetic Word.

For the most part the Prophets were lonely men. Their lot was a hard one. They could not tolerate a religious life and worship that was mostly outward show and ceremonialism. They looked for a religious life that had inner and spiritual reality ; a religion and a worship characterised by moral fervour, by a strong sense of justice, by a zeal for personal goodness and social righteousness.

The day was to come when Jeremiah would say for God : "I will put my law within them, and write it on their hearts." (xxxix, 33). Religion must, that is, have a personal basis ; every man must have personal consciousness of fellowship with God. Long before Jeremiah's day Nathan challenged David. The righteous law of God applies to kings as well as to commoners. Kings and princes cannot be a law unto themselves. Nathan would allow neither a powerful king's favour nor

(1) *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, vol. I : p. 419.

(2) *Honest Religion*, pp. 67, 68.

his displeasure to silence the righteous word of God. It was because of the strong moral element in their teaching that the Prophets frequently found themselves opposed by kings, political rulers and an official priesthood. Frequently they were misunderstood and opposed by the common people whom they desired so much to help.

There is much in the Prophetic writings to shew how real and deep was the conflict between the Prophetic and Priestly views of God, of religion and worship. It was from the lips of the Prophets that passionate denunciation of ritual and ceremony divorced from holy living and social righteousness came. The Prophets believed that worship should find its consummation in a genuine love of God expressed in a courageous obedience to His holy will in *all* the affairs and relationships of life. If, sometimes, there is the danger of exaggerating the conflict between Prophet and Priest, it must ever be remembered that the conflict was real, not merely superficial.

To those who were thronging the temple to offer sacrifices, Isaiah spoke scathing words : chapter i, vv. 10-17. They are matched by Amos v, 21-25 ; Micah vi, 6-8 ; Hosea vi, 6 ; Jeremiah vi, 20 ; vii, 21-23. Dr. Peake writes : "The prophets do not attack sacrifice in itself so much as sacrifice divorced from morality ; yet their tone suggests that they attached very little intrinsic value to the sacrificial ritual."<sup>(1)</sup>

If both Prophet and Priest were necessary for Israel's full development, it is nevertheless significant that when He came of Whom the Prophets were heralds and fore-runners, Who was the culmination and consummation of the Prophetic witness, "He makes no sacerdotal claim, does no sacerdotal act . . . He is Rabbi, but never to any man, least of all to Himself, is He a Priest."<sup>(2)</sup> " . . . the religion of Christ . . . stood among the ancient faiths as a strange and extraordinary thing—a priestless religion,

(1) *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, p. 437.

(2) *Christ in Modern Theology*, A. M. Fairbairn, p. 517 and p. 49.

without symbols, sacrifices, ceremonies, officials, hitherto, save by prophetic Hebraism, held to be the religious all in in all.”<sup>(1)</sup>

W. A. Curtis writes of Jesus :

“He was a son of the synagogue, rather than of the temple, and most of all an heir of Prophecy, for to the Prophets sacrifice had become no more than a vanishing symbol of self-offering, of a broken and repentant heart. Among the names and offices which He assumes and which in turn He assigns to His disciples and apostles we look in vain for one which appropriates the tradition of the temple priesthood. His followers were in His name to prophesy or preach the Gospel, to receive and teach wisdom, to be true scribes of the Kingdom, to be healers in the power of the Spirit, but there is no hint of a Levi among the tribes of the New Israel . . . . For Him all Christians, or none, since the rending of the Temple Veil, were henceforward priests in the New Israel. Such sacrifice as remained was the service of love and worship in the heart and life of the believer, a reasonable and rational service. God was so near and accessible in His fatherly goodness that old forms of mediation could not be continued.”<sup>(2)</sup>

The outspokenness of the Prophets against priestly sacrifice may prompt us to press their views too far. They poured scorn upon the conventional religion of their day, they denied to sacrifice the efficacy which others attributed to it, they insisted that God’s favour could not be procured by gifts, that the Eternal’s blessing came to those who sought to be just and merciful, but, “it is important to notice . . . that the thing which excites the Prophets’ scorn is the worshippers’ false ideas about God, not the particular form of worship. They declare that some practices associated with sacrifice are abominable ; that God has no need of sacrificial gifts and that material oblations have no power to influence Him, but they do not say that the practice of sacrifice is wrong in itself . . . probably no Prophet, except perhaps Jeremiah, really wanted it to be abolished.”<sup>(3)</sup>

(1) *Op. cit.*

(2) *Jesus Christ the Teacher*, pp. 58, 59.

(3) *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, F. S. Marsh, Vol. 1., p. 635.

For the full development of Israel's life it would seem that Priest and Prophet were necessary, that both were part of the preparation for the full redemptive work finally to be expressed in Christ.

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews speaks of that Priesthood of Jesus which continues for ever. The "surety of a superior covenant"; the New Covenant which is the *substance* as against the *shadow* of the old.

Throughout a large part of Christendom the "doctrine of the Priesthood of all believers" is tenaciously held if not always vigorously applied. There is much in the New Testament teaching which appeals for a new sacramentalism; a sacramental way of life made possible by the love of Christ and the power of His spirit manifest in the lives of all His professed followers, they, themselves, sanctified by His grace and truth, mediating His redeeming love and saving power to a sinful world. The seventeenth chapter of St. John's Gospel is sometimes referred to as the "high-priestly prayer" of Jesus.

"Sanctify (consecrate) them in thy truth . . . as thou didst send me into the world, even so have I sent them into the world, and for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves may also be sanctified in truth . . . I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know that thou didst send me, and lovedst them, even as thou lovest me." (vv. 17-23).

The fact that the Prophets continued their witness so valiantly despite all disappointment, derision and persecution, is only part of the evidence to show how strong was the hand of God upon them; how deep His truth and power in their lives.

For speaking the Eternal's word Jeremiah was mocked and derided.

"I am made a laughing-stock all the day, and yet, if I say I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name, then there is in mine heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot contain." (xx. 7, 9).



All the true Prophets of Israel knew that feeling.

"Frequently the Prophet was forced by the inspiration within him to place himself in direct opposition to the majority of his fellow-countrymen. By his own generation he was accounted an alien and even a traitor. Yet it was he who realised the true unity and continuity of the national life, and the magnificence of the task with which Israel was entrusted. He felt that he was helping to work a great plan. And he was not mistaken."<sup>(1)</sup>

As we read the Gospels we cannot fail to see that Jesus stood in the direct Prophetic line. History has shown Him to be even greater than the loftiest vision of the Prophetic mind. Dr. Oman's words are pertinent. "How great the Old Testament revelation of God was appears in the way Jesus started from it; and how great His revelation of the Father was appears in how far it went beyond what was reached by even the greatest of the prophets."<sup>(2)</sup>

The stern note in the Prophetic teaching must not mislead us regarding the nature of the Prophets themselves. They were men of tender compassion and mercy. They were deeply sensitive to all wrong and suffering. Like the Lord whose way they prepared, their hearts were filled with a deep longing to win the people to God, to turn them from evil ways and sham religion to true repentance and obedience to God. They set before the nation those spiritual and moral truths by which alone God's blessing can come upon it.

The Prophets felt keenly the ingratitude of their rulers and people. They declared that God had done all that He could, short of taking away from them their freedom of choice altogether. Isaiah likens Israel to a favoured vineyard. Upon it God has lavished every care :

"And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?"  
(v. 3, 4).

(1) *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, p. 430.

(2) *Honest Religion*, p. 71.

Yet God's kindness is slighted. His people—His vineyard—has brought forth bad grapes instead of good.

It was in the development of Prophetic thought and revelation that Israel was given at last the knowledge of the Messiah as a lowly Servant whose vicarious sufferings would heal the peoples ; would redeem and sanctify their lives. And not Israel only. One day all nations shall rejoice in Israel's God, and shall find their highest purpose and satisfaction in Him.

"And it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established . . . and shall be exalted above (all) the hills. And many peoples shall go and say, 'Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob . . . . He will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths . . . .' " (ii, 2, 3).

The growing universalism of the Prophetic mind is one of the most significant factors in all their teaching.

Of the mighty words of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah we might well say that Jesus made them His own. In His life and death and resurrection He gave them a meaning and purpose that transcended even the best and noblest in the Prophetic mind itself.

A further consideration to bear in mind in any study of the Prophetic word, is that Prophecy is a unity. "The various Prophets were all contributors to one work." Through that work there runs "a great connecting purpose binding it all together."

"It is part of a still greater and more august unity. It is an essential element in the Divine scheme of the redemption of the world through Christ. His work rested upon theirs. His revelation of the Father was the consummation and the vindication of their revelation of the God of Israel. 'God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.' " (Hebrews i, 1).<sup>(1)</sup>

(1) *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, p. 430.

## II.

A brief statement on the development of the Prophetic word, on its religious basis and spiritual content, and on its nature and the method of its fulfilment, will be helpful.

The Prophetic word was spoken long before it was set down in writing. Amos is the first of the Prophets to write down his message that it might be kept safely and used in future days. "The age of the literary prophets falls in the 8th century B.C."

The beginnings of Prophetic utterance reach back, probably, to between three and four hundred years before Elijah. They may be dimly seen in the rough, unsettled, formative years of Israel's life; in the period of the desert wanderings: 1300-1200 B.C.

Samuel stands at the head of the Prophetic line. He saw, too, the introduction of the Monarchy: Saul, c. 1025 B.C.

There is some slight uncertainty about the dates of Elijah and Elisha, but both were remarkable men who exercised a profound influence on the life of Israel between 870-830 B.C.

"Elijah is a prophet of the desert; he represents the old faith and the stern simplicity of nomad religion; he is at home in the wilderness, and flees for refuge to the ancient mourning sanctuary of Horeb. He has left no sermons; he was no theologian. He makes no claim for the centralisation of worship; he does not discuss details of ritualism; he frankly recognises the use of many altars (I Kings xix, 14), but he declares that the people of Israel, under the influence of the court, are turning to the worship of the Tyrian Baal. Yahweh (Jehovah) alone must be worshipped by Israelites. The question as to the use of images and symbols is not raised. The demand is for the exclusive worship of Yahweh by His own people." (1)

For many people today, the term Prophet suggests one or other of the outstanding figures of Israel—Isaiah, Ezekiel—or one of the better known of the (so-called) Minor Prophets—Amos, Micah, Hosea. And these studies will be, for the most part, of the life, times, and teachings of these great men.

(1) Prof. W. G. Jordan, in *Peake's Commentary*, pp. 86, 87.

The sure basis of the Prophetic word is the mind of God as He *revealed* it to those whom He had chosen and set apart for this specific task.

The idea, all too prevalent in our day, and responsible for so much of the world's tragedy, that God cannot or does not reveal His mind and will to men, was unthinkable to the Prophets of Israel. As unthinkable as such an idea was to the mind of Jesus Himself. "*Thus saith God the Lord,*" or "*Thus saith the Lord,*" was the great Prophetic watchword and safeguard. It is vitally necessary for men and women of every age to grasp the deep significance of these words.

The mind of man, his ideas and opinions, are not to be despised, but *there must be an objective standard of judgment higher than the views and opinions of men.* If there is not there cannot be religion in the true sense of the word.

If there is no supernatural standard of judgment *good* and *evil* become relative terms; morality rests on the shifting sands of men's opinions and fancies—it is made altogether subjective and, furthermore, spiritual values are emptied of their Divine and eternal content. Without an Objective Standard of Judgment higher than men's subjective views we are driven to admit that one man's opinion is as good as another's; a criminal's views are as valid as those of a saint; the fantastic racial and national notions of a modern dictator of equal value with the spiritual principles of a Paul or a Livingstone.

If there is no Objective Standard of Judgment in the universe who shall say what is right and what is wrong? Man simply becomes a law unto himself, and on that basis he who commands the greatest material power and armed force may set himself up as a god and a tyrant to demand the subjection of all others.

We need to get a firm grasp of this truth in our minds. There must be no equivocation here. *On this fundamental fact the Prophets of Israel based all their teaching.* Their authority was of God: "*Thus saith the Lord.*" Without this authority, and without an understanding of this truth,

all religion, all morality, all spiritual values, have no sure foundation; their existence is very precarious indeed. The Prophets never doubted that for individuals or nations to flout God's word is to do so at their peril.

Jesus, Himself, was at pains to emphasise this same vital truth. "... he that sent me is true; and the things which I heard from him, these speak I unto the world... as the Father hath taught me, I speak these things." (John viii, 26, 28). "For I spake not from myself; but the Father who sent me, hath given me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life eternal; the things therefore which I speak, even as the Father hath said unto me, so I speak." (John xii, 49, 50).

Paul's profound warning is of the same Prophetic type: "Be not deceived; (Do not deceive yourselves!) God is not mocked." (Gal. vi, 7).

\* \* \* \* \*

Misunderstanding of the nature of Prophecy and of the method of its fulfilment often springs from a totally wrong view of the words "Prophet" and "to prophesy." Usually, when someone says that he has no intention of "being a prophet," he means that he will not venture to predict that a certain event will happen at a certain time. The Prophets of Israel *should never be thought of as predictors in the narrow and prescribed meaning of the term.*

The strange idea that the Prophets were a type of super-fortune-teller, predicting, by a kind of magic, the dates and places of future events, is a most dangerous and harmful idea. It has been well said that the Prophets were "forthtellers," rather than "foretellers."

The Prophets read the events of their day in the light of the Word of God and the Moral Law which are as inexorable as the "law" of gravitation. They saw with deep spiritual insight that for persons or nations to play fast and loose with this Word and this Righteous Law is to be caught up ultimately in overwhelming disaster. God Himself

cannot interfere with the Moral Law without denying Himself; without defeating His Divine purpose and undermining every idea of rationality in the universe.

When Israel denied the Lord God, when the people turned to follow other gods, when they derided His righteous commands and forgot His mercy and loving kindness, when spiritual values were scorned, when self-interest and materialistic views of life governed action and conduct, then, sooner or later, a price had to be paid. All too often it was paid in terrible terms. When the blow fell, when, as nearly always happened, innocent as well as guilty were caught up in the disaster, men were wont sorrowfully to exclaim: "*This is that*" which was spoken by the Prophet . . ." "*This is that!*"

The emphasis on the consistency of the character of God is stressed by all the Prophets. They all declare His Holiness and Righteousness. They speak of His Truth and Goodness, of His Mercy and Loving-kindness. They never doubt the Almighty arm that is ever stretched out to save. But they never obscure the fact of the "Wrath" that is eternally against all unrighteousness. "Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am Holy."

Side by side with God's Transcendent Majesty they set His Infinite Mercy. The Divine Majesty and the Divine Mercy are the twin themes of Isaiah xl.

It must never be thought that the Prophets were messengers of doom and disaster only. Jeremiah believed that not even the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and the leading away of the people into captivity, could ultimately thwart God's plan for Israel—or God's plan through Israel for the world. Peoples whom Israel knew not should one day come unto her because of her God.

If some of the visions in the Prophetic writings are clothed with an imagery that makes their meaning obscure to us, we must remember that they were clear enough to the people for whom they were spoken and written. Many popular phrases and turns of speech, many of the cartoons and illustrations of our day, will be lost on the people of

future generations. The Prophets spoke for God to their day and generation in terms and imagery understood by their own people, but because they spoke for God, the fundamental truths of their teaching have an abiding significance.

One of the wonders of history is the preservation of the Scriptures. They have been kept and handed on from generation to generation. Here and there in the Hebrew text are verses the meaning of which is far from clear. Scholars would not dogmatise on any one interpretation, nor admit that any one of a number of possible interpretations expressed exactly the mind of the speaker or writer. Nevertheless, the meaning and purpose of the whole is clear.

We all owe an inestimable debt to those faithful men whose sanctified intelligence and scholarship have been dedicated to the study and translation of the Scriptures in order that men of all nations, through succeeding generations, may read in their own tongues the marvellous works of the Lord. It is not given to all to be able to read the Old Testament in the Hebrew and the New Testament in the Greek—the original tongues in which they were written, but from our Authorised and Revised versions in *comparison* with modern translations such as those of Moffatt and Weymouth, the true sense and meaning of the text may be found by all who truly seek. There is no need to deplore the fact that reconsideration and revision of the original texts still continue. It is, indeed, a healthy sign that men, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, should ever seek the new light and truth that is to break forth from God's word. And we should ever remember that it is the mind and spirit of the Lord Jesus—the Word made flesh—that reveals to seeking men the spiritual riches of God's word.

“And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?” *Opened to us the Scriptures!*

The closing words of the *Introduction to Moffatt's translation of the Bible* deserve our careful consideration.

"The object of any translation ought to resemble the object of its original, and in this case it is not mere curiosity, not even intellectual interest. Our English Bibles always reprint the dedication of the 1611 version to King James; it is a somewhat fulsome piece of writing, nearly as fulsome as some of Bacon's references to that monarch. Why does nobody reprint the preface of 'the translators to the reader,' which breathes an ampler air? Here are the concluding sentences of that neglected preface. 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, but a blessed thing it is, and will bring us to everlasting blessedness in the end, when God speaketh unto us, to hearken; when He setteth his word before us, to read it; when he stretcheth out his hand and calleth, to answer, Here am I, here we are to do Thy will, O God.'"

"The Lord work a care and a conscience in us to know Him and serve Him, that we may be acknowledged of Him at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Holy Ghost be all praise and thanksgiving."

"These words," Dr. Moffatt continues, "put nobly the chief end of reading the Bible, and the object of any version; it is to stir and sustain present faith in a living God who spoke and speaks. Three hundred years lie between the Authorised Version and the version printed in these pages, but I hope there is nothing in the execution, certainly there is nothing in the aim, of the modern translation which would be out of keeping with the tone of these searching words which preface its great predecessor."

"*Faith in a living God who spoke and speaks.*" That is the thought always to have in mind. If in the Prophetic records there is repetition, it is because the sins and waywardness of one age are those of every age. And it is a living, saving God who speaks a living word to all peoples from one generation to another. Of God's purpose for Israel in the world the Prophets never doubted. To them was given the growing conviction that out of Israel would come the Saviour and Deliverer of mankind. That great Messianic hope they never lost. Today it is easy for us to see that Jesus fulfilled, yea, more than fulfilled, all that was proclaimed of Him by those who prepared the way for Him. That, at His coming, His own people for the



most part should not recognise and accept Him, is, perhaps, the supreme mystery and tragedy of history.

For us, however, what matters supremely is that the Lord Jesus Christ gathers up and transcends all that is noblest and best in the Prophetic thought and revelation. Through the Prophetic word we look to Him, the Word made flesh, Who dwelt among men ; the risen and glorified Lord, our personal Redeemer, the Saviour of the world : "The Way, the Truth, and the Life . . . this Jesus . . . the same yesterday, and today, and for ever."

## 3

AMOS OF TEKOA  
SHEPHERD AND PROPHET

THE village of Tekoa lay ten miles south of Jerusalem. Bethlehem was half-way between the two. It was built on a hill 2,700 feet high, on the edge of the desert of Judah, and was surrounded by lower hills. Here, in the early years of the eighth century B.C., Amos was born. It is possible that verse nine of chapter eight is an allusion to the solar eclipse of June 763 B.C.

Amos earned his living by tending sheep and cultivating fig-mulberries. The fruit of the sycamore—or fig-mulberry—tree was neither large nor sweet. Holes made in the figs allowed an insect to escape and helped the fruit to ripen quickly. The sheep were of a peculiar kind with very short legs and ugly faces, but their wool was of fine quality and was valued highly.

From the hillside at Tekoa, Amos looked out on the hills over which David had roamed and, beyond Bethlehem, he would see the Mount of Olives.

The name Amos probably means "Burden-bearer." In the years of his prophetic ministry (750-740 B.C.), he made it clear that he was no prophet in the professional sense.

"I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son ; but I was a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees ; and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said unto me, 'Go, prophesy unto my people, Israel.' Now, therefore, hear thou the word of the Lord." (vii, 14, 15).

On his native hillside God spoke to his heart. Here Amos meditated on the way God had blest and led his people in bygone days. Here he received the visions of the locusts, the fire, the wall and plumbline, and the basket of the summer fruit—all symbolical of the fate which must overtake Israel unless she turned from a mere conventional religion to sincere worship and willing obedience to God's

will. It was from the quietness of the pasture land that Amos set out with power and conviction in his heart to challenge the rulers and priests at Jerusalem and Bethel.

The journey was not a long one. From Tekoa in Judah to Bethel, the priestly centre in Israel, was just over twenty miles. Jerusalem stands between the two.

The cynical disregard for the moral law by priests, rulers, and many of the people, deeply grieved the Prophet. Injustice and oppression, sexual vice and commercial dishonesty were rampant. The lot of the poor was hard and the rich made it harder. In God's name Amos challenged priests and rulers alike. He declared that it was God's will that they should seek justice and righteousness, should love mercy and kindness, should seek in their personal lives and in all their social relationships to honour God's laws. Unless they did so God's judgments would certainly be visited upon them.

The evil which Amos condemned above all others was a religious life and practice almost completely divorced from moral considerations and spiritual truth. At Bethel the great religious services and festivals were observed. "Come to Bethel!" was the cry. "Come to Bethel," challenged Amos, and for what? To continue your rebellion against God, to add to your services and ceremonies, to increase your sacrifices, to ignore God's righteous demands, to deny justice and mercy to your fellows? Thus the Prophet appealed for a religious life and worship based on sincerity of heart and obedience to God's will. Without such, all ceremonialism and sacrifice were just mockery and hypocrisy. "Luxury, unrighteousness, and a merely ritual religion, can only call forth the displeasure of God."

The intensity of the Prophet's words angered priests and rulers alike. Amaziah the Priest deliberately misrepresents Amos, accuses him of conspiracy, and declares that all his words are so revolutionary that no one can take them seriously. "The earth cannot bear all the words."

"Then Amaziah the priest of Beth-el sent to Jeroboam king of Israel saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of Israel ; the land is not able to bear all his words. For this Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of the land. Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there : but prophesy not again any more at Beth-el : for it is the king's sanctuary, and a royal house." (vii, 10-13).

It is probable that the enmity and the threats of Amaziah caused Amos to commit his utterances to writing. He is the first of the Prophets to do this. The book which bears his name gives us his words "very much in the form, if not in the order, in which they were spoken." He desired to see the establishment of justice and righteousness. He denounced as a denial of God's holy will the senseless luxury of a wealthy minority which involved poverty and suffering for the many.

The social sins that called forth the Prophet's wrath could only degrade Israel and bring disaster upon her : cruel oppression and sexual depravity, contempt for honesty and fair-dealing, religious practices debased to pander to the worst passions of the human heart, a corrupt commercial life, scorn of the Sabbath, a worship divorced altogether from morality. If, at first, Amos dwelt on the sins of Israel's neighbours : Philistia, Tyre, Edom, the Ammonites and Moab, he made it startlingly clear that the greatest punishment of all would fall on Israel. She had been chosen of God. Her relation with Him was a Covenant-relationship. She had been especially privileged, therefore her apostasy would bring upon her a greater doom.

Yet Amos never doubted the Divine love and mercy. If the nation repented and turned again to Him she would prove His goodness and saving power.

"Here is the Eternal's message for the house of Israel :  
 Seek me and ye shall live,  
 Seek not Bethel, go not to Gilgal,  
 Cross not to Beersheba . . .

seek the Eternal and live . . . ." (v, 4, 5, 6).

For Amos, Israel's relationship with Jehovah "is grounded in and conditioned by the righteousness of the divine nature. The relationship arose out of Jehovah's free choice of Israel from among all nations to be His people ; it is preserved by the maintenance, not of ritual, but of righteousness in national life." Furthermore, while the Prophet knows of the gods of other nations and realises that his people believe in the reality of such gods, he does not so believe. If Jehovah is the God of Israel in a peculiar sense, He is also the God of all the nations, and ultimately His truth shall be vindicated before all nations and peoples.

Amos was moved by a profound sense of the supernatural. It was no easy thing for him to run counter to the accepted beliefs and customs of his people. So powerful and convincing was the word of God to his heart, however, that he could not believe that others could be altogether indifferent to God's righteous demands. In any case, he must declare that which God has spoken ; he must make priests and peoples see how bitter will be the consequences for the nation of religious practices and worship that do not strengthen men in personal goodness, nor build up a nation in righteousness. What God has given him to speak must be spoken. The anger of ungodly men, however high their office, however great their power, must never silence the word of God.

The Prophet's writings end abruptly. The closing verses of the book are from the pen of one who saw the end of the Exile (c. 538 B.C.), and who looked for the restoration of Jerusalem and the Temple. They suggest a contentment with a restored material prosperity different from the satisfaction born of personal faith and goodness, of a deep sense of dependence on God and a zeal for social righteousness so characteristic of the life of Amos.

Of the later years of the Prophet we have no certain knowledge. In all probability he ended his days in Tekoa and was buried with his people there. Tradition about him varies. In the early centuries of Christianity it was

affirmed that his sepulchre was to be seen at Tekoa. As late as 1737 a visitor to the neighbourhood was told that his tomb was in the village on the mountain.

Amos takes his place among the outstanding figures of Israel. His profound belief that God spoke to him and through him is surely vindicated in our recognition of the fact that the burning truths he set forth have relevance for men and nations today.

## 4

## HOSEA : PROPHET AND POET

THE last of the great kings of Israel was Jereboam II. He reigned for about forty years and died in 743 B.C. It was during the latter part of his reign that Hosea began his prophetic work.

After Solomon's death there was an insurrection in Israel. The people protested vigorously against the intolerable taxation imposed to maintain the pomp, luxury and splendour of the Court. The story is vividly told in I Kings, chapter twelve.

The upshot of it all was that the kingdom was divided. The tribe of Judah became the kingdom of Judah in the south ; the remainder of the tribes became the kingdom of Israel—sometimes referred to as Ephraim—in the north. Judah, only, remained loyal to the Davidic house, and elected Rehoboam as king. Jeroboam, who had fled from Solomon, was recalled from exile in Egypt and made king of Israel.

Hosea belonged to Israel—the northern kingdom. His writings reveal him as a man of strong religious convictions, of very sensitive nature, and of a deeply loving heart. Even more profoundly than his predecessor Amos, perhaps, he felt the waywardness and sinfulness of his people.

All the Prophets were lonely men, but few experienced greater loneliness than Hosea. Some good men are hard, the fibre of their inner life is strong, they can bear calumny, persecution and suffering with stoical fortitude. Other men, however, because of the very sensitiveness of their natures, suffer agonies of mind and spirit. Such a one was Hosea. He loved nature, he felt a warm kinship with all living things, his very being called out for goodness, love and beauty, yet he was surrounded by harshness and arrogance, by cruelty and godlessness ; he saw anarchy and

apostasy threatening the nation from within and powerful forces ready to assail her from without.

If Hosea believed wholeheartedly in Divine justice, he believed, also, most deeply, in God's love. If God's nature is such that He must punish sin and disobedience, He nevertheless punishes remedially, to purify and restore. "Hosea thus managed to combine a doctrine of God as love with a high ethical standard because his loving God would punish sin." The Prophet's deepest grief was caused by the ingratitude and unfaithfulness of the people and their leaders. They had followed Baalim. Their worship was so mixed up with the customs of the Canaanites that it had become a half-heathen system. In the worship of the calf and idols Jehovah was forgotten. Their ritual and sacrifices were of no consequence to Him.

It was from the dark experience of his own unhappy domestic life that Hosea came to understand so clearly God's continued love and unwearying patience towards His unfaithful people. The Prophet's wife, Gomer, had treated him shamefully and had deserted him. Despite everything his love for her never wavered, and this un-failing love in his own heart made him to feel the reality of God's unfailing love and mercy towards a nation that had forsaken Him and turned to idolatrous practices.

That such idolatry and sinfulness would bring calamity upon them, the Prophet could not doubt ; that sorrow and disaster follow inevitably upon the neglect of God and disobedience to His will, he knew full well.

Since the days of Amos the situation in Israel, religiously, politically, socially, had grown steadily worse. There were times when it seemed that God could no longer show pity or patience, but the love and tenderness of his own heart reflected for him the infinite love and tenderness of the Divine heart. Dedicating his poetic gifts to the service of his prophetic calling, Hosea sought to win his people to repentance, and to renew in their hearts a sense of gratitude and responsibility to God. Even now if they turned again



to Him they would prove that He was still their God and discover that His merciful love was still toward them.

After the terrible words of chapter thirteen, the Prophet ends :

"O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God ; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity . . . . return unto the Lord : say unto Him, Take away all our iniquity, and accept that which is good . . .

Assyria shall not save us ; we will not ride upon horses : neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods : for in thee the fatherless find mercy.

I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely : for mine anger is turned away . . . . I will be as the dew unto Israel : he shall blossom as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his fragrance as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return, they shall revive as the corn, and shall blossom as the vine : the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.

Ephraim (Israel) shall say, What have I to do any more with idols ? I have answered, and will regard him . . . . Who is wise, and he shall understand these things ? prudent and he shall know them ? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them : but transgressors shall fall therein."

Unlike many of the priestly and political leaders of the nation, Hosea could not put any trust in Israel's alliance with her powerful neighbours, Egypt and Assyria. The Prophet believed that such alliances could lead only to Israel's greater misfortune. Neither Egypt nor Assyria would consider Israel when their own interests were at stake. Hosea pleaded for a deeper trust in God, for a rebirth of true religion, for a greater moral leadership on the part of those who professed to have the deepest interest of the nation at heart. The priests, for the most part, were mainly concerned with their own privileges and security, and priests and rulers often quarrelled violently among themselves. The people, as a whole seemed to have forgotten their Covenant-relationship with God, from whose gracious hand they had received their nationality and country, their religion and laws. He it was who had led and blest them in the past. In a renewed obedience to His holy commands they would find Him their great Deliverer still.

The strange, symbolic names which Hosea gave to his three children were intended to be a warning from God to the nation. His first child, a son, was called Jezreel. To king Jeroboam, and to the nation as a whole, it was a disturbing name. It struck a chord of remembrance. It recalled the terrible crime committed by Jehu a few years earlier. Jehu, a cruel and powerful military leader in Israel, had allowed some of his followers to crown him king. At Jezreel he put to death all the descendants of king Ahab. From Jezreel he went on to Samaria to commit crimes even more terrible. No one in Israel could mistake the warning in the name Jezreel. Unless the nation repented before God, unless it sought to be cleansed from its degradation and immorality, the consequences of its evil would be terrible indeed.

To his girl-child Hosea gave the name, Lo-ruhamah : "Unpitied," or, "No longer compassionate." His third child, a boy, was named Lo-ammi : "No longer my people."

Despite all this, however, Hosea held to the belief that God would not abandon His people for ever. Even after the bitterness of exile there would be restoration and blessing. A day would yet dawn for Israel when "Jezreel," "Whom God soweth," shall have no sinister meaning, but shall suggest an Israel sown again in newness of life and Divine blessing ; when the ominous names, Lo-ruhamah and Lo-ammi, shall have significance for her no more.

The day came when Hosea opened again his home and his heart to Gomer. Often she had spurned his love and sought the favours of others. The marks of her sin were plain upon her. She was despised by those who had once sought her favours. Now, if the Prophet hardened his heart, she must reap in bitterness all she had sown. In his own persistent love for an unfaithful wife, Hosea felt something of the Divine love which overshadowed Israel ; a love which, despite all her unfaithfulness and forgetfulness, would never finally let her go. "Brooding over the tragedy of his married home-life and still yearning

with love to redeem the fallen Gomer, Hosea is led to see a Divine lesson in it all of Yahweh's unconquerable love for a faithless Israel."

Nearly seven centuries were to pass before Another revealed, in all its beauty and fullness, that love "so amazing, so Divine," that was not for Israel only, but for all mankind.

## 5

## MICAH : THE PROPHET OF THE POOR

TWENTY-FIVE miles south-east of Jerusalem, in fertile land near the Philistine border of Judah, there once stood the village, Moresheth-Gath. Of the meaning of the name no one is quite sure. Here, towards the close of the eighth century B.C., when the Prophet Isaiah was an old man, the young man, Micah, began to prophesy.

Not all that appears in the book "Micah" was written by the Prophet ; some of the chapters, or parts of them, were added later. From Micah's own writings, however, there stands out the figure of an inspired righteous man, fearless in his denunciations of the cruelties and oppressions of his day. Micah was moved not to pity only, but to righteous anger when he saw poor people turned from their homes and their small plots of land seized by wealthy landowners. With equal fearlessness he condemned dishonesty in commercial life and the use of violence. "Pinched peasant faces peer between all his words."

Nor did Micah hesitate to speak against the rulers who lived in Jerusalem. They had betrayed their trust. They scorned the commands of God. They ought to have been the true friends and protectors of the people, instead of which they were their enemies.

"And I said, Hear, I pray you, ye heads of Jacob (Judah) and rulers of Israel : is it not for you to know justice ? (you) who hate the good, and love the evil ; who pluck off their skin from off them (the people), and their flesh from off their bones ; who also eat the flesh of my people . . . and break their bones, yea, they chop them in pieces as for the pot, and as flesh within the cauldron."  
(iii, 2, 3).

Figurative language like the above was well understood by those to whom the Prophet addressed his words.

Most guilty of all, however, in Micah's eyes, were the members of the professional priesthood and the false prophets. It was their duty to protect the poor even as a shepherd of those days did all in his power to protect his

sheep. They cared little for the poor and much for their own interests. They flattered the wealthy, and ignored the oppression and the exploitation of the common people. The Prophet's words struck home to them. They knew his utterances to be the righteous judgments of God against them. They knew, also, that ultimately they could not escape those judgments. The day would come when :

" . . . they shall cry unto the Lord, but he will not answer them : yea, he will hide his face from them at that time, according as they have wrought evil in their doings. Thus saith the Lord concerning the prophets that make my people to err ; that bite with their teeth and cry, Peace : (All is well) . . . therefore it shall be night unto you, that ye shall have no vision ; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine ; and the sun shall go down upon the prophets, and the day shall be black over them. And the seers shall be ashamed, and the diviners confounded ; yea they shall all cover their lips : for (to them) there is no answer of God.

But I truly am full of power by the spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, unto Israel his sin. Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel, that abhor justice and pervert all equity. They build up Sion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money : yet they will lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord in the midst of us ? (so that) no evil shall come upon us.

Therefore shall Sion, for your sake (because of you) be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps (ruins), and the mountain of the house (the temple-hill) as the high places of a forest." (iii, 4-12).

The stirring challenge of Micah was recalled in Israel a century later, and quoted to secure protection for Jeremiah.

Jeremiah, thrown into prison by the priests and false prophets of his day, and likely to be put to death, was saved by friends who courageously declared, "This man does not deserve to die : he has been speaking to us in the name of the Eternal our God . . . When Micah of Moresheth prophesied during the reign of Hezekiah king of Judah, he told all the people that this was the word of the Lord of Hosts : 'Sion shall be ploughed up like a field, Jerusalem

shall become a heap of ruins, the temple-hill a mere wooded height . . . Did king Hezekiah or the people of Judah ever put him (Micah) to death? Did they not reverently appease the Eternal, till the Eternal relented and withheld the evil he had pronounced against them? But as for us, we are about to wreak evil on ourselves." (Jeremiah xxvi, 18, 19).<sup>(1)</sup>

Jeremiah was spared, Micah's words had the authority of God. They have today. "The prophecies of Micah proclaim great principles which are independent of time and circumstance alike."

There are two abiding truths which Micah continually emphasised and which always call for serious consideration : (a) the righteous nature of God, (b) the type of worship that is acceptable to Him.

Many of the rulers and religious leaders of Micah's day laboured under the delusion that because they lived in Jerusalem, and because the Temple was there, therefore, by these very facts, God was always in their midst, they were His favoured people, and that in all circumstances He would protect them from harm. (The same dangerous and untenable view is echoed in the words of the Pharisees of New Testament days—words which John Baptist repudiated, "We have Abraham to our father . . .").

Not for a moment would Micah tolerate such views. He said in effect that neither Jerusalem nor the Temple had anything to do with it. Israel could only be God's people in any true sense as her leaders and people committed their lives to Him, revered His name, willingly obeyed His righteous commands, and sought to establish righteousness in all the activities and relationships of life.

Furthermore, true religion and worship can never consist of mere ceremonialism and outward religious display. There must be sincerity of heart, purity of motive, spiritual power and moral earnestness. There must be a love of righteousness for Righteousness' sake. There must be an absence of all sham and make-believe.

(1) See chapter on Jeremiah, p. 60.

Ceremonialism and outward observances have a part to play in religious life, they are an aid to worship, but unless in the hearts of the people, there is a love of God, a desire to know His will and to do it, a spiritual interpretation of life and moral earnestness, sooner or later they degrade religion and bring disaster upon the people.

In stressing these truths Micah was in line with all the great Prophetic minds of Israel. Jesus, Himself, was equally emphatic.

The opening verses of the sixth chapter of "Micah" are well known. They constitute "one of the greatest passages in all religious literature." They are "a vindication of true religion as against soulless formalism—its shadow and curse."

The passage ends :

"Wherefore shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God ?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old ?

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil ?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul ?

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good ; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God ?" (vv. 6-8).

The margin of the Authorized Version gives the suggestive alternative : "humble yourself to walk with God !"

In chapter four Micah sets forth the way of life in faith and righteousness to which God calls men, and shews the fulness and satisfaction in which such a way of life will issue.

Dr. L. Elliott Binns, quoting G. A. Smith, writes : "In iv, 1-7 . . . we see how the divine spiral ascends. We have, first, Religion, the centre and origin of all, compelling the attention of men by its historical evidence of justice and righteousness. We have the world's willingness to learn of it. We have the results in the widening

brotherhood of nations, in universal Peace, in labour freed from War, and with none of her resources absorbed by the conscriptions and armaments which in our times are deemed necessary for enforcing peace. We have universal diffusion and security of property, the prosperity and safety of the humblest home. And, finally, we have this free strength and wealth, inspired by the example of God Himself, to nourish the broken and to gather in the forwandered.”<sup>(1)</sup>

It was given to Micah, seven hundred years before New Testament days, to speak of Him who should one day come to be the true Shepherd and Deliverer of Israel. In the Lord Jesus Christ faithful people in all nations have found the Prophet's words more than fulfilled. In the mystery of His birth, the beauty of His life, the wonder of His passion and death, the glory of His resurrection and exaltation, He gathers up and transcends the highest claims and the noblest visions of the Prophetic mind. He is the First and the Last, the Mighty Saviour and Prince of Peace ; King of kings and Lord of lords.

“But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall come forth unto me (one) that is to be ruler in Israel ; whose goings forth are from of old,—from everlasting . . . and he shall stand and shall feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God : and they shall abide ; for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.” (v. 2).

(1) *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*. vol. I, p. 584.



## 6

## THE PROPHET ISAIAH

OF Isaiah it might be said, he was the Prophet who believed in success through failure ! He had an unshakable faith in the over-ruling providence of God and thereby could take the long view of history. The sins of his people may be as scarlet, the plight of the nation desperate, yet God is God, His will is supreme, and ultimately His Divine purpose must prevail.

King Uziah (Azariah) was crowned king of Judah as a youth of sixteen. He died, a leper, about 740 B.C., after a reign of over half a century. "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." (ii Kings xv, 3).

It was in the year that king Uziah died that the young man, Isaiah, whose home was in Jerusalem, visited the Temple there. He was probably about twenty years of age. His experience in the Temple was a remarkable one. He was overwhelmed with the sense of God's majesty and splendour ; he was powerfully moved by the feeling of God's awful holiness. The realisation of his own sin and unworthiness was as a terrible burden upon his heart. The knowledge of his people's wickedness was like a crushing weight upon him.

The vision of God which flooded his being in the Temple left an indelible impression on the young Isaiah. The memory of it strengthened and inspired him throughout the forty years of his ministry. So vivid was the recollection of what happened on the day of his call and consecration that several years later he wrote a powerful description of it.

"In the year that king Uziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train (spreading robes) filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim : each one had six wings : with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, with two he did fly. And one cried to another, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory . . . Then said I, Woe is me ! for I am undone, because

I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips : for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." (vi, 1-5).

The Prophet then goes on to tell how he received the assurance of God's forgiveness and of his wonderful experience of being cleansed and renewed in his inner life. To the Divine call which now came to Him he readily responded.

"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?' I answered, 'Here am I; send me.'" (vv. 8, 9).

Isaiah was under no illusion concerning his people. He knew that their hearts would be hardened against him. The hesitant co-operation of the kings under whom he served made his task somewhat easier than that of Jeremiah and the Prophets of the northern kingdom who frequently had to act in direct opposition to the kings under whom they lived.

During his long ministry Isaiah never wavered. He went steadily on. Deep in his heart was the conviction that, although he failed, the cause for which he stood—the cause of God's righteousness—would one day prosper. None could finally frustrate the Eternal's will. "It was Jehovah who controlled courts and used the great world-empires for the working out of His plan." (x, 5 f).

Of the difficulties and disappointments that would beset his path God had warned him. The Prophet had said, "Here am I, send me." God had said, "Tell the people (you) listen and listen, but you never understand; (you) look and look, but you never see!" (vi, 9). That, as Isaiah discovered, was exactly what happened.

This is a source of trouble and heartache in every generation to those who would speak to the people for God. What is the good of hearing God's word if it is not understood, accepted and translated into action? Jesus spoke of the "blind guides of the blind!" He frequently appealed, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Men are not to hear only, but to understand; not to see only, but to perceive.

Confronted by a people who refused to take his teaching seriously, what then must the Prophet do? What was God's plan for him?

In his imagination he had seen his people as a glorious nation. That vision was a constant inspiration and encouragement to him. He thought of the rulers and leaders of the nation consecrated to God's high service even as he was. Such a vision ought to become an actuality. There was little chance of that happening, however. The very disobedience of the nation endangered its future. How then shall God's word be preserved? Who will guard the Divine teaching of God's will and purpose for Israel?

There was one way. Isaiah would gather around him a small band of those who remained faithful and loyal to God. Always within the nation there would be a "Righteous Few," a "Godly Minority," a "Holy Remnant." Whatever happened to the nation as a whole, the Remnant would be preserved. "For the nation, since it would not accept his teaching and remain in quiet and peace, Isaiah foresaw inevitable, though not complete, disaster. But out of the fire of calamity a purified remnant will emerge . . . and the nation will be reborn . . ."

If at first the doctrine of the remnant was given almost as a threat to the nation, it soon became for the Prophet the sure hope and safeguard of his people. To signify this truth Isaiah named his first son, "Shear-jashub," meaning "a Remnant shall return." He instructed and inspired the company of the faithful that they might become salt, light and leaven to the nation in the coming days.

"Bind thou up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait for the Lord, who hides his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him." (viii, 16, 17).

On this passage, Dr. Peake comments :

"The mention of his disciples suggests that he had formed a religious brotherhood, held together by his prophetic teaching. This was epoch making. It secured the preservation of his own prophecies, and perhaps those of others. It created a religious

organisation to carry out the programme of the prophets which, when it could no longer work openly, as in the time of Manasseh, could work underground and issue in the Deuteronomic reformation. Recognising that his labours among the people at large had been a failure, he gathered the nucleus of the remnant to which was entrusted the future of spiritual religion.”<sup>(1)</sup>

Of his disciples Isaiah said, “Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.” (i, 9).

Thus the Prophet held steadfastly to the belief that God would never leave Himself without a witness. Whatever may be the disasters that fall upon Israel, however powerful the nations at whose hands she suffers, God’s word shall yet be preserved alive in her midst. And one day the nation shall know and shall rejoice in “Immanuel: God is with us!” A child shall be born, a son shall be given. The government shall be upon His shoulder. His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. (ix, 6).

Isaiah’s faith in God was vindicated; as was also his trust in the “Faithful Few.” In Israel’s darkest days, when the hearts of many trembled for fear, there were always the “few” who remained steadfast in the faith, loyal in their obedience to God. The vicarious sufferings of the Remnant helped to cleanse and to re-sanctify the national life as a whole. That has been true on more than one occasion in the history of our own land. Isaiah speaks a word of encouragement and challenge to faithful men and women today, when, again, the hearts of many fail them for fear, when the ways of God are not easy to see upon the earth, when men easily fall into the error of blaming God for the inevitable consequences of man’s wilful disobedience of the Divine will.

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In his long prophetic ministry Isaiah saw the reign of three kings. Jotham—who was regent in the life of his

(1) *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible*, p. 443.

father, Uzziah—reigned only two years. Ahaz was a feeble, superstitious and obstinate man. Hezekiah was more courageous and somewhat worthier of the kingly office. Manasseh came to the throne, as a boy of twelve, it is said, about the year 686 B.C. Whether or not Isaiah lived on into Manasseh's reign, we cannot be sure.

It was with Ahaz that the Prophet had his first difficulty. Ahaz was afraid of two neighbouring kings ; Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel. They wished to force Ahaz and the people of Judah into an alliance with them against the Empire of Assyria. Isaiah, obeying God's command, went to meet Ahaz "at the top of the conduit from the upper reservoir, on the road to Fuller's Field." He took with him his son Shear-jashub. The king was pitifully afraid. "The heart of Ahaz and of his people quivered like trees quivering before the wind in the jungle!" (vii, 2).

When Isaiah urged the king not to be afraid of Rezin and Pekah, "these two tails of smoking fire-brands," he would neither listen to reason nor seek a sign from God. It was then that the Prophet gave the promised sign "Immanuel," "God is with us." He appealed to Ahaz to put an implicit faith in God. "If your faith does not hold you will never hold out."

The appeal of Ahaz to Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, for aid, brought Judah into subjection. The tribute—paid under the guise of a present—to the Assyrian ruler, made the lot of the poor of Judah harder still. Already the ruthless oppression of the poor was one of the nation's worst sins. Had Ahaz accepted the statesmanlike advice of Isaiah, Judah would, in all probability, have remained free. The Assyrian would never have allowed Syria and Israel to combine with others against him.

In burning words Isaiah told of the terrible calamity which the action of the king would bring upon the nation. The day would come when Assyria would overrun Judah. The land would be wasted. The disaster would be comparable only with the revolt of the ten tribes after the death of Solomon which led to the cleavage of Israel and

Judah. Isaiah conveyed his warning in the symbolical name of his second son : Maher-shalal-hash-baz, meaning, "Spoil-speeds, booty-hastes."

When the day of the Prophet's words was fulfilled, he called upon leaders and people not to resist Assyria. No human power could stay her advance. God would deal with Assyria and bring retribution upon her. Judah should yet be free, but she was to rely on God and not put her trust in earthly kings. "For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel : 'In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength.'" In sorrow the Prophet was compelled to add, "And ye would not."

Isaiah's love for his people ran deep and it was with grief that he spoke words of condemnation. Yet speak he must, for while king and leaders and people remained content with a mere ceremonial religion, while oppression and injustice went unchecked, while the praise on men's lips belied the intentions of their hearts, the moral and spiritual foundations of the nation were undermined and disaster made inevitable. "Because Isaiah believed in God's justice his indignation burned like a fire against all injustice in man. Hence he denounced the social sins that disfigured the national life—above all the greed and avarice of the great landowners, supported as it was by a corrupt administration which denied to the poor and helpless all legal protection, and left them at the mercy of their oppressors. The prophet denounced as freely the senseless luxury of the women which, no doubt, was one of the causes of the rapacity of their lords." (1)

Side by side with these vicious practices went much superficial religion. Much was made of Sabbath observance ; great store was set by the new moon and other festivals ; temple-treading was "quite the thing" : many in the nation were very religious and very Godless !

(1) *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, Dr. L. Elliott Binns, vol. I, p. 433.

Isaiah was compelled, as was Jesus centuries later, to use stern and scathing words against religious ceremony and ritual divorced from morality, righteousness and mercy.

"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken : I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his stall, but Israel doth not know (me), my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that deal corruptly : they have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are estranged and gone backward. Why will ye still be stricken, that ye revolt more and more ? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it : (only) wounds, and bruises, and festering sores : they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with oil. Your country is desolate ; your cities are burned with fire ; your land, strangers devour it in your presence . . . the daughter of Zion (Jerusalem) is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a shed in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the Lord of Hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom ; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me ? saith the Lord : I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of beasts ; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats.

When you come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to trample my courts ? Bring no more vain oblations ; incense is an abomination unto me ; new moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies—I cannot tolerate iniquity and the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth : they are a trouble unto me : I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you : yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear : your hands are full of blood.

Wash you, make you clean . . . put away your evil, learn to do good, seek justice, relieve the oppressed, do right to the fatherless, plead for the widow.

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord : though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool . . . be willing and obedient." (i, 2-19).

Few have spoken so fearlessly against the evils and religious insincerities that imperil a nation's life, but with all his denunciation Isaiah pleaded for a spirit of repentance among his people. That was the condition of Divine forgiveness and of restoration. That would lead again to joy and gladness throughout Israel.

"And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."  
(xxv, 9).

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After the death of the two great Assyrian soldier-kings, Tiglath III, and Shalmaneser IV, Sargon seized the throne in 722 B.C. Seventeen years later he was assassinated, but before his death he had brought many nations into subjection. He took Samaria, defeated the Philistines and the Egyptians, captured the great city of Charchemish, subdued the Medes, and finally drove Merodach-baladan out of Babylonia.

Hezekiah, who succeeded Ahaz to the throne of Judah, joined with the rulers of Egypt and other neighbouring states in league against Merodach. Sargon crushed the revolt at Ashdod, and demanded tribute from Judah, Moab and Edom.

From the beginning Isaiah had seen that no alliance with Egypt and other states could save the situation for Judah. Against the folly of trusting Egypt he spoke strongly. Sancherib (Sennacherib) had once taunted Hezekiah, "Egypt is a broken reed of a staff, that will pierce the hand of any who leans on it." Isaiah knew that to be true.

In a desperate effort to convince the nation of its misguided policy, Isaiah "put off his garment and for three years walked barefoot like a captive," thus symbolising the fate that would overtake his people. (xx, 2).

Sancherib, Sargon's successor, dealt with the revolts of some of the smaller states and then marched against



Palestine. The Ethiopian king of Egypt came to the help of Hezekiah, but Egypt was soon subdued and Sancherib marched into Judah. (The story of Hezekiah's vain attempt to buy off Sancherib, even to the stripping of the Temple itself, is told in II Kings, chapters eighteen and nineteen.) As Isaiah had said, all was in vain. Very soon Sancherib demanded the unconditional surrender of Jerusalem. Hezekiah, stricken and fearful, dressed himself in sackcloth, went to the House of the Lord and sent a message to Isaiah: "This day is a day of trouble, of rebuke and contumely . . . It may be that the Lord thy God will hear all the words of Rabshakeh (the commander), whom the king of Assyria hath sent to reproach the living God, and will rebuke the words which the Lord thy God hath heard: therefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left." (2 Kings xix, 3, 4). The Prophet's reply surprised, if it did not at once comfort, Hezekiah. Isaiah declared with conviction that despite all appearances to the contrary Sancherib would never enter Jerusalem. Nor did he. What dread disease befell his armies no one knows to this day. Sancherib makes no reference to it in his own records. Whatever it was, the Assyrian armies withdrew in haste and Jerusalem was spared. Nor, during the remaining twenty years of his reign, did Sancherib ever again march against Jerusalem.

"And it came to pass in the night, that the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred four score and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sancherib, king of Assyria, departed and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. (II Kings xix, 35-36).

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In the second book of Kings, and in certain chapters of Isaiah, there are several records of Hezekiah's activities which are not easy to reconcile. It would seem that although the king would not refuse entirely to make political alliances, as Isaiah desired, yet he did show considerable

political insight, and he also brought about certain reforms in the religious life of the nation which made possible greater reforms in after years.

Isaiah lived a long and strenuous life. To the end of his days he kept his vows of consecration and loyalty. Ever before him was the vision of the Divine Majesty first revealed to him in the Temple. How he died we do not know. There are traditions—not reliable—that Manasseh, Hezekiah's successor, had the aged Prophet cruelly put to death. Probably he died a natural death in Jerusalem and was laid to rest by the loving hands of his disciples.

Isaiah served God among his people as Prophet and Poet, Mystic and Statesman. Words of encouragement and hope spoken to the nation in a dark hour were God's word to his own heart. He looked to God in every circumstance of life for inspiration and guidance. He found in God an unfailing source of comfort and hope, of spiritual insight and moral endeavour. "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength," was not superficial advice to others, it was the affirmation of his own experience. He may appear at times to despair of men : never of God.

The Prophet saw sin, ungodliness and sham religion bring sorrow and disaster upon the nation. Yet he never doubted God's power to overrule the evil that men do, nor would he believe that God would forever cast off his people. He looked for repentance and the spiritual renewing of the nation's life ; in his own way he sought to make his people understand that great spiritual principle stated centuries later by Jesus with such a remarkable economy of words, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and all these things (all material blessings) shall be added unto you."

The words of Sir George Adam Smith command our prayerful consideration. "How divine Isaiah's message is, may be proved by the length of time mankind is taking to learn it. The remarkable thing is, that he staked so lofty a principle, and the pure religion of which it was the temper, upon a political result, that he staked upon them,

and vindicated them by, a purely local and material success—the relief of Jerusalem from the infidel. Centuries passed, and Christ came. He did not—for even He could not—preach a more spiritual religion than that which He had committed to His greatest forerunner, but He released this religion, and the temper of faith which Isaiah had so divinely expressed, from the local associations and merely national victories, with which even Isaiah had been forced to identify them. The destruction of Jerusalem by the heathen formed a large part of Christ's prediction of the immediate future: and He comforted the remnant of faith with these words, to some of which Isaiah's lips had first given their meaning: *Ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet in Jerusalem worship the Father. God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.*"<sup>(1)</sup>

"Have we learned this lesson yet?"

(1) *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. I, pp. 381-2-3. "Ye shall neither in . . ." the italics are Sir George Adam Smith's.

## 7

## THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

"It is difficult to conceive any situation more painful than that of a great man, condemned to watch the lingering agony of an exhausted country, to tend it during the alternate fits of stupefaction and raving which precede its dissolution, and to see the symptoms of vitality disappear one by one, till nothing is left but coldness, darkness, and corruption."

LORD MACAULAY.

LESS than an hour's walk from Jerusalem—two and a half miles to the north—lies the village of Anathoth (now Anata). Here, about the year 650 B.C., a son was born in the house of a priest named Hilkiah. The family probably traced its descent back to Eli. The boy was named Jeremiah, and his was to be one of the strangest and most remarkable lives ever lived. Sorrow and suffering were to be his lot. There is much in his life to suggest that in his thinking, and in his sorrow and suffering, he stands nearer to Jesus than any other Prophet. He desired with great longing to help his own people, yet the deepest anguish of his heart sprang from their harsh treatment of him as he spoke the truth in God's name. He was to know an intensity of loneliness and dejection, a sense of utter failure and frustration, such as few men have ever known.

"Belonging to the orders of both Priest and Prophet, and living at the very time when each had sunk to its lowest state of degradation, he was compelled to submit to the buffeting which they each bestowed upon a man who was by his every word and deed passing sentence upon themselves. He saw them permitted to vent their rage upon his person, he saw them held in esteem by the people, their way prospering, those that dealt treacherously happy. For the greater part of his mission he 'had no man likeminded with him' . . . But through it all conscientious devotion to duty maintained its place within his heart. The promise that he should be a brazen wall made at the time of his call and renewed later never failed him."<sup>(1)</sup>

(1) *Jeremiah and Lamentations*. Dr. A. W. Streane. Intro. xxvii.

Although sometimes so overwhelmed by a sense of hopelessness that he cried out that never again would he speak in the name of the Lord, yet he could not keep silence. He was compelled by a living power that worked in him and through him—a power he knew to be of God—to declare those truths given him to speak. God's word was as a fire burning in his bones.

"And if I say, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name, then there is in mine heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot contain." (xx, 9).

It was given to Jeremiah, spiritually illuminated by his suffering, to proclaim for God a new Covenant, a Covenant not between God and the nation Israel only, but between God and each individual in the nation.

"I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah . . . this is the covenant that I will make after those days, saith the Lord: I will put my law in their inward parts, in their hearts will I write it: and I will be their God, and they shall be my people . . . they shall all know me, from the least unto the greatest . . ." (xxxii, 31-34).

The new relationship with God was to be personal. Men were to live as individuals who felt a sense of moral responsibility to God.

The Prophet died in a strange land. He was taken forcibly to Egypt by some of his own countrymen. "In misery and continual peril he witnessed the fall of the State and the destruction of Jerusalem: he survived it, but in the silent tomb of an alien land."

An attempt had been made by king Josiah to purify the religious life of the nation. The incentive was given by the discovery of a lost book of the Law which had been buried for many years in the Temple. When Josiah read it and compared the religious state of the nation with the commands given in the Law Book, he grew alarmed. There must be speedy reform or disaster was inevitable. Already he had begun to restore the Temple and had sought to cleanse its services from the worst of the pagan rites and practices. The Book of the Law demanded much more.

"And the king went up to the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him . . . and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments . . . with all his heart and soul . . . and the people stood to the covenant. And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest to bring forth out of the temple all the vessels made for Baal, and for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven . . . and he burned them without Jerusalem . . . and carried the ashes of them unto Beth-el . . . and he put down the idolatrous priests . . . and brake down the houses of the Sodomites, that were in the house of the Lord, where the women wove hangings for Asherah." (The full story is found in II Kings, xxiii, xxiv).

Jeremiah had gone through the towns and villages of Judah urging the people to heed the new compact of the law and to give a loyal obedience to God's commands. He came to realise that the teaching of the law was not enough. The need was for a more deeply spiritual religion. Outward observance of priestly rules and regulations would avail nothing without sincerity of heart and mind. Formalism and meaningless ceremonialism mocked God and menaced the life of the nation.

The Prophet had also to contend with the extremely serious political situation in Judah. The nation was threatened by the great military states on her border. Josiah made the mistake of trying to oppose the forces of the pharaoh, Necho, and was killed at Megiddo (c. 608 B.C.). His younger son, Jehoahaz, was crowned, but three months later Necho sent him in chains to Egypt and appointed Jehoiakim, Josiah's elder son, to rule in Judah. (II Kings, xxiii, 29-37).

Jeremiah was greatly troubled when Jehoahaz was sent away. He spoke to the people: "Weep not for the dead (Josiah), but weep sore for him that goes away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country." (Jeremiah xxii, 10). Jehoahaz died in Egypt.

Events moved quickly. Necho was defeated by the Chaldean (Babylonian) leader, Nebuchadrezzar, at Carchemish. (604 B.C.). Jehoiakim and his people were now at the mercy of Nebuchadrezzar. If Jehoiakim decided

to rule wisely he had not much to fear. He could, indeed, do much to lighten the lot of his people. But he acted foolishly, exploited his people without mercy, and drew from Jeremiah a burning denunciation of his conduct.

"Woe unto him that builds his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by injustice; that uses his neighbour's services without wages, and giveth him not his hire: that says I will build myself a wide house with spacious chambers . . . ceiled (panelled) with cedar, painted with vermilion. Shalt thou reign (really be a king) because thou strivest to excel in cedar? Did not thy father eat and drink, and (yet) do judgment and justice . . . he judged the cause of the poor and needy: then it was well. And was not thus to know me? saith the Lord. But thine eyes and thine heart are for covetousness, to shed innocent blood, to oppress and to do violence. Therefore, thus saith the Lord, concerning Jehoiakim, king of Judah, There shall not (anyone) lament for him, saying, Ah my brother . . . Ah lord! or Ah his glory!

He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem." (xxii, 13-19).

To advocate the policy of willing submission to Babylon called for great courage. This Jeremiah did, however, for he was convinced that nothing short of that could save the nation from destruction. When, at one of the religious festivals, Jeremiah's words were read to the people by his scribe, Baruch, there was a great stir. So much so, that Jeremiah and Baruch were urged to make their escape whilst they could and to remain in hiding. As the Prophet's words were read to the king he became so angry and contemptuous that he slashed the scroll with a knife and threw the pieces into the brazier by which he warmed himself.

"The king sent to Jehudi to fetch the roll (it had been hidden in the room of Elishama the scribe) and Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes who stood beside the king . . . and it came to pass, when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, the king cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was in the brazier, until all the roll was consumed . . . And they were not afraid, nor rent their garments (repented) . . . Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah made intercession to the king that he would not burn the roll, but he would not hear them . . . and the king commanded to take Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet. (xxxvi, 21-26).

(The events may be read in their true sequence if the first five verses of chapter forty-five are inserted between verses seven and eight of chapter thirty-six).

When the news of the king's action reached Jeremiah in hiding, he dictated to Baruch another scroll. This was also intended for the king. It contained, "in addition to the contents of the former, a rebuke to him for his impious act and further announcements of God's forthcoming vengeance. These words, though received by the king with anger and contempt, had no doubt the effect which God designed in preserving the salt of the people during these evil times, and supporting them through the captivity which was approaching in the reign of Jehoiakim's two successors."<sup>(1)</sup>

It is not the only time in history that evil men have thought to destroy the righteous command and the word of God by burning the inspired writings of good men—or even by burning the men themselves. But God's righteous words are written in the hearts of those men whom He calls to speak His truth, they are held as the pearl of great price by all who would live in faithful obedience to His holy law: the fires cannot destroy them.

At this time another voice was raised against the evil ways of the king. Uriah had been compelled to flee to Egypt because of his outspokenness. He was captured, however, brought back to Judah and put to death at the king's command. Jeremiah owed his life to Ahikam, the son of Shaphan. He came to the help of the Prophet and "prevented him being handed over to the people and killed."

In whatever situation the Prophet found himself, however, he faithfully spoke the convictions of his heart. The words he uttered were God's words to the nation: they must be fearlessly spoken, and the consequences left with God.

"But as for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as is good and right in your eyes. Only know ye for certain that, if ye put me to death, ye shall bring innocent blood upon yourselves,

(1) *Jeremiah and Lamentations*. Streane: Intro. pp. 20, 21.



and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof; for of a truth the Lord hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears." (xxvi, 14-16).

Amid all the discussion and argument there were those who recalled the words of Micah spoken a century earlier. Micah had challenged Hezekiah. These words were now quoted by some of the older inhabitants of Jerusalem in defence of Jeremiah.<sup>(1)</sup>

"Thus saith the Lord of hosts: Zion shall be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps (ruins) . . . (but) did king Hezekiah of Judah . . . put him at all to death? Did he not fear the Lord? and the Lord repented him of the evil . . . (yet) we commit greater evil against our own souls." (xxvi, 18-19).

Jeremiah stood desperately in need of sympathy and understanding. Yet even this, combined with his own strength of character, was not enough to sustain him in the tasks committed to him and the sorrow upon his heart. His sufficiency was of God. No overpowering vision of the Divine Majesty had been vouchsafed to him as to Isaiah; nor did he experience the kind of vision which came to Ezekiel at a later date. He had not sought the work he did; he had, indeed, recoiled from the very thought of it. The work was of God, and there was no escape. Jeremiah might have said with Him whose great forerunner he was, "To this end was I born."

The situation in Judah steadily deteriorated. In 597 B.C., Jehoiakim committed his greatest folly; he openly revolted against the might of Babylon. Soldiers of the nations under Babylonian domination now began to overrun Judah. The Prophet was again forced to oppose the king with ever greater determination. He declared that utter ruin must inevitably overtake the nation.

"Then came Jeremiah from Topheth, whither the Lord had sent him to prophesy: and he stood in the court of the Lord's house, and he said to all the people; Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, I will bring upon this city and upon all her towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it; because they have made their neck stiff, that they might not hear my words. (xix, 14-15). Now Pashur the son of Immer the priest, who was chief officer in the house of the Lord, heard Jeremiah the

(1) See chapter on Micah p. 41.

prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the upper gate of Benjamin, which was in the house of the Lord . . . on the morrow, Pashur brought forth Jeremiah out of the stocks. Then said Jeremiah unto him, The Lord hath not called thy name Pashur but Magor-missabib (Terror). For thus saith the Lord, Behold I will make thee a terror to thyself, and to all thy friends ; and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and thine eyes shall behold it ; and I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive to Babylon, and shall slay them with the sword. Moreover I will give all the riches of this city, and all the gains (possessions) thereof, and all the precious things thereof, yea, all the treasures of the kings of Judah will I give into the hand of their enemies, which shall spoil them, and take them, and carry them to Babylon. And thou, Pashur, and all them that dwell in thy house shall go into captivity : and thou shalt come to Babylon, and there shalt thou die, and there shalt thou be buried, thou, and all thy friends, to whom thou hast prophesied falsely." (xx, 1-6).

At this period of his ministry, Jeremiah began to reach the lowest depths of loneliness and dejection. It seemed to him that he had mistaken God's leading ; or worse, that God might even have misled him. He felt that he ought never to have been born ! It seemed useless to speak in the name of God when, in the whole nation, only the merest handful of people would heed his words. And yet there was no escape from the conviction that the Eternal had chosen him and set him apart as the instrument of His Divine purpose.

"O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was (let myself be) deceived ; thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed ; I am become a laughing stock all the day, everyone mocketh me . . . the word of the Lord is made a reproach unto me, and (I am held in) a derision, all the day. And if I say, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name, then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing . . . I have heard the defaming of many, terror on every side . . . denounce him, say all my familiar friends, they that watch for my halting (mistakes), peradventure he will be enticed and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him.

But the Lord is with me as a mighty one and a terrible ; therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail ; they shall be greatly ashamed, because they have not dealt wisely, even with an everlasting dishonour, which shall never be for-

gotten." (xx, 7-11). (Verses 14-18 of chapter twenty should precede the above verses; 7-11).

Through his darkest hour the Prophet remained steadfast; to the end he remained obedient to his Divine calling; his suffering, his courageous loyalty through forty years of ministry is sufficient vindication, surely, of his irresistible belief in God's purpose for him.

"Before I formed thee in the womb, and before you were born, I sanctified thee. I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations.

Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak; for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am (as) a child; for to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid because of them; for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth; and the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth; see, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms." . . . . . (i, 5-10).

\* \* \* \* \*

Jehoiakim — probably slain in a skirmish — was succeeded by his son, Konish, who took the name Jehoiachin. It was clear now to Jeremiah that Nebuchadrezzar would overthrow Jerusalem and that many of his people would be carried away into exile. He openly declared that Jehoiachin would not reign long. Three months later the besieged Jerusalem surrendered. The king, the queen-mother, much of the army, the skilled workmen and the better-class citizens were taken to Babylon. Evil-Merodach, Nebuchadrezzar's successor, later released Jehoiachin from prison and allowed him to live in Babylon as a captive prince.

Zedekiah, a younger son of Josiah and uncle to Jehoiachin, was permitted by Nebuchadrezzar to rule over the remaining inhabitants in the desolated towns of Judah. It was not long before he was plotting with other satellite states—Moab, Ammon, Tyre—against the Babylonian ruler. The inevitable consequences of such a policy were clear to Jeremiah. In an effort to compel the king and people to heed his words he even went to the length of going about

wearing a wooden yoke. When this was taken from him and broken he declared that very soon an iron yoke would be upon the nation, and that Hananiah, who so violently opposed him, would be dead within the year. He was.

To the exiles in Babylon the Prophet wrote counselling patient submission. Only such a course, he said, could preserve them in their present distress and give hope for the future. Not all the exiles accepted his guidance, and revolt was planned by some of them in conjunction with a few influential people still left in Jerusalem.

Zedekiah reigned for eleven years and watched the struggle for ascendancy between Babylon and Egypt. For a man of ability and strength of character the task would have been almost impossible, but for a commonplace man of the type of Zedekiah the position was hopeless. Twice he sent for Jeremiah and asked him to seek Divine guidance. "Inquire, I pray thee, of the Lord for us . . . Pray now unto the Lord our God for us." (xxi, 2 : xxxvii, 3).

Many in Judah hoped to see some restoration of the nation's fortunes. Jeremiah was well-disposed to the king, and the king, in his turn, sought to protect the Prophet. When Jeremiah's enemies threw him into prison the king caused the sentence to be mitigated, and when he was left in the muddy underground cistern and like to die of starvation, the king gave orders that he was to be lifted out and lodged in the guard-room.

Neither to appease his enemies nor to please the king, however, would Jeremiah modify the course he believed to be God's will for the nation. The only course that offered any hope at all was quiet and orderly submission to Babylon. Any sign of revolt would mean the final overthrow of the nation.

"Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the Lord, in that which I speak unto thee ; so it shall be well with thee, and thy soul shall live. But if thou refuse to go forth (to submit) then this is the word that the Lord had shewed me ; Behold, all the women that are left in the king of Judah's house shall be brought forth to the king of Babylon's princes . . . ." (xxxviii, 20-22).

They should be taken away, declared the Prophet, with the realisation that those who had professed friendship towards them had actually betrayed them and brought their "feet into the mire."

Ezekiel, also, who was with the captives in Babylon, was suspicious of Zedekiah's policy. The king had sworn a solemn oath to Nebuchadrezzar, but his loyalty was superficial. Nor can he ever have considered seriously the teaching and pleading of Jeremiah.

"Zedekiah was twenty and one years old when he began to reign ; and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem ; and he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God ; he humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth (with the authority) of the Lord. And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadrezzar, who had made him swear by God : but . . . he hardened his heart from turning unto the Lord, the God of Israel." (II Chronicles, xxxvi, 11-12, and Jeremiah lii, 3).

The king's plea that his vow was not binding because it had been made to a heathen was rejected by both Jeremiah and Ezekiel. "As I live, surely *mine* oath that he hath despised, and *my* covenant that he hath broken, I will bring it upon his own head." (Ezekiel xvii, 19).

About 590 B.C. Zedekiah was approached by other puppet rulers—Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre—with a view to making a concerted effort to throw off Babylonian rule. Even at this distance of time it is not easy to see how the rulers of the small states came to think that they could break the might of Babylon. It may have seemed to them that Chaldea would decline as quickly as she had risen, or that in the event of an uprising Egypt would also attack Babylon. Whatever the cause, it was a vain and disastrous hope.

Nebuchadrezzar attacked Judah and marched on Jerusalem. Jeremiah spoke words of hope and encouragement to the frightened rulers and people. In the general alarm, and with a growing fear in their hearts, the king and his subjects turned to God and renewed their vows of loyalty to Him. A solemn vow was made declaring that in future the law demanding the freeing of slaves would be observed. (Exodus xxi, 2 ; Deut. xv, 12):

An attack by Egyptian forces in the rear compelled the Babylonians to withdraw. The danger removed, many in Judah went back on their oath. Jeremiah spoke fiercely against their sin and mockery. “. . . since you will not hearken to me to proclaim liberty, each to his brother and fellow, I now proclaim you free, saith the Lord—Free to fall under the sword, the pestilence, the famine! I will make you to be tossed to and fro among the nations . . .” (xxxiv, 17).

The Prophet now openly declared his conviction that Jerusalem must fall; that famine, even cannibalism, might have to be endured inside its besieged walls, and that none would escape the sword and terror of Babylon except a few who would desert and flee under cover of darkness. Those who had plotted to attempt to overthrow Nebuchadnezzar hated Jeremiah bitterly. They denounced him as a dangerous traitor and, but for a stealthy move by Zedekiah, it is almost certain that he would have been killed. The Prophet's prediction concerning the certain fate of Jerusalem was fulfilled.

“The famine was sore in the city . . . there was no bread (lii, 6) in the fourth month, the ninth day . . . a breach was made in the city, and all the princes (high officers) of the king of Babylon came in, and sat in the middle gate . . . and when Zedekiah and his men of war saw them they fled the city by night, by way of the king's garden . . .” (xxxix, 2-4).

With his household, some of his bodyguard, and a handful of soldiers, Zedekiah managed to escape. They were betrayed, however, and captured on the plains of Jericho. Nebuchadnezzar was merciless. He taxed Zedekiah with falsity and ingratitude, made him watch the slaughter of his children, and then ordered his eyes to be put out. The city walls and battlements were thrown down and the whole of the population, with the exception of the poorest of the poor, carried off to Babylon. Those who had escaped to the hills gradually returned to find the treasures of the Temple gone and the city practically destroyed by fire.

Jeremiah, given the choice of going to Babylon or of staying on in the ruined city, decided to remain behind with the afflicted remnant.

"And the captain of the guard (the commanding officer) took Jeremiah and said unto him, The Lord thy God pronounced this evil upon this place . . . he hath done it as he spake . . . Now, behold, I loose thee this day from the chains which are upon thy hand . . . If it seem good unto thee to come with me into Babylon, come, and I will look well unto thee; but if it seem ill to thee to come with me, forbear: behold, all the land is before thee, whither it seems good and convenient to thee to go, thither go." (xl, 1-4).

Once free, the Prophet went and joined Gedaliah whom Nebuchedrazzar had appointed to take charge. Gedaliah proved a true friend to the afflicted people and, like Jeremiah, insisted that their only hope of safety and recovery lay in submission to Babylon. Two months later Gedaliah was treacherously betrayed and murdered. The story is a terrible one. The facts are given in Jeremiah, chapters forty and forty-one, and in II Kings, chapter xxv.

Jeremiah, with other of the people, was carried off to Egypt. He had to listen to his own countrymen railing against God because of the disasters which had befallen the nation. They would not accept the Prophet's conviction that denial of God and the deliberate repudiation of His laws were the root cause of their calamities.

Thus passed Jeremiah; one of the supreme figures of the Old Testament, one of the outstanding characters of history. How he died we do not know. He may have met a violent death at the hands of his own countrymen.

Of the Prophet's life and work we may say that it truly testifies to the mysterious working of the Divine will; that it is evidence of that overruling providence which sustained Jeremiah throughout his darkest hours. He who had to endure the anger and scorn of men at the Eternal's command was of a sensitive nature. He loved the quietness of the countryside. He illustrated his teaching by references to birds and animals, to fallow ground and hot wind.

The rejection of his message and the derision of his person by his own countrymen, caused him the deepest anguish of spirit. Yet, in the path in which God had set him, he never wavered. Even when denounced as a traitor he "stood up and told all that God had commanded him," and was "not afraid of their faces."

For Jeremiah the Sovereign power of God was supreme. He staked everything on that fundamental truth. Jerusalem might be destroyed, the Temple razed to the ground, the people carried away into exile, yet God's will for Israel, and His purpose through Israel, would ultimately prevail. Strong in that belief he matched the most intense suffering with a sublime faith. If in some of his words there is the suggestion of a cry for revenge, it is not for any personal satisfaction. His longing is for the vindication of the Eternal's cause ; he longed to see his people proving the covenant mercies of God.

"I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought his work on the wheels. And when the vessel that was made of the clay was marred in the hand of the potter, he made (shaped) it again another vessel as it pleased the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as does this potter. Behold, as the clay (is) in the potter's hand, so are ye in my hand, O house of Israel." (xviii, 3-6).

God gives men skill, intelligence and power. He has breathed His living Spirit into man, He has given man a large measure of freedom, but man is man and God is God, and it is God's cause that must ultimately triumph.

It was given to Jeremiah to see, even more clearly than his predecessors, that if religious life is to have spiritual and moral vitality, it must be based on a personal covenant-relationship between God and Man ; that in the heart of every man there must be a deep feeling of reverence for God, gratitude to God, and a sense of inner responsibility issuing in a life of willing obedience to God's righteous commands.



All worship, ceremonialism and ritualism are worthless, apart from the consecrated mind, the loving heart, the sanctified will. "I will put my law within them, and write it on their hearts."

So spoke Jeremiah for God in his own day ; so he speaks for God to our age and to every age.

## 8

EZEKIEL  
A PROPHET IN EXILE

THE book *Ezekiel* still presents a number of problems not yet finally solved. Not the least of these is the fact that the Prophet whose life's work lay with the exiles in Babylon not only appears to address a large part of his message to Jerusalem, but that he has also an accurate knowledge of all that is happening in that distressed city five hundred miles away. It is not impossible that correspondence passed between Jerusalem and the exiles ; news may even have reached Ezekiel from Jeremiah in a roundabout way, but there is no evidence to support such a view. Of the importance of the book which bears his name to Israel's life, of its tremendous influence on the re-establishing and re-ordering of the religious life and worship of the restored Jerusalem there is no doubt ; nor is there any doubt of the wider influence of the book over succeeding centuries.

The character of the Prophet himself has called forth the highest tributes from those who have considered his life's work. He was Priest, Prophet, and Pastor of Souls. "If a man's greatness be measured by the courage and moral strength with which he overcomes difficulties and performs his life's work, then Ezekiel was great even among those very great men, the Hebrew prophets."<sup>(1)</sup>

"He is a man of rich and versatile mind, thoroughly alive to the problems and perplexities of the peoples he addresses, and well qualified, by discipline alike of head and heart, to bring to bear upon their situation words full of insight and consolation, of warning and hope."<sup>(2)</sup>

The name Ezekiel has the meaning, "God is strong," or, "God strengthens." The Prophet, who came of a priestly family in Judah, was twenty-five years old when he

(1) *A New Commentary of Holy Scripture*, Dr. W. Emery Barnes, Vol. I, p. 521.

(2) *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, Professor J. E. M'Fadyen, p. 501.

was driven into exile with Jehoiachin and the leading people of Jerusalem by Babylonian soldiery. The year was 597 B.C. As he walked with the sad procession into captivity the Prophet experienced the terrible feeling of loneliness and dejection. One company of the exiles was settled at Tel-Abib, not far from Babylon and near a canal or tributary of the Euphrates. Here Ezekiel came later. It is fairly certain that he spent the next twenty-two years of his life at Tel-Abib, and that he began his great prophetic work when he had been in exile for about five years.

It is not easy to trace the Prophet's career. The book that bears his name is not a life story. It records visions and teaching nearly all of which are clothed in, what seems to us to be, a strange symbolism and figurative language. We cannot always be sure of their exact meaning although the general trend of the teaching is clear. Those to whom the Prophet spoke would understand. The word which God gave him to speak was not generally acceptable to his fellow captives. He could offer no prospect of release from captivity in the near future. Rather he was compelled to declare that even greater disasters must befall Jerusalem and the people before Return and Restoration were possible. The Prophet was a "Watchman" who spoke with a terrible realism to his people. The situation in which they found themselves and the trend of events in Jerusalem allowed of no soft words or the nursing of false hopes.

Many of the people in captivity blamed God for the disasters which had befallen them. Ezekiel reminded them of their responsibility. They had been forgetful of God's past mercies, they had been disloyal to God, they had fallen into idolatrous ways. The Prophet marvelled at their unwillingness to learn from their present afflictions and at their continued hardness of heart.

Chapters four to twenty-four have to do with sin and judgment. They are powerful chapters and they set forth mercilessly the inevitable consequences of faithlessness, idolatry and disobedience. Of the hardness and immensity

of the task to which God had called him, the Prophet writes in chapter two. He records the command :

"Son of man, go, get thee to the house of Israel, and speak my words unto them . . . thou art not sent to a people of strange speech and of a hard language, but to the house of Israel . . . Surely, if I sent thee unto them they would hearken unto thee . . . But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee ; they will not hearken unto me . . . they are of a hard forehead and a stiff heart. (Yet) I have made thy face hard against their faces, and thy forehead hard against their forehead. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead ; fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks . . . Moreover, he said unto me, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of the people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord God ; (tell them) whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear." (iii, 4-7).

Thus the command given to the Prophet—the roll he was bidden to eat—was not an easy command to obey but, in the decision willingly to obey God's word, the roll became in his mouth "as honey for sweetness." (iii, 3).

In Tel-abib the Prophet was constrained to minister to the individual needs of his people. Torn from Jerusalem the national centre, separated as many families were from their own kinsmen, the strong power of their national religion, in which the individual had counted for so little, was considerably weakened. The new conditions of their life called forth "a very notable announcement from the Prophet, of a doctrine which is fundamental in all true religion, namely that every man is responsible for his own soul."

No longer are they to quote, "The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." They are to realise henceforth that "All souls are mine, the soul of the father as the soul of the son ; the soul that sins, that soul shall die." Israel was now to understand that whoever persists in wickedness will die ; he who repents, saves his soul alive. "The sin of his ancestors will not ruin him, nor will the righteousness of his ancestors save him. It is not the family or the clan that will be held responsible before

God ; the individual sinner must answer for himself, and make a personal repentance."

The first exiles had been in captivity eleven years when the greatest disaster of all befell Jerusalem. The coalition of small states which Zedekiah had joined against Babylon came to nothing. After a terrible siege Jerusalem fell. Amid scenes of horror and appalling destruction the remainder of the people were banished. Only the poorest of the poor were left behind to be joined later by small groups who had escaped to the hills. To those already in exile the news came as a terrible blow. Despair and helplessness settled on all. Then it was that Ezekiel spoke his wonderful words of inspiration, comfort and hope. His people may be suspicious of him ; they may refuse to believe that God could raise up a Prophet among them in a foreign land ; but the Prophet was sure of his calling and his faith never wavered.

The desolation of his countrymen is brought out in the passage which tells how he came in bitterness of spirit to Tel-abib. "The spirit lifted me up, and took me away ; and I went in bitterness . . . the hand of Jehovah was strong upon me. So I came to them of the captivity at Tel-abib . . . and I sat there astonished among them seven days." (iii, 14, 15).

For Ezekiel there was no limit to be set to God's power. He could work His will not in Judah and Jerusalem only, but in Babylon or wherever He pleased. The Eternal was greater than any earthly ruler. He could dispose of Babylon and all her might. The Prophet declared to his people the assurance of Israel's restoration. God longed to re-unite the divided kingdom, to bring Judah and Israel together again. Let the people but repent and willingly return again to the Lord, and they should yet see His power wonderfully revealed in the days to come. When the people cried out bitterly that their sins and transgressions pressed heavily upon them, that their whole life as a nation was wasting away, the Prophet declared that it was not

God's desire that the wicked should die, but, rather, that they should turn to Him, seek His mercy, and live. "Give up your evil ways, O Israel. Why will you die?"

God's promise of the religious and spiritual renewal of Israel is beautifully told in the symbolic language of the "Valley of the dead bones." It suggests a resurrection ; a rising up in a new birth to a newer and nobler way of life. Its true power is to be a spiritual strength springing up from within the hearts of the people ; not a power based on compulsion applied from without.

"The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he carried me out in the spirit, and set me down in the midst of a valley . . . full of bones ; and he caused me to pass by them round about . . . they were many, and lo, they were very dry. He said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest (you alone know). Again he said to me, Prophesy over these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God, I will cause breath to enter you, and ye shall live. I will lay sinew upon you, and will bring flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath into you, and ye shall live ; and ye shall know that I am the Lord.

So I prophesied as I was commanded ; and as I prophesied, there was a noise . . . and the bones came together . . . and lo, there were sinews upon them, and flesh came up and covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind and say, Thus saith the Lord God, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

Then said he unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel ; Behold, they say, Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost ; we are clean cut off. Therefore, say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God ; Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, O my people ; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. I will put my spirit into you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land, and ye shall know that I the Lord have spoken it, saith the Lord." (xxxvii, 1-14).

Such was the Prophet's inspired word to his desolated people. The day would dawn when, in a new Temple, the praises should be heard in a restored Jerusalem. In that day justice and righteousness would characterise the social

life of the nation. The Eternal's spirit would be in the people's hearts, and all their worship would find its consummation in holy living. God would give them a new heart and mind, they would become more responsive to the promptings of His spirit, they would heed and obey His commands, they would know themselves to be His people and He their God. "I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes."

The vision which Ezekiel puts before his people is that of one land well cultivated, ruined places cleared and towns rebuilt, pasture lands well stocked with flocks, and a growing populace happy in its work and religious life. (xxxvi, 26-37).

The Prophet combined in his teaching the sureties of the judgments and the grace of God. When his faith was sorely tried, when, instead of a spirit of repentance, he saw his people giving themselves up to further idolatries and sinfulness, he spoke unflinchingly of the severities of the Divine judgments. "And as for me also, mine eye shall not spare . . . but I will bring their way upon their heads." Yet he held tenaciously to his belief that Israel would be restored and that God would yet achieve His purpose through her.

Ezekiel was not spared the experience of personal sorrow and tragedy. His hold on God and his unshakeable belief in God's firm grasp of him is evidenced in the words which tell of the death of his wife whom he loved dearly. Out of his own grief and desolation he was ready to learn how to speak to others in their bereavements. This Prophet used his own dark experience symbolically to remind his people of God's unwearying love for them, and to nerve them to meet courageously the further tribulation yet to come upon them.

"Also the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke (suddenly); yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Sigh, but not aloud; make no mourning for the dead, bind thy headtire upon thee, cover not thy lips, and eat not the (mourning) bread of men.

So I spake unto the people in the morning ; and at even my wife died ; and I did in the morning as I was commanded . . . Thus shall Ezekiel be unto you a sign (example) ; according to all that he hath done shall ye do ; when this (trouble) cometh, then shall ye know that I am the Lord.

And thou, son of man, shall it not be in the day when I take from them their strength, the joy of their glory, the desire of their eyes, and that whereupon they set their hearts, their sons and their daughters, that in that day he that escapeth shall come unto thee . . . and thy mouth shall be opened to him . . . so shalt thou be a sign unto them ; and they shall know that I am the Lord." (xxiv, 15-18, 24-27).

Ezekiel did not live to see the return of his people, the restoration of Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple. He had been dead thirty years when the descendants of those who first went into captivity returned to Judah, yet his influence on the re-ordering of Israel's life and her restored Temple worship is inestimable. Chapters forty to forty-eight set forth in detail the codes and rules that are to govern the restoring of the city, the rebuilding of the Temple, the method and control of its worship, and the future development of Israel as a Theocratic State.

Dr. J. Skinner has written : ". . . the fact is clear that the whole movement by which the new Israel was consolidated proceeded on the lines foreshadowed in Ezekiel's vision. His position in this respect may be compared with that of Augustine in the Latin Church. What the *Civitas Dei* was to mediaeval Christendom, that the vision of Ezekiel was to post-exilic Judaism : each moulded the polity of the age that followed." (1)

In his teaching Ezekiel stressed with increasing emphasis the great religious truths of his Prophetic predecessors. He, as they, by word and example, pleaded for repentance, for an unwavering belief in the Divine Providence ; like them he shared the great Messianic hope and made it, indeed, "a practical ideal in the life of the Nation."

(1) *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. I, p. 819.



To the restored and re-united Israel he gave the dominating conception of a nation whose life shall have its centre in the Temple wherein is seen the unspeakable glory of God; where, from His Holy Place, holiness shall radiate and permeate every activity and relationship of life; religious, political, social. Nor were the boundaries of Israel to be the limits of the Divine Glory and the Way of Holiness. Israel was to be the "centre of a renovated world, and the earnest of a latter-day glory about to dawn."

Of the vast power of other nations the Prophet was not unaware. He had his word for Tyre; he knew of her ships and trade and almost limitless resources, yet his heart rested not in material power but in that which is spiritual.

In a way that is not always easy for us to follow, Ezekiel spoke to the desperate needs of his people in their day. Yet his words, too, have gone out into all the world. Hidden in the symbolism of wheels and wings are abiding truths significant for the spiritual health of the nations in every generation. In the Prophet's life there is evidence of a vital faith, a knowledge of God's judgments, and a deep compassion that speak in every age to the deepest longings and aspirations of the human heart.

Ezekiel, priest-prophet, is numbered with those who suffered and laboured to make straight the way of the Lord. He trod firmly the path appointed for him, he saw with the eye of faith that which would be revealed more clearly to those of a later day, he entered into the darkest experiences of his countrymen, yet he ever kept before them the way from darkness into light through repentance before, and faith in, a living and ever-loving God. If, as is fairly generally agreed, Ezekiel's teaching lacks the breadth of sympathy and the wider freedom of Jeremiah, if in his writings there is nothing that combines the sovereign greatness with the sovereign grace of God as does Isaiah 40, if much of his work seems to lay the foundations of a legalism from the developments of which the early Christian Church had to break, it nevertheless remains true that

Ezekiel takes a "high place among the heralds of Christ in the Old Testament."

"His clear assertion of the value of the individual soul and of the efficacy of repentance, his profound sense of sin as ingratitude, and of the need of a new heart in order to fulfil the law of God, his impassioned vindication of the character of God as merciful and eager to forgive, are among the brightest gems of spiritual truth to be found in the pages of prophecy."<sup>(1)</sup>

(1) Dr. J. Skinner, *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. I, p. 819.

## 9

## THE PERIOD OF THE EXILE.

## RE-THINKING RELIGION

It is easy to understand how the grim fact of the Exile and the bitter, humiliating experiences associated with it, caused the religious thinking Jew much heart-searching. Old foundations were gone. Age-long ideas were no longer tenable. There were brave and faithful hearts among the exiles who insisted still that God was God, that His sovereign power still ruled over all, and that He must be praised even amid dire calamity; but there was no easy answer to the question, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" Tears and sighs came more easily than song and laughter. "We wept when we remembered Zion." (Jerusalem). Over many generations the belief had hardened that Jerusalem was inviolate. It was the Holy City, the Temple was in the midst of her. Suffused with the Divine glory and majesty—God's dwelling-place on earth—how, then, could Zion suffer harm or be overthrown?

Yet, even with the development of that belief, the outstanding Prophets of Israel had declared that the true temple of God was the hearts of His people, that unless godliness and goodness ruled there the mere fact of the city and Temple would ultimately avail them nothing. The true strength of Israel was the righteous character of her people and that alone made all worship and sacrifice acceptable to God.

The unqualified warnings of Micah and Isaiah can be matched in many chapters of the Prophetic writings.

"Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? . . . He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to humble thyself to walk with God?" (Micah vi, 7, 8).

"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord; I am full (utterly weary!) of the burnt offerings of rams . . . I delight not in the blood of bullocks and lambs . . . when you come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands, to trample my courts? Bring no more vain oblations . . . your appointed feasts (religious festivals) my soul hateth . . . I am weary to bear them . . . your hands, are full of blood."

"Wash you, make you clean; cease to do evil; learn to do well, (right), seek judgment, (justice), relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, (do right by orphan children), plead for the widow." (Isaiah i, 11-17).

The destruction of the city and Temple coupled with the harshness of the captivity bred deep hatred and bitterness in many hearts. Psalm 137 closes with a passionate cry for a terrible revenge.

Not all, however, gave way either to hatred or despair. Amid all the sorrow and humiliation that befell Israel in these calamitous days there were those who held tenaciously the belief that God had not entirely forsaken His people, that He had not cast off Israel for ever. They held firm the conviction that God would yet fulfil His purpose in Israel, and through Israel for the world. One great spiritual discovery was inescapable. The Exile showed clearly that God was no longer to be thought of as being confined to Jerusalem and the Temple. In far away Babylon, amid circumstances very different from life in Jerusalem, away from ritual and priestly sacrifice, God could still be honoured and worshipped by those who sought Him. Thus it was that this dark period of Israel's life saw much religious literary activity.

One of Israel's noblest characters, one of the world's outstanding spiritual leaders, whose name we do not know but who is usually referred to as Deutero-Isaiah (the second Isaiah) spoke reassuring words of courage and confidence, gladness and hope. "Comfort ye, my people, saith your God." "The wilderness and the solitary place shall blossom as the rose."

We have already seen how Ezekiel in Babylon planned with minute detail the rebuilding of city and Temple and

re-ordered worship. Many of the Psalms belong to the period of the Exile, and it is generally accepted that the theme of the great epic poem "Job" was first outlined by an anonymous but inspired writer of the days of the Exile or soon afterwards. Furthermore, not only were new writings produced, much reconsideration was given to old ones. On the part of many there was a strong desire for greater intellectual honesty in religious practice and thought. It became painfully obvious that there had been much wishful thinking in Israel's religion. Men had clung to views of God and life which simply did not square with history and experience. It could not, for instance, be honestly denied that some righteous men did suffer and that some wicked men did prosper. There was much evidence to shew that godly living did not always bring material reward, nor did all evil-doers necessarily come to a bad end. This problem of the afflicted righteous and the prosperous wicked baffles the minds of men in every age, and in every age causes many hearts to become embittered. For many people one of the hardest demands of faith is to learn how to divorce goodness and the desire for material reward in their thinking. All who would have a faith worthy of the name must learn to love God for Himself alone, to desire righteousness for its own eternal worth, to realise how evil and dangerous a thing it is to set a premium on goodness, to be able to say fearfully, yet confidently, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."

"Though vine nor fig-tree neither  
Their wonted fruit should bear,  
Though all the fields should wither,  
Nor flocks nor herds be there,  
Yet, God the same abiding,  
His praise shall tune my voice :  
For, while in Him confiding,  
I cannot but rejoice."

The arguments of the *Book of Job* are the wrestlings of a sanctified and deeply religious mind with this great problem. The grievously afflicted Job is driven to deny the stock arguments of his friends with a mordant rudeness. "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die

with you !” If the only solace they could offer him was to declare his agony and torment to be a due reward for his sins, then they were indeed “miserable comforters.” All his days as he had seen the light he had walked in it ; to live the righteous life had been his studied aim for himself and his household, and he would not, therefore, even in his extremity, seek a false comfort in a view which offended his intelligence and denied the facts of experience.

“Lo, I have seen all this,  
 Mine ear hath heard and understood it.  
 What you know, the same I know also ;  
 I am not inferior (no more foolish !) to you.  
 I would speak with the Almighty,  
 I desire to reason with God.  
 But ye are forgers of lies . . . physicians of no value.  
 O that ye would altogether hold your peace !  
 It should be your wisdom !

Hear now my reasoning, and hearken to the pleading of my lips.  
 Will you speak unrighteously (unfairly) for God, and talk deceitfully for him ?

Will ye respect his person ?

Will ye contend for God ?

As one deceiveth a man, will ye deceive him ? . . . .

Though he slay me, yet I will wait for him . . . .

I will maintain my way (integrity) before him.

(xiii, 1-8, 15).

Words are inadequate to describe the sufferer's desolation. In one moment of darkness Job bitterly regrets that he was ever born. Yet he maintains his integrity of heart, and not in his darkest hour will he indulge in wishful thinking or deceive himself by a pretended belief in outworn traditional views. With a daring faith he will believe in spite of everything that God is not a vindictive God, and that one day He will assuredly vindicate the trust he has in Him.

“But I know that my Redeemer (vindicator) liveth,  
 And that he shall stand up (for me) at the last upon the earth.  
 And after my skin (body) hath been thus destroyed,  
 Yet from (out of) my flesh shall I see God.”

(xix, 25, 26).

Chapter nineteen has been called the watershed of the book. Here the sufferer declares that God will not honour his fidelity only, but that he will be permitted to see his Redeemer—or “Vindicator,” as the word is better translated. “Apart from my flesh I shall see God.”

“ . . . . God a means hath found,  
Though faith and hope have vanished  
And even love grows dim,  
A means whereby His banished  
Be not expelled from Him.”

In such words fortitude of soul may be found by stricken men and women in every age, but the living faith of “my servant Job” turns our eyes to Another Sufferer whose Cross has the power to sanctify all our pain.

\* \* \* \* \*

The *Book of Job* as it stands in our Bible contains certain passages and chapters from the hands of different writers. Chapter twenty-eight, the poem on Wisdom, should be noted, and the majestic poetry of chapters thirty-eight to forty-one, which have as their theme the Transcendent Sovereignty and inexhaustible power of God, has an abiding appeal. Of the poetical grandeur of the book as a whole, Dr. W. T. Davison has written :

“The sublimity and simplicity of its leading conceptions, the picture of the august scene in the council-chamber of heaven, and of the sudden desolation and overwhelming sorrow in an earthly household, of Job lying in physical anguish and mental bewilderment upon the ash-mound outside his house, and the deep sympathetic silence of his friends broken at last by the heartrending wail of the sufferer’s despair—all indicate the hand of a poet at the outset, and prepare the way for the unfolding of the tragedy that follows. Only a close study of the book can give an idea of the richness and multiplicity of its metaphors, the concentrated vigour of its phraseology, its depth of human feeling, its portraiture of patriarchal life, and the impressiveness of the descriptions of external nature, which form throughout a majestic background to the moving picture of human pain and sorrow.

“Thus, out of the sorrows and varied experiences of the Exile, thinking men and women were compelled to review the old, to try to assess the meaning and purpose of present experiences, and to provide a worthier faith for the future.”

We now turn to consider one of the most inspired of all among Israel's outstanding spiritual leaders, one in whose writings are words which, more than any other, prompt the thought of Him who "was wounded for our transgressions," and with whose "stripes we are healed":—the Second Isaiah.



## IO

# DEUTERO-ISAIAH

## THE MAN AND HIS MESSAGE

### CHAPTERS xl-lv : lvi-lxvi

A BRIEF statement with regard to the distinctive character of the above chapters will be helpful. The assertion that "no critical conclusion is more certain than that they belong to a later period" than the First Isaiah, would not be challenged today by anyone who had given serious thought to the evidence available. In the Introduction to volume two of his now world-famous studies, Sir George Adam Smith briefly summarises the main facts.

"Chapters one to thirty-nine are addressed to a nation on its own soil. There are temple and king, and the living problems of religious, social and political life. On the other hand, chapters forty to sixty-six—or the bulk of them—came to a people in exile. In chapters i-xxxix the term 'righteousness' has to do mainly with man's moral and religious duty; the establishment of justice in the social and commercial life of the nation. In chapters xl-lxvi, except in a few cases, 'righteousness' is something which the people expect from God. They look for their historical vindication in God's reinstatement of them as His people. These chapters deal with profound questions. What is Israel? What is Israel's God? How is He different from the gods of other nations?"

"The immediate conditions of Second-Isaiah are those of the Exile, but 'his vision ranges from Abraham to Christ.' Again, he would understand the meaning and purpose of the Exile; he would know the Divine purpose for Israel in the future.

"In the patient and prayerful consideration of these great issues the writer is led by the Spirit of God to an experience of deep spiritual religion. He is given the power of great Prophetic utterance. To him is given, among all Old Testament visionaries, the clearest vision of the Christ who should one day come.

"In these chapters there is revealed that sense of sin with which Israel entered Exile, and which thus makes the literature of this period 'the confessional of the world.' There is that unexhausted programme of the service of God and man, which the Prophet lays down as Israel's duty and example to humanity, and there is that prophecy of the virtue and glory of vicarious suffering for sin, which is the Gospel of Christ and His Cross." (1)

(1) *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. II, intro.

A further quotation from a later writer may be cited :

"Everyone who reads the prophecies of Isaiah must be conscious of having entered a new world at chapter forty. The old Judah of courts and kings, of baals and false prophets, has passed away ; we read of the ruins and 'old waste places' of the holy land which the Second (Isaiah) calls upon his people to repair.

"The theme is first the coming deliverance, its divinely ordered and its human means ; and then the problems which confront the pioneers of the Return. Obviously more than a generation has elapsed since the Captivity. . . . The enemy is no longer Assyria, but Babylon. It ought not to be necessary at the present day to advance more reasons for claiming a Second Isaiah as the author of most of the concluding chapters of this book. The question is not whether Isaiah *could* have prophesied with so much detail of events in the distant future ; but rather whether his words would have been intelligible to the men of his own time, and whether they would have preserved them as a sort of 'Joanna Southcott's Box.' "(1)

Professor W. L. Wardle writes : "We may with confidence assign chapters 40-48 to a date between 546, when Cyrus gained his great victory over Croesus, and the year (538) of his triumphal entry into Babylon ; since the latter event is regarded as imminent, the actual date may be c. 540." (2)

Not many among the outstanding writers of any age have possessed a poetic power like unto that of Deutero-Isaiah. Our English translations convey something of the matchless poetic beauty of his words. It is nearly four hundred years now since our people first heard the Scriptures in their own tongue, and from then until now men have felt their hearts warmed and their minds stirred by the sublime utterances of one who spoke for God to His captive people twenty-five centuries ago.

Central in the Prophet's thought is the absolute Sovereignty of God. "*God the Omnipotent King that ordaineth.*"

(1) *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, Alfred Guillaume, vol. I, pp. 457/8.

(2) *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, p. 460.

Monotheism ; belief in one supreme God, had been stressed by Lawgiver and Prophet in Israel over many generations. In earlier days the people had accepted the reality of the gods of other nations—indeed, all too frequently, the Prophets had been stirred to indignation and alarm by the proneness of the people to turn from the Lord Jehovah to worship baalim and other idols. The gods of Babylon and the worship of them had not been without influence on Israel during the long period of the Exile (approximately sixty years), but for Deutero-Isaiah the thought of any other God than the Lord Jehovah is impossible. During all her chequered history He had been Israel's God, He still was and ever would be in the days to come, and now, when the time of her deliverance is at hand, the Prophet would have his people know that Israel's God is the Lord of the universe beside whom there is none other.

With Deutero-Isaiah Israel's God becomes fully universal. He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Perfecter of all ; the Alpha and Omega, the One in whose hands lies the destiny of all creation. In these lofty terms the Prophet would have his people think of God, and would inspire them to believe that through Israel the world should one day learn this truth and all nations bring their tribute to His feet.

"This was the True Religion which Israel was to proclaim to the world. 'G. A. Smith thus summarises the four points upon which this religion offers itself ; First, it is the force of the character and grace of a personal God ; second, it speaks with a high intellectual confidence, whereof its scorn is here the chief mark ; third, it is intensely moral, making man's sin its chief concern ; and fourth, it claims the control of history, and history has justified the claim.'" (1) "*And history has justified the claim,*" that sentence should be under-scored in all our minds.

The twin theme of chapter forty is that of the Divine Majesty and the Divine Mercy. Great as is the high and

(1) *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, vol. I, p. 459.

mighty God, all transcendent as His nature is, He is not remote from His creation. He is, indeed, vitally concerned with it. He determines the course of events, and men and nations are the instruments of His will. "Righteousness is an absolute quality of His nature," and His arm is ever outstretched to save.

Thus is the Prophet inspired to speak words of confidence and hope to his people. Thus he still speaks ! The true meaning of "comfort" is to strengthen and fortify the inner life of man ; to re-quicken an enfeebled faith, to give a larger vision of the meaning and purpose of life, to stir the imagination, and to nerve the will to new endeavour. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God."

And anticipating the great call of Jesus, "Follow Me," and speaking almost with the mind of Paul about "fellow-workers," "fellow-labourers" (together with God), the Prophet would have his people find life's truest and fullest satisfaction in the appointed work of the Lord.

"Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God."  
(xl, 2, 3).

God's demands are great ; the tasks to be attempted will call forth all that men can give. Valleys are to be filled up ; mountains and hills straightened out. Rough places are to be made smooth, and crooked places straight, and so "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed," and all men shall see it ; these are the commands of the Lord.

God feeds His flock and gathers up His lambs. Men are to proclaim the justice and tender goodness of the Lord ; with conviction and gladness they are to speak of His power and righteousness. They are to remember His majesty and sovereign greatness as against their own frailty and the shortness of their days ; they are as the grass that withers and the flowers that fade. He is from everlasting to everlasting ; His promise stands for evermore.

In supetlative 'language, with no little irony (and, perhaps, humour) the Prophet reproves those who forget

or never realise the existence of the Creative, All-commanding, All-controlling Power of the God who is Lord of the universe. He asks who among men ever measured the waters and the skies? Who "comprehended the dust of the earth, and weighed the mountains in scales, or the hills in a balance?" Who ever instructed or advised the Eternal? Who informed the Lord what or what not to do? Before Him the "nations are as a drop in a bucket, as the small dust of the balance; he taketh up the isles (distant lands) as a very little thing!" Not all the forests and beasts of Lebanon are an adequate sacrifice for Him.

The Prophet then shews the futility of idol worship. What material image can ever represent God? He would have men see the childishness of making images of wood or metal, of decorating them and trying to make them stand upright! What pitiable absurdity! He would have mankind consider the Lord Eternal's absolute power over the universe and all who dwell therein. The universe itself declares its creator's power. He is high and exalted—He "sits" over all. He spreads out the skies as curtains and to Him the inhabitants are as grasshoppers! Because of the Divine purpose He ordains earthly rulers who, however mighty they may appear to be, are soon cast down; they never even properly take root!

There is no one to compare with God: "To whom then will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare to Him? He made the stars and arranged their order; by his command they never fail."

Yet the Prophet would have his people know also that besides the sovereign majesty of God there is also the fact of His mercy and gracious goodness. They are wrong to complain that God does not know of their sufferings and humiliations. On the contrary, it is they who have never properly grasped the true nature, and power and purpose of God. "Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard? the everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary; there is no searching of his understanding"—there is nothing

outside the range of his knowledge! The right and satisfying way of life is to trust in Him, to obey His righteous commands, then—"He giveth power to the faint, and to him that hath no might He increaseth strength . . . . they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and never weary; they shall walk and not faint." Or, as Coverdale translated: "Unto them that have the Lord before their eyes, strength shall be increased. Eagles' wings shall grow upon them: when they run they shall not fall, and when they go they shall not be weary."

\* \* \* \* \*

The early years of the captivity had been harsh. Conditions may have varied in different localities, but Israel "had received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." As the years passed and the people gradually accustomed themselves to their new circumstances, life became more tolerable. The new generation that grew up among the exiles knew at second-hand only the rigours, misery and grim desolation of the first period of the captivity. Many of the new generation by their zeal and industry attained to positions of influence and responsibility in Babylonian life. Israel adjusted herself for practical purposes to the tragic situation in which she was placed. When the day of deliverance came not all of the captivity desired to return.

Nevertheless, she remained *Israel*. "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning" (skill). So vowed the exiles as they first sat by the rivers of Babylon unable to sing the Lord's song in a strange land. The longing for freedom and restoration persisted, and the cherished hope in many a breast was that one day a "new song" should be sung and sighs and weeping give way to gladness and rejoicing.

"Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise from  
the end of the earth . . . let the inhabitants thereof . . . .  
the wilderness and the cities thereof . . . .  
let them give glory unto the name of the Lord . . . ."  
(Isaiah xlii, 10-12).

When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion,  
we were like them that dream.

Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our  
tongue with singing; then the heathen said among  
themselves, The Lord hath done great things for  
them. The Lord has done great things for us :  
whereof we are glad."

(Psalm cxxvi, 1-3).

Cyrus, "the Persian," broke the might of Babylon at Opis. On the 3rd October, 538 B.C., "Cyrus came to Babylon, and henceforth bore the title of 'King of Babylonia.' Peace to the city did Cyrus establish; peace to all the province of Babylon did Gobryas his governor proclaim. Governors in Babylon he appointed."<sup>(1)</sup> The policy adopted by Cyrus towards the small states was a lenient one. "Experience had taught him the danger of allowing a disaffected population to exist in a country which might be invaded by an enemy; his own conquest of Babylonia had been assisted by the revolt of a part of its population; and he therefore reversed the policy of deportation and denationalization which had been attempted by the Assyrian and Babylonian kings. The exiles and the images of their gods were sent back to their own homes; only in the case of the Jews, who had no images, it was the sacred vessels of the Temple which were restored."<sup>(2)</sup>

Opinions differ with regard to Cyrus' religious allegiance. Professor A. H. Sayce writes: "The proclamation of Cyrus shows . . . that as he claimed to be the successor of the Babylonian kings, so also he acknowledged the supremacy of Bel-Merodach the supreme Babylonian God."<sup>(3)</sup>

(1) Prof. A. H. Sayce, *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible* 1901, Vol. I, p. 542.

(2) *Op. cit.*

(3) *Op. cit.*

C. H. W. Johns writes, "The policy which Cyrus pursued towards the Jews is variously estimated, but all accounts agree in stating that the restoration of the Temple was started by him, and in claiming him as a worshipper of Jahweh." (Jehovah).<sup>(1)</sup>

A. Guillaume says, "No longer were the gods of conquered nations insulted ; Cyrus went out of his way to do them honour. He did not fulfil the prophet's hope to the full, but he did 'let the people go.' For State reasons he seems to have laid aside (at any rate in his public life as the inscriptions witness) his countrymen's tendency to worship one supreme deity ; possibly the Persian inclination towards monotheism encouraged the Deutero-Isaiah to hope that Cyrus would embrace Judaism. He seems to contemplate this in xlv, 3."<sup>(2)</sup>

In these stirring days then, when the atmosphere was tense with the expectation of deliverance, there stood one among the captives of Israel who looked first not at the might and power of earthly rulers, but at the majesty and purpose of God. For him earthly kings did not order and decree in their own right, they, though all unwittingly, subserved the high purpose of the Eternal God, strong in justice, absolute and supreme in Righteousness, Who over-ruleth and ordaineth in all things. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (lv, 8, 9).

For Deutero-Isaiah, "the Prophet with a massive philosophy of history," the policy of Cyrus was not merely a clever move on the part of an astute ruler, it was a revelation of the hand of God in history, a manifestation of that Divine plan and purpose which Israel and all nations would do well to heed. It is the Eternal who says of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd (friend), he performs my purpose !" (xliv, 28). It is the Eternal who consecrates

(1) *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, single vol. (1909), p. 17.

(2) *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, vol. I, p. 465.



the subduer of the mighty Babylon to serve His purpose for Israel and the world.

The Prophet acknowledges no limit to the knowledge and power of the Eternal God. He it is who casts down and builds up. He will use Cyrus, "whose right hand I have holden," to subdue nations, to open doors and to keep gates from being closed, to break down doors of brass and to snap iron bars ; He, the Eternal, will go before him and level the mountains ! He will discover the treasures hid in dark places and the riches kept in secret. This is the Lord God who calls Israel by name, who has chosen her for His own special purpose, who delights still in a people who will not acknowledge Him.

"I am the Lord, and there is none else ; beside me there is no God : I will gird thee, though thou hast not known me ; that all may know from the rising of the sun (the east) to the west, that there is none beside me : I am the Lord, and there is none else.

I form the light, and create darkness ; I make peace, and create evil ; (calamity) I am the Lord, that doeth these things."

(xlv, 5-7).

To suffering and downcast peoples, to fearful and timid souls, to those whose faith is tried almost to vanishing point, the assured faith and convictions of the Prophet are an abiding inspiration ; they are as relevant today as in his own day.

"Remember this, I am God and there is none else . . .

I have spoken . . . I will also bring it to pass :

I have purposed, I will also do it.

I will give salvation in Sion . . . my glory in Israel."

(xlvi, 9, 11, 13).

In such a manner does the Prophet see the interplay of all the affairs of men and nations as the weaving of a pattern finally to be perfected by God. To him there is given an understanding of Israel's peculiar part in the Divine plan. This amazing man of God is given a spiritual insight that enables him to see his nation's weakness as its greatest strength ; her terrible sufferings as the source of her saving power. Who, among the enslaved nations, was so neglected and despised as captive Israel ? Who so lacked

beauty that any should desire her? Yet, because of her spiritual life, because of her hold on the one true God and God's sure hold on her, even in her piteous weakness she was stronger than Assyria and Babylon had ever been; stronger than the mighty empire set up by Cyrus. Such empires must pass away and the glory thereof, but Israel would remain, her vicarious suffering would be a healing for the nations; because of her the kings and nations of the world would one day bring their tribute to the feet of the One, True and Righteous God, and out of Israel would He arise; "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, by whose stripes we are healed."

Five centuries later there was born in Israel "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"; the Redeemer of mankind, the Conqueror of sin and death, the Lord of Life, the Saviour of the World—the Christ who fulfilled, who, indeed, exceeded, every inspired claim of the Prophet's word.

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To the question of the true significance of the "Servant of Jahweh," and the "Servant Songs," as they are called, much careful and detailed consideration has been given. "The Problem as to the identity of the Servant has evoked an enormous literature, and the flood shows no sign of abating."<sup>(1)</sup> The relevant passages are Isaiah xlii, 1-4; xlix, 1-6; l, 4-9; lii, 13-liii, 12.

A detailed study of this involved question would be out of place in such a book as this, but Principal W. L. Wardle's conclusion may be noted. "The real solution of the long-debated problem, then, is in the idea that, while primarily the Servant is Israel, often the picture of the Servant is drawn from an individual prophet, and an individual prophet may be regarded as in some measure embodying the ideal Israel. In other words we must treat the

(1) *Op. cit.*

‘Servant’ as of varying interpretation in differing contexts, but realise that for Deutero-Isaiah this meant no real break in the continuity of the conception.”<sup>(1)</sup>

Sir George Adam Smith’s noble words should also challenge our hearts. “The Divine Ideal which our prophet saw narrowing down from the Nation to an Individual, was owned and realised by Christ. But in Him it was not exhausted. With added warmth and light, with a new power of expansion, it passed through Him to fire the hearts and enlist the wills of an infinitely greater people than the Israel for whom it was originally intended. With this witness, then, of history to the prophecies of the Servant, our way in expounding and applying them is clear. Jesus Christ is their perfect fulfilment and illustration. But we who are His Church are to find in them our ideal and duty,—our duty to God and the world. In this, as in so many other matters, the unfulfilled prophecy is the conscience of Christianity.”<sup>(2)</sup>

The closing chapters of the book of Isaiah (lvi-lxvi) suggest a different outlook from that of the preceding chapters. The scene has moved from Babylonia to Palestine, and the problems to be faced are of a very different character. The generally agreed opinion seems now to be that, while certain passages in this section and possibly the whole of the last two chapters, are from Deutero-Isaiah, the chapters for the most part are from a later writer—or writers.

Thus to consider the “Book of Isaiah” as it stands in our Bible is not to lose anything but, rather, to gain much. We are enabled to trace the unfolding judgment and purpose of God over a long period in those far-off days; we are enabled to see that God never does leave Himself without a witness, and that He does move “in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.” In the recognition of these truths our own faith is stimulated. The Prophets who addressed

(1) *Supplement to Peake’s Commentary*, (1936), p. 12.

(2) *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. II, p. 305.

their God-given message to the people and problems of their own day, speak to the heart, mind and conscience of men through succeeding centuries.

Dr. T. H. Robinson's words are pertinent. "We have no reason or right to limit the Divine inspiration to that small number of men whose names appear at the head of our prophetic books, and it may well be that some of the most cherished messages that God has ever bestowed on man have reached us through nameless Prophets whose life is utterly unknown to us, and whose work has come down to us only in brief snatches and minute sections."<sup>(1)</sup>

It is instructive to recall that all modern Protestant missionary enterprise sprang from the inspired words of Isaiah fifty-four. They gripped the heart and fired the imagination of William Carey. The words below were the text of "The Deathless Sermon" preached at Nottingham on Wednesday, May 30th, 1792.<sup>(2)</sup>

"Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them  
Stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations.  
Spare not,  
Lengthen thy cords, and  
Strengthen thy stakes ;  
For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the  
left ; and  
Thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and  
Make the desolate cities to be inhabited.  
Fear not." (liv. 2, 3).

(1) *Prophecy and the Prophets*, p. 59.

(2) *William Carey*, S. Pearce Carey, 1923 ed. ch. vii.

## II

HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH  
A CALL TO ACTION!

THE closing words of Isaiah xl are a reminder to the people that men are not adequate in their own strength to the great demands which life makes upon them. By his own wit and wisdom, his own skill and sagacity, man can achieve much, but, if great and lasting work is to be done, if periods of reformation and restoration are to come to full fruition, man must supplement his own power by Divine grace and strength.

“. . . He fainteth not, neither is weary . . . He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.”

It was a glorious vision of a restored nation and a restored Jerusalem and temple that the Prophet put before his people, but it was not to be thought that the vision would suddenly be transformed into reality by any magical method. The new Jerusalem would not be brought into being by a kind of “Walls of Jericho in reverse process!” The city’s crumbled walls—razed almost to the ground, the ruined temple and the desolated homes of Judah, would not suddenly spring up out of the earth strong and complete in their old-time splendour, by the marching songs and braying trumpets of the priests.

The rebuilding and reshaping of Israel’s life would call for strong, courageous faith, for infinite patience and untiring zeal, for a determination of mind and will that nothing would daunt, for the constant renewing of the belief in God’s holy purpose for Israel. It would indeed be necessary to “wait upon the Lord.”

Not all the exiles were willing to leave Babylon. Many who had secured for themselves fairly comfortable positions and who did not find Babylonian ways and customs too irksome, felt no inclination to face a dangerous trek of five hundred miles to begin the enormous task of rehabili-

tating the towns and villages of Judah which, for the most part, had lain desolate since their fathers were driven out two generations earlier.

Very little indeed is known of the first eighteen years of the restoration. If, later, the challenging words of Haggai and Zechariah suggest a people almost bereft of hope, there are mitigating circumstances to be pleaded. When, in 521 B.C., Darius the Great ascended the throne of Persia, he had to contend with strong insurrection and revolt in several parts of the empire. Judah was not free from the tramp of foreign armies—and armies, then as now, “lived on the land.” To add to the difficulties there was a succession of bad harvests, and all too often the wealthier and more fortunate people ignored or deliberately exploited their less fortunate brethren. •

It was in the September of 520 B.C., that Haggai felt the call of God to speak to the people. The time had come to challenge them to throw off their despondency; to revitalise their faith. The self-complacency, almost cynicism, into which some of the people had sunk, and the general reluctance to attempt vigorously the restoring of the Temple and its services, called for strong words from the Prophet. He was most outspoken against those who were more concerned to put up fine houses for themselves than to rebuild the House of God. Such an attitude on the part of those whom he condemned was a clear indication to the Prophet of the low spiritual life of the people, of their enfeebled faith and almost vanished hope of a better day. Yet without faith and hope and vision a people are doomed. In such condition they need to be “lifted out of themselves,” and challenged to serve again a great and worthy cause.

It was in the second year of King Darius, the first day of the sixth month (September 1st, 520 B.C.), that Haggai challenged Zerubbabel, the son of the governor of Judah, and the high-priest Joshua. Haggai declared that the time had come to build again the Temple—the Lord’s House. It was shameful for wealthy people, and the rulers, to be

living luxuriously in their large houses, and yet to insist that the time was inopportune to rebuild the House of the Lord ; to be content to see it in ruins. The time had come when they ought in all seriousness to reconsider their way of life. They had sown, but had garnered little, had eaten and drunk, but were left unsatisfied, had clothed themselves, but had enjoyed no warmth, and "he who earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes !" It was time they began to reflect and to learn from experience ! They would do well to forget their own selfish interests for awhile and to concentrate on getting the necessary timber and other materials together for the building up again of the Temple in the midst of them. (i, 1-8).

In October of the same year Haggai spoke again. "Courage, says the Eternal. Courage, do your work, for I am with you . . . my spirit still remains among you ; have no fear." (ii, 4, 5). In the December the Prophet preached his third sermon.

Estimates of the value of Haggai's work vary. Not all would go so far as Dr. Theodore H. Robinson and deny to the Prophet a "really spiritual message." "Even the denunciations of sin and corruption which had marked the utterances of the pre-exilic Prophets are wanting, and the Prophet seems to have included stone and timber amongst the essentials of his spiritual and religious ideal."<sup>(1)</sup>

Against this J. C. H. How insists that the work of Haggai must "be recognised as of paramount importance." "The Temple worship was the centre of the religion of Judaism. No Temple—No Judaism. And almost it might be said, 'No Haggai—no Temple.' The Temple once built was to become the rallying centre of the Jews and the standing challenge to objective worship. Haggai's work prepared the way for Ezra and Nehemiah."<sup>(2)</sup>

It would seem that in the existing circumstances Haggai's message met the deepest need of the people. One's

(1) *Prophecy and the Prophets*, p. 177.

(2) *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, p. 604.

assessment of the value of his work, and of certain aspects of pre-exilic prophecy generally, will inevitably be determined to some extent by one's personal views on the relative value of the priestly and prophetic functions in religious life as touching both Judaism and Christianity.

Haggai's stirring appeal moved the hearts of the people. There was a willing and vigorous response. Twenty-three days after his September sermon, work was begun on the Temple. To those who were still reluctant to help, who declared discouragingly that the new Temple would never be able to compare in splendour with the old, who harked back continually to a "golden" past and held no hope for the future, the Prophet appealed for a greater faith in themselves and in God. "Mine is the silver, mine the gold, the Lord of Hosts declares; the latter splendour of this House shall outshine the former . . . and I will make this place prosper, says the Lord of hosts." (ii, 8, 9).

\* \* \* \*

Haggai and Zechariah were contemporary. There are references to Zechariah in Ezra (v, 1; vi, 14), but of both men we have no knowledge other than the records in the books which bear their names.

The *Book of Zechariah* divides into two parts; chapters one to eight and nine to fourteen. No one today who had given serious consideration to the question would deny the claim that the two sections are by different authors. The historical situation in chapters nine to fourteen is very different from that of the earlier part. The scene has changed from Judah as a small community concerned with the rival claims of Joshua and Zerubbabel, to a "larger Judaism in conflict with a world power described as Greek, whose strongholds are not Babylon, but Damascus, Hamath, Tyre and the Philistine towns." The first eight chapters are definitely related to 520 B.C. and the years immediately following. The Exile is spoken of as a recent event; there is the urgent call to undertake the rebuilding of the Temple; individuals are named and mention is made



of the particular tasks which they are called to do at this critical period in Israel's history ; these definite references place this section of the book with certainty. With regard to the later chapters Professor R. H. Kennett writes, "Apart from some points as yet unexplained on any theory of date, every section of these chapters is quite consistent with the known history of the second century B.C." (1)

The first part of the book records the utterances and visions of Zechariah. The Prophet's visions may have come to him while he was in an ecstatic state and set out later in writing. In one sense Zechariah may be thought of as the Bunyan of his day. Strange as his word pictures seem to us, their meaning would be clear to his own people.

When, in 520 B.C., Zerubbabel, a descendant of the House of David, and Joshua, of the line of High Priests, arrived in Jerusalem from Babylon, they were astonished at the low spiritual condition of the people. They heard with regret that little had been done towards the restoration of the Temple. Their presence gave added power to the words of the Prophet, and proved a spur to the people. Later, when differences arose between Zerubbabel and Joshua with regard to their respective states and spheres of influence, Zechariah supported the claims of Joshua, "declaring that so long as his conduct was blameless he ought to be the head of the Temple." The Prophet believed that Zerubbabel had his own sphere of usefulness, and that he should work harmoniously with Joshua for the good of the nation.

In the Prophetic utterances of Zechariah there is more than just an appeal for the restoration of the Temple and its priestly services. He appeals to the people for a true spirit of penitence. He would have them realise that present conditions cannot be divorced in thought from past happenings. Sins, individual and social, bring their inevitable consequences, and a new heart before the Eternal is as necessary as a new Temple. God's first demands are for faith, submission and obedience, and

(1) *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, p. 579.

worship and ceremonialism have no value before God if the lives of the people are not characterised by a spirit of true religion and moral power.

In the November of 520 B.C. Zechariah "spoke from the Lord of hosts." He appealed for a return to God. He reminded them of the evil which had befallen their fathers in earlier days when they had ignored the Prophetic warnings and had lived without regard for God's holy law. "But my words, and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? and they turned and said, Like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us." (i, 6).

In these words there is an anticipation of the warning given by St. Paul. Men and nations reap as they sow. Zechariah asks, "Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they abide for ever?" Is not the Prophetic word always there to guide and warn?

When Zechariah speaks again it is of the danger of religious fasts and festivals which have no spiritual motive, and which are disassociated in the minds of the people from righteousness and holy living. "When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and in the seventh month, even these seventy years, did ye fast at all unto me, even to me? And when ye eat and drink, do ye not eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?" (vii, 6).

In Israel's days of prosperity and peace the Prophets had always asked in God's name for justice and mercy, for compassion and understanding between man and man. "Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassion every man to his brother; and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, nor the stranger, nor the poor, and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart . . . . but they refused to hearken . . . . they stopped their ears . . . . yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone . . . . so shall they cry, and I will not hear, saith the Lord of Hosts . . . but I will scatter them with a whirlwind

among all the nations they have not known . . .” (vii, 9-14).

Zechariah, however, had thoughts for the future as well as for the past. He sought to give a vision of happier days to come. With sincerity towards God, with truth and goodwill in their hearts towards each other, men can transform all their religious activity, they can make their worship acceptable to God and receive at His hands the blessings He waits to bestow. Jerusalem may yet be called “The Faithful City,” and the Hill of the Lord may yet become “The Sacred Hill.” Elderly people shall sit at peace in the open spaces, the children shall play there free from all fear, and the day will come when the inhabitants of other great cities shall covet the favours of Israel’s God and shall turn their hearts to Him.

For Zechariah, as for the other great pre-exilic Prophets, the blessings that God desired for Israel would never be attained by material wealth and power alone. The decisive factors in a nation’s life are moral and spiritual. “This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel . . . . Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” (iv, 6). “Even while Zechariah urges Zerubbabel and Joshua to achievements as yet beyond them, he does not ask them to rely on material means. It is ‘by my spirit, saith Yahweh’ that the true Jew’s hopes are to be consummated. No army large enough to defeat the Persian forces, no mass of wealth or other material power is to win for them the victory, but the direct activity of the spirit of God. A successful revolution is always in the last resort a spiritual one.”<sup>(1)</sup>

The impatient zeal of one section of the people not to rebuild only, but to *re-fortify* the ruined walls of the city, caused Zechariah grave concern, and led to serious consequences. By this act the suspicion of the Samaritans was aroused. Political enmity developed, to be followed by a religious enmity which had lost none of its bitterness when Jesus walked through Samaria five centuries later. (c. Luke ix, 51-56).

(1) *Prophecy and the Prophets*, p. 182.

Once again Israel suffered severely for ignoring the Prophetic word. Zechariah's counsels of patience fell on deaf ears. "His mission was denied, and his advice disregarded. Only too late did the Church of Judah learn the truth of his reiterated assurance, 'Ye shall know that the Lord hath sent me unto you.'"(1)

Professor R. H. Kennett further writes, "Zechariah's teaching is characterised by sanctified common sense . . . Like Him whose forerunner he was, Zechariah would have gathered Jerusalem's children together as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and they would not."(2)

\* \* \* \*

In the rebuilding of the Temple, with the consequent re-development and intensification of ritualism and ceremonialism, with ever-increasing sacerdotal power, some scholars see a decline in Israel's religious life, or, at least, a regrettable falling away from the lofty conception of the nature of God and righteousness as revealed through Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah and Deutero-Isaiah. This point of view is put emphatically by Dr. Theodore H. Robinson. With the successors of Haggai and Zechariah in mind—Ezra, Nehemiah and "Malachi,"—he writes :

"The very forms of religion against which Amos had protested are now elevated to the highest position. Hosea and Jeremiah had no use for sacrifice, and Isaiah spoke in language which might well be interpreted as condemning it.

"Pre-exilic Prophets would not, perhaps, have swept it away altogether ; their concern was to see that men realised that religion was a moral and spiritual thing, and not merely a ritual one. The restoration of ritual to its old position as the essential element begins with Ezekiel. With him the other features are, however, the dominant ones. In Isaiah fifty-six to sixty-six, the same character appears, ritual plus righteousness. Already in Haggai Yahweh's demands centred round the Temple and its ritual, and in 'Malachi' the process seems to be complete. It is not without reason that this book stands in our English Bibles as the last of the Prophets." (3)

(1) *Peake's Commentary*, Prof. R. H. Kennett, p. 576.

(2) *Peake's Commentary*, pp. 575, 576.

(3) *Prophecy and the Prophets*, pp. 190, 191.

## EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

### A PERIOD OF RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

THE two books which bear respectively the names *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* were originally a single work. They appear as such in the Greek version known as i. Esdras. They are records of religious and political development rather than books of prophecy. Furthermore, they are the only Hebrew records we have over a long period of Israel's history. Incidents mentioned in these books range over a period beginning with the ascension of Cyrus to the throne of Persia, 538 B.C. to the end of the reign of Darius III, 332 B.C.

There are large gaps in the books; references are not continuous, and apart from the oddly-placed passage *Ezra* iv, 6-23, "the narrative passes over in silence the three-quarters of a century that lie between 516 and 458." There are difficulties with regard to dates. The "thirty-second year of the Persian king Artaxerxes" might refer to 433 B.C.—the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes I, or to 372 B.C.—the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes II.

Dr. G. Buchanan Gray writes: "Ezra and Nehemiah, which are the direct continuation of *Chronicles*, originally formed part of that work. *Chronicles* II, xxxvi, 22ff., are identical with the opening verses of *Ezra*, there is a striking similarity in style between those parts of *Chronicles*, *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* which are reproduced word for word from the sources used by the compiler; the dominant interest throughout is in the same subjects: the Temple and Temple-worship, the priesthood, genealogies, statistics; and the date at which *Ezra-Nehemiah* was written can be shown independently to be much the same as that of *Chronicles*. The date . . . is not earlier, but need not be later, than about 300 B.C. The generation that succeeded the return from the Exile and lived about 500 B.C., and the

generation of Ezra and Nehemiah (about 460-430 B.C.) are coupled together as periods that are (long) past." (Nehemiah xii, 26).<sup>(1)</sup>

The many problems connected with the books and their suggested solutions will be found in the larger commentaries, which will also reveal that certain problems still call for further consideration.

Our main concern, however, is with the life and teaching of these two outstanding men. Both men exercised a remarkable influence over Israel in their own day, and Ezra's influence in particular persisted in Israel over the centuries. It was Ezra who gave the Law "an authority which it never had before in Jewish history." His influence is mainly responsible for the later zeal in Israel for the "letter of the Law." "Ezra's is an austere and commanding figure, which has left a lasting impress upon the religious life of the Jewish people. He is the true founder of Judaism. By investing the Law with a sanctity and influence that it had never before possessed, and making it the possession of the entire community, he endowed the Jewish people with a cohesive power which was proof against attacks from without."<sup>(2)</sup>

Ezra, the scribe, was of a priestly family. He was anxious to leave Babylon and to return to Judah where he might re-establish the Law, invest it with a supreme authority and make it determinative for the whole of Israel's life; religious, political, civic. In 458 B.C. he gathered a caravan of some 1,800 males, including thirty-eight Levites and, after a period of prayer and fasting, set out for Judah. As he had frequently asserted that God would afford all necessary protection he did not ask for an escort. Artaxerxes gave Ezra wide powers and made extremely generous provision for him and his company. The journey took four months. (Ezra vii, 12-26).

Their reception by their own people in Jerusalem was not too cordial. Ezra found much idolatry, and soon

(1) *A Critical Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 97-98.

(2) *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, One volume, p. 253, G. H. Box.

became very disturbed by the practice of mixed marriages. His real fear lay in the fact that foreign wives were all too often responsible for the introduction of idolatrous practices in Israel's religious life. They were mostly polytheists—worshippers of many gods and goddesses. They had little concern for the monotheism—the worship of one God—of Israel. Their worship had little or no concern for morality or purity. Ezra could not forget the appalling degradation that Solomon's policy had brought on Israel, and his discovery that certain of the priests and princes had contracted marriage with foreign wives distressed him greatly. In the measures he adopted to deal with this problem he appears to have been ruthless and not to have let humanitarian considerations influence him. Many innocent women and children were banished from Israel.

After some delay, the explanation of which we cannot be sure, Ezra called a great assembly in Jerusalem, and read and expounded the Law to the people.

“And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the broad place that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel . . . and Ezra read therein . . . in the presence of the men and the women, and of those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law . . . and Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; and when he opened it all the people stood up; and Ezra blessed the Lord the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with the lifting up of their hands; and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.” (Nehemiah viii, 2-6).

The reading of the law was continued on the following fast day. “Nehemiah” ix, records Ezra's great prayer of praise, confession and re-dedication. The prayer appears to end abruptly. “Perhaps the appeal that followed is lost. But the painting of the picture of Israel's present state was appeal enough in itself. There was no need for further words.”

Of the actual relationship of Ezra with Nehemiah nothing can be said with definiteness. The scant references

in the memoirs of each to the other, constitutes a baffling problem. All such questions are secondary, however, compared to the fact that both men laboured with zeal, courage and power to achieve spiritual reconstruction in Israel. Both men manifested a faith in God's overruling purpose and power that triumphed over every difficulty, frustration and disappointment. Ezra's word to his own people has proved a source of inspiration to hard-pressed faithful people in every generation since. "The joy of the Lord—to rejoice in the Lord—is your strength."

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The question is frequently asked: "Does the age produce the outstanding man, or does the outstanding man shape his age?" History affords us many examples of men who seem to have been born specifically to serve their age in a distinctive way. Jeremiah believed that he was so called. "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew thee; before you were born, I sanctified thee; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." (Jeremiah i, 5).

Of Nehemiah it has been well said, "He is a conspicuous instance of the right man in the right place. It was his privilege to render great service to his nation, for which both his character and his position fitted him. He was patriotic, courageous, God-fearing . . ."

In the year 445 B.C., Nehemiah, living in Susa, the winter residence of the Persian court, heard from his brother, Hanani, who had just returned with others from Jerusalem, of the sad plight of the city and its people. The walls were still down, the inhabitants were in a really pitiable condition, and Ezra was having an almost super-human struggle to revivify the religious and political life of the land. Nehemiah was overwhelmed by the news. He sat down and wept. He mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of Heaven.

"I beseech thee, O Lord, the God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments; let thine ear now be attentive,



and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee at this time, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, whilst I confess the sins . . . which we have sinned against thee ; yea, I and my father's house sinned . . . we have not kept thy commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandest . . . Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand, O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servants, who delight to fear thy name ; and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. (I was cupbearer to the king)." (Neh. i, 5-11).

As cupbearer to Artaxerxes Nehemiah was in a privileged position. The office carried with it certain favours and, furthermore, it enabled Nehemiah to make personal contact with the king without seeking the favours and permission of other officials. "The holder of the office of cupbearer was brought into confidential relations with the king, and must have been thoroughly trustworthy, as part of his duty was to guard against poison in the king's cup. In some cases he was required to taste the wine before presenting it."

Despite his favoured position Nehemiah did not find it easy to make his request to the king. Four months had elapsed before the king himself gave Nehemiah the desired opening by asking him why he looked so agitated and miserable. The king's request, "Why is your face sad, seeing that you are not ill?" made Nehemiah afraid. Nevertheless, he determined now to declare all the burden of his heart. "I said to the king . . . Why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates are burned with fire?" When the king asked what favour he wished, Nehemiah prayed for guidance and then asked permission to return to Judah there to put in hand the rebuilding of Jerusalem. (ii, 1-4).

After asking about the length of time Nehemiah wished to be absent, the king granted him permission to leave, gave him letters of safe conduct, and an order to present

to Asaph, the keeper of the royal parks, to provide timber for gates and other purposes.

With his armed escort, Nehemiah reached Jerusalem safely. He thought it wise not to unfold his plans immediately to those in authority there. In company with a few of the friends who had travelled from Susa with him, he made a night inspection of the walls. Later, he spoke to the assembled rulers. He declared that the reproach that lay on the city—its ruins and desolation—ought to be removed. He then made known the power given him by Artaxerxes and his intention to rebuild the walls.

“Then said I unto them, Ye see the evil case we are now in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates are burned with fire ; come, and let us build up the wall . . . that we be no more a reproach. I told them that the hand of God was good upon me ; also of the king’s words which he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for the good work.” (ii, 17, 18).

Many in Jerusalem and Judah, of all classes, responded to Nehemiah’s appeal. The only exception seems to have been Tekoa. “Their nobles put not their necks to the work of the Lord.” (iii, 5). Nehemiah was not without his enemies. Whilst some were satisfied to express disagreement with his policy, others adopted an attitude of violent personal enmity. He had to contend with strong and treacherous opposition. His chief enemy, Sanballat, is called a Horonite ; the locality indicated is uncertain. It is possible that Sanballat had some official standing in Samaria. With Tobiah, the Ammonite, and Geshem, the Arabian, he defiantly opposed Nehemiah and sought to wreck his plans.

Nehemiah steadily pursued his appointed course, and the work progressed. The builders of the city walls knew much hardship and suffered at the hands of their enemies. Nehemiah armed them and they worked with their swords at their sides. Trumpeters, set at vantage points on the walls, gave warning immediately danger threatened. The opposition at one time was so strong that Nehemiah and his workmen slept with their clothes

on. Added difficulties arose from the fact that many who had left the towns and villages of Judah to labour under Nehemiah's direction, had perforce to let their cultivated land and crops stand neglected. Food became scarce, and it is possible that their enemies raided both their homes and farms.

It was a source of bitter disappointment and distress to Nehemiah to find that many of the wealthier classes in Jerusalem and Judah exploited the situation for their own ends. He reproached them with anger, and at a public meeting condemned them severely. He contrasted his own self-sacrificing efforts and suffering with their despicable conduct. His challenge was effective. Again his appeal met with a generous response. Chapter v records that some had mortgaged everything to help the work ; there were others who had given the money with which they hoped to purchase the freedom of their sons and daughters in slavery. After Nehemiah's great rebuke, those who had wronged their fellows and refused to help in the work, pledged themselves to restore all they had wrongfully taken and to ask for no further interest on loans.

The wall was completed and the gates were practically ready when Nehemiah's enemies determined to make one last desperate effort to undermine his authority and frustrate his final plans. Intimidation, ridicule and threats of force having availed nothing, they now resorted to cunning. Nehemiah was invited to meet Sanballat and others in the valley on Ono. He saw through their plot, and replied that he could not leave the work he was doing to enter into discussion with them.

"Then Sanballat sent his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand ; wherein was written, It is reported among the nations, and Gashmu says it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel ; for this cause you build the wall ; and thou wouldest be their king, according to these words, And thou hast appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah. Now shall it be reported to the king (Artaxerxes) according to these words. Come now, and let us take counsel together.

Then I sent unto him, saying, There is no such thing done as thou sayest, but thou feignest it (maketh it up) out of thine own heart. For they would all have made us afraid, saying, Their hands should be weakened from the work, that it be not done. But now, O God, strengthen thou my hands." (vi, 5-9).

The rumours which Sanballat said were abroad were extremely dangerous. Powerful and despotic kings are not prone to allow others to attain to power. When such rumours reach them they usually act swiftly and effectively and leave investigation until afterwards! Nehemiah had no ulterior motive. Strong in the knowledge of his own integrity he held steadily to his course. He accused Sanballat of spreading abroad false reports; he refused to be intimidated by Sanballat's spies and their talk of the danger that threatened his own life, nor would he act on the advice of the false prophet, Shemaiah, who suggested that he should shut himself up each night in the Temple to avoid the risk of assassination.

"I went into the house of Shemaiah . . . who was shut up; (he kept himself apart) and he said, Let us meet in the house of God . . . let us shut the doors of the temple; or they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come . . . And I said, Should such a man as I flee, and . . . who would go into the Temple (just) to save his life? I will not go in.

I discerned, and, lo, God had not sent him (to me) . . . Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him . . . . He was hired that I might be (made) afraid, and do so, (as he suggested) and sin; that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach (ridicule) me." (vi, 10-13).

The completion of the walls was fittingly celebrated. At a great service of thanksgiving and dedication, walls, gifts and people were purified; Ezra and Nehemiah headed processions which met at the Temple, and new appointments were made for Temple worship and sacrifice. Once again Jerusalem was a city "without reproach."

Nehemiah was compelled to return to the Persian court. His enemies were not idle during his absence. Before long, Temple laws were violated, priests were deprived of their livelihood, and rules governing Sabbath observance and worship were ignored. When Nehemiah returned again

to Jerusalem he dealt drastically with the new problems that had arisen. Tobiah's belongings were cast out of the Temple chamber, and it was restored to its sacred uses. (ch. xiii). For Nehemiah, as for Ezra, mixed marriages seemed to be an evil calling for the most severe measures. They appeared to threaten the very existence of the Hebrew tongue. An urgent appeal was made on the grounds of patriotism to preserve the language. How long it continued as a living speech after Nehemiah's day we do not know.

Thus Nehemiah served his age and nation. He was faithful and courageous; he could be magnanimous, but he was unyielding towards anyone who sought to hinder the fulfilment of what he believed to be his God-given task. He was not without his weaknesses. He spoke of his virtues, and saw no reason why God should not reward him handsomely for all that he had done. "Remember unto me, O God, for good, all that I have done for this people!" He was not free from a spirit of vindictiveness against those who opposed him, and his vision of Israel's future had none of the lofty, universal grandeur of Deutero-Isaiah. His zeal for a "pure" Israel outran all other considerations. Exclusiveness can be carried too far. The later history of Israel proved how dangerous it can be.

There is no direct evidence to substantiate the claim, but it is possible that the introduction of the beautiful pastoral story of Ruth into the Canon was to show, to the discerning eye, that the policy of Ezra and Nehemiah called for modification. Ruth was not a Jewess, but a Moabitess who married Boaz, a Jew. Her son Obed became the father of Jesse, the father of David. David, therefore, was not of pure Jewish descent. Jesus was in the Davidic line.

The decision to rebuild, at all costs, the walls of Jerusalem had much to commend it, but carried through imperiously it might arouse grave suspicions in the minds of neighbouring peoples and have repercussions in later

days. It has been suggested that words in Psalm cxxvii are a warning and a mild protest.

Except the Lord build the house,  
They labour in vain that build it :  
Except the Lord build the city,  
The watchman waketh but in vain.

In *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* there is much to shew the value of unflinching faith and courageous zeal, but the books sound a warning note. Narrow national exclusivism, a religious life mechanical and rigidly institutional, stand in direct opposition to the universal purposes of God ; they ever seek to limit and control the life and power of His free Spirit. Not least among the tragedies of Israel's life when Jesus came was the fact that not even the religious leaders understood : "The wind blows where it wills ; you can hear its sound, but you never know where it has come from or where it goes ; it is the same with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John iii, 8).

## 13

THE "PROPHET JONAH"  
THE CALL TO ISRAEL TO BE A  
MISSIONARY NATION

ONE of the most famous of all books in the English language is Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. It has been translated into many different tongues and is now known and read in nearly all the nations of the world. The characters in the book are given strange names. They portray the "nature" of people. They are character names: Mr. Talkative, Mr. Obstinacy, Mr. Worldly-wiseman, Mr. Timorous, Mr. Facing-bothways. We find also the names, Christian, Hopeful, Prudence, Piety, and so on. No one imagines for a moment that John Bunyan knew people who actually had such names. The names are used deliberately to portray the various characteristics, good, bad and indifferent, in human life. We do not have to read far before we find ourselves admirably portrayed in one or more of Bunyan's figures!

The book is an Allegory. Certain things are described under the figure or image of others. Throughout the ages the allegorical method has been used very effectively for the purpose of instruction and teaching. This method makes the presentation of truth more exciting and arresting than otherwise it would be. No one can miss the lessons Bunyan teaches in his *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Unfortunately, the truths taught in the *Book of Jonah* have, for the most part, been sadly missed. This remarkable book—one of the most remarkable in the Bible—is an allegory. Failure to understand this has done untold harm. Its true meaning and purpose have not been recognised, and thus, a book which is admittedly one of the most thrilling and challenging missionary books ever written, has been the cause of endless trouble and of undignified argument on issues that are totally irrelevant.

The name of the writer of the book we do not know, but he is not least among the inspired Prophetic voices of Israel. Its probable date is sometime in the fourth century B.C. "Among the inspired utterances of Israel's religion, this book takes rank with Isaiah liii, Jeremiah xxxi, 31-34, Psalm lxxiii, and comes as near to Christianity as anything in the Old Testament. By the Jews it is read as the prophetic lesson in the afternoon service on the Day of Atonement."<sup>(1)</sup>

The name *Jonah* means "Dove." It was a custom in Israel for many centuries to speak of Israel as a "Dove." A dove, like certain of our pigeons, can be used as a messenger bird. Many of Israel's most spiritually-minded leaders thought of their nation as God's messenger to all the nations. The writer of the book of Jonah would not believe that God willed Israel to become proud, narrow, intolerant and exclusive. He desired that all the nations should be brought to a knowledge of Israel's God; that they should find a new and nobler life in the power of His love and mercy, His judgments and righteousness. It is the truth that Israel's God is the one true God of the universe that shines out again in the book of Jonah.

For Israel to become God's messenger to the Gentile nations was no easy task. It would demand not only vision, zeal and courage, but also the spirit of patient endurance and suffering service. To go as a missionary messenger to Nineveh was to attempt the seemingly impossible. Nineveh was the capital city of the great Assyrian empire whose rulers and armies had trampled down the nations. Israel herself had been a victim of their ruthlessness. There was also the apparently insuperable difficulty of the fundamental difference in religious outlook. The nations outside Israel were polytheistic. They believed in a multitude of gods and goddesses. Their religious practices knew nothing of a worship that must find its highest expression in devotion to the *one* High and Eternal God, issuing in spiritual power and moral endeavour.

(1) *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, Dr. G. A. Cooke, vol. I, p. 380.



That many in Israel should be scornful of the heathen nations is understandable; that many who were not scornful should shrink from such a missionary task as that demanded by *Jonah* is also understandable, yet it was God's inescapable will that Israel's light must be seen among the Gentiles.

In Nineveh, "that great city," God's insistent call to repentance was to be proclaimed. Rulers and people had done great wickedness, but they were still God's people. He desired not their destruction, but rather that they should turn from wickedness and live. If they would turn to the one true God they too should know salvation and blessing. "If you can pity so small a thing as a climbing plant, shall not God pity this great city, with its massed inhabitants?" "You are sorry about the gourd, though you spent no toil upon it, you never made it grow—a gourd that sprang up in a night and perishes in a night! And am I not to be sorry for Nineveh, that great city, with over a hundred and twenty thousand infants in it who know not their right hand from their left, and with all its cattle?" (iv, 10, 11).

Such, then, is the inspired message of *Jonah*. Had Israel as a whole heeded this call and applied herself devotedly to this great work, her own history and that of all nations might have been very different. The universalism in the story appealed to Jesus. He was saddened in His day by the narrow nationalism and the appalling self-righteous exclusiveness that characterised the lives of so many of Israel's rulers and people. They knew not the things that belonged to their peace. He understood *Jonah* as they did not, as many Christians do not! "The 'sign of Jonah' (Luke xi, 29, 30) was the appearance of a Hebrew prophet in a stronghold of heathenism."

Dr. A. S. Peake has written :

"The marvel of Jonah's adventure with the fish was naturally selected for ribald mockery by enemies of the Bible, who, had they even an inkling into the true meaning of the book, might well have shrunk from thus profaning the Holy of Holies. The advocates of a rigid theory of inspiration were in this way often diverted from a right estimate of the book to undue emphasis on a trivial

issue, some being so ill-advised as to make belief in the marvel of the fish a test of orthodoxy . . . . It might, no doubt, be fairly urged that the writer was unduly optimistic, that the heathen world was not ready for the truth, and would not eagerly welcome it if it came. Yet not only was his the noble error, but it was nearer the essential truth, as the progress of Christianity abundantly proved. And the author stands beyond question among the greatest of the prophets, by the side of Jeremiah and the second Isaiah. That out of the stony heart of Judaism such a book should come is nothing less than a marvel of Divine grace."(1)

In his mighty and inspired challenge the writer of the book of Jonah addresses a larger "Israel" today. He speaks urgently to us in God's name—if we have eyes to see and ears to hear! The message of Israel's God, the Gospel of His redeeming love in Jesus, still needs to be proclaimed in "heathen lands afar": but in our own and other lands also where men *have* heard and yet have forgotten or deliberately ignored the Divine love and truth and judgments, must His Name still be proclaimed and magnified.

For us, as for Israel of old, the task may seem frightening and well-nigh impossible, yet the need and opportunity were never greater, nor is God's arm shortened that it cannot save, and the measure of the security and happiness of the nations in the days to come, will be the measure of the knowledge and acceptance of God's word and love in Jesus Christ, among them.

\* \* \* \*

The Psalm put into Jonah's mouth (ii, 2-9) is an insertion introduced into the text by a later writer. "It is so out of harmony with Jonah's situation that the writer himself cannot have inserted it." It is, nevertheless, an inspired and wonderful prayer, and never does it seem more so than "when upon life's billows we are tempest tossed."

"Out of my anguish I called to the Eternal,  
and he answered me;  
from the belly of death I cried,  
and thou didst hear my voice.

(1) Peake's *Commentary on the Bible*, pp. 556, 558.

Thou hadst flung me down, deep into the sea,  
and the floods rolled around me,  
all thy breakers and billows swept over me.  
I thought I was flung out of thy sight,  
never to see thy sacred shrine again.  
The waters closed to choke me,  
the deep rolled round me,  
sea-weeds wrapped my head,  
I sank to the very roots of the mountains,  
to a land where bars shut behind me for ever.  
But from the pit thou didst lift my life,  
O Eternal my God.  
When I lay fainting, I remembered the Eternal,  
and my prayer reached thee, reached thy sacred shrine,  
Those who heed vain idols leave their real refuge,  
But I will sacrifice to thee with loud thanksgiving ;  
what I have vowed I will perform,  
for 'tis the Eternal who delivers."

# "DANIEL"

## THE MESSAGE FOR THE MOMENT

Nor only in Israel, but among other nations too, the harsh and stern experiences of life have compelled men to consider the "last things." Particularly in times of great upheaval and national calamity, when "men's hearts are failing them for fear," their imaginations have been quickened and their minds stimulated to consider the form and the end of things. This study of "last things" is called Eschatology; the literature associated with it is called Apocalyptic. Our English Bible has two Apocalyptic books; *Daniel* and *Revelation*. The latter is sometimes referred to as the Apocalypse. There are in the Bible shorter apocalyptic passages incorporated in other books.

It is interesting to note that the Hebrew Old Testament does not include *Daniel* among its Prophetic writings. It is now generally agreed that the Hebrew Prophetic Canon was closed early in the second century B.C., and that *Daniel* was written later. The book belongs to the years of the Maccabæan revolt, its date is probably 165 B.C. The purpose of the book was to encourage men to stand firm in their faith in the face of a terrible persecution and martyrdom; to urge them to hold fast the belief that God was with them amid all their sufferings, that one day He would vindicate their steadfastness, that in His own time He would "put down the mighty from their seats," He would "exalt the lowly and meek" and would establish His righteous decrees.

Of the man Daniel we know nothing beyond "the picture of him presented in the book." The writer of the book may have taken the name from Ezekiel xiv, 14, xxviii, 3. Around this old-time hero of the people he "built up a marvellous picture of the nation—its past history, present plight, and future prospects." He inspired his fellow men in a desperate hour to manifest to the world

an unsurpassable loyalty and devotion. As they faced their fanatical persecutors in the midst of appalling butchery and slaughter—in the midst of a “burning fiery furnace”—he put it into their hearts to say with an assured calmness, “If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us . . . But if not, be it known to thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.” (iii, 18, 19).

Ours is not the first age in which evil men have defied the State, nor the first age in which faithful men, willing to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s have, nevertheless, said very definitely to Caesar “thus far and no farther,” and have then steadily set their hearts to meet the consequences of prison and concentration camp unmovable in their fidelity to Him who will stand with them in the “burning fiery furnace”—Who is able, if He wills, to deliver them, but who, if He does not, will give them all necessary grace and strength to say, “But if not, be it known unto thee . . . .”

We need not be unduly concerned to discover that *Daniel* is not “history,” any more than we are concerned because *Pilgrim’s Progress* is not “history.” The faithful, inspired writer of *Daniel* spoke to the hearts of men in the deepest and most searching experiences of life. He has spoken through the centuries and he speaks today. He speaks in a peculiar way at this time to Israel in Europe, —again in the “burning fiery furnace.”

In his noble plea to his countrymen to stand fast in the faith, in the story method he adopted to suit the terrible circumstances of that day, and in his own burning faith, he was right. Babylon, Syria, Greece, have gone, and other great empires, too, yet Israel remains; out of her, a century and a half after *Daniel*, He was born, whom we believe to be the One Hope and Saviour of mankind.

The historical situation which prompted the writing of *Daniel* can be briefly portrayed. In 202 B.C. a Syrian king, Antiochus, afterwards called the Great, brought Palestine into subjection and appointed Syrian governors

to rule and levy taxes. Antiochus adopted a moderate policy. He did not interfere with the Temple worship and, later, for varied motives, he gave monetary help to enable the Temple services to be continued. He was killed in an insurrection at Elymais, 187 B.C. His second son, Antiochus iv, was given a number of names. He is usually referred to as Antiochus Epiphanes—the latter meaning "Illustrious." "Epimanes," madman; "Nikepharos," victorious; and on the coins there was an inscription, "Theos," god. He was kept a prisoner in Rome for fourteen years, but succeeded to his father's throne in 175 B.C. He aimed with determination to spread Greek teaching, ideas, and ways of life throughout the whole of his dominions. By such means he believed that he could bring all his subject peoples into some semblance of unity.

Onias, the high priest, was driven from Jerusalem, and Jason, his brother, appointed in his stead. Jason promised to pay a large sum of money and to intensify the efforts being made to impose Greek ways of life on the people. In 171 B.C. Jason was supplanted by Menelaus who, hearing a rumour that Antiochus had died whilst campaigning in Egypt, decided to besiege Jerusalem. On hearing this news Antiochus "went mad." He marched at once on Jerusalem, massacred thousands of the people, plundered the Temple and sent its treasures to the Greek temple at Antioch, and set the cruel Philip, a Phrygian, to govern the desolated city.

Three years later Antiochus was warring successfully against Egypt when his Roman overlords ordered him to bring his campaign to an end. "Mad with anger," he turned and vented his rage on Jerusalem. Apollonius, one of his chief captains, entered the city on a Sabbath day with twenty thousand men. There was no effective resistance and Apollonius began to carry out his instructions to exterminate the inhabitants and to people Jerusalem and the surrounding country with a Greek population. Words cannot describe the sufferings of the Jews. Great numbers of the men were killed. A few escaped to the hills with

Judas Maccabæus. Women and children were sent into slavery. Jerusalem was burnt out, but, later, part of it was rebuilt as a Syrian garrison and such it remained for twenty-six years. Attempts were made to stamp out completely the Jewish religion. Sabbath observance and worship were forbidden. To offer sacrifices or to be found in possession of a book of the Law were crimes punishable by death. Menelaus continued to act nominally as high priest, but the office was a sinecure. Upon the remains of the altar for burnt offerings a smaller altar was set up. On it sacrifices were made to the Greek god, Zeus. Drunken orgies were indulged in in the courts of the Temple, and, to the horror of the religious few, swine were killed and offered as sacrifice on the Temple altar. Israel suffered the Abomination of Desolation.

Scattered about the hills of Judah were small groups of faithful people. In the midst of the furnace of suffering they kept alive their faith in God, they cherished their Law and religious customs, they refused to bow down to man or to man-made images, and they held to the vision of an Israel restored religiously and politically. No Prophetic voice spoke to encourage them. Such a voice would have been silenced immediately. But the written word is sometimes as powerful as the spoken word. "It was just at this crisis, and immediately after the outbreak of the rebellion against Antiochus, that the Book of Daniel was written. It sprang, as Ewald says, 'from the deepest necessities and the noblest impulses of the age.'"

As the writings were secretly circulated and read, the hearts of the people were moved. The setting of the story was cleverly set back four centuries upon the stage of history. Jerusalem had passed through the fires before. It had been invested by Nebuchadrezzar; the siege had lasted nearly two years and had reduced the trapped people to a state of indescribable destitution. It was not Nebuchadrezzar now, but Antiochus. The story may be of the past, but it related to the present. It strengthened men, it breathed hope, it kept alive the vision of deliverance and

freedom. They were "thrown to the lions," they stood in the midst of the "burning fiery furnace," but God was still God, and whatever earthly rulers, drunk with power, might do to them, they could not overthrow God. He could stop the mouths of lions; He could deliver from the furnace, if He so willed. "But if not . . ."

Israel is bitterly oppressed in the world today. *Daniel* is once again the Message for the Moment. She has suffered at the hands of many, but she has read the obituary notices of all her conquerors. *Daniel* is a *living* book. To see it in its historical setting, to know its true meaning and purpose, to have an appreciation of its inspired conception and daring production is to feel in one's own heart something of the strange and powerful working of the Spirit of an ever-living God in the hearts of faithful, sorely tried men of every generation. The book is the "appeal of a true patriot to his people to remain firm and unmoved in the faith in spite of suffering and even martyrdom. The comfort and inspiration which it brought to the Jews in their hour of trial secured it an imperishable place in their literature, and it was handed over to Christianity as a priceless legacy."<sup>(1)</sup>

The book itself is written partly in Hebrew and partly in Aramaic. It divides into two parts: i-vi, vii-xii. Throughout, however, *it is the story that matters*. The writer and those who collaborated with him in his great task never faltered. They made their witness undaunted even by the most savage cruelty. The belief that the time would come when the oppressor nations themselves would reverently acknowledge Israel's God was set forth.

"Then king Darius wrote unto all the peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, that in all the dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel; for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth; (he) who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions." (vi, 25-27).

(1) Professor T. H. Andrews, *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, p. 523.



There is in the writings also an appeal for penitence. Israel had not always listened to the voice of her true Prophetic leaders as she might have done. Her waywardness and disobedience had grieved God and had made certain disasters inevitable. The prayer in chapter nine is one of the noblest prayers in the Bible. It expresses adoration, penitence, confession and supplication. Not only Israel, but Christian communities during the ages, have been called upon to pass through the "burning fiery furnace." They have been faced with the stark alternative of submitting to evil rulers who defied the state or of facing extermination. The early Christians faced the torturers rather than burn incense to Caesar, and a fanatical nationalism demanding the absolute subjection of man, body, soul and spirit, has claimed its victims through the centuries even as it has done today. Yet faithful men and women have stood firm, have "dared to be a Daniel!" And the unknown multitudes of Daniels, Shadrachs, Meshachs and Abed-negos are the "salt of the earth," "the last who shall be first," "the meek who inherit the earth," those "of whom the world is not worthy," the "elect" among the "great cloud of witnesses."

The Nebuchadrezzars, the Antiochuses, the Caesars of bygone days are names, only, in history. We might well say that they were broken on the wheel of history. But the Word of God spoken by inspired men abides. Earthly empires come and go; *The City of God remaineth.*

"God's word, for all their craft and force,  
One moment shall not linger,  
But, spite of hell, shall have its course;  
'Tis written by His finger.  
And though they take our life,  
Goods, honour, children, wife,  
Yet is their profit small;  
These things shall vanish all,  
The city of God remaineth.

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Of the reference to a certain Daniel in the book of Ezekiel, Dr. J. Taylor writes, "The two passages were

written respectively about B.C. 592 and 587. They mention Daniel as an extraordinary righteous and wise man, belonging to the same class as Noah and Job, whose piety availed with God on behalf of their unworthy contemporaries. All three evidently belonged to a long-distant past: Ezekiel's readers were familiar with their history and character . . . Round the name of Daniel, in the course of the ages, stories illustrating his qualities of piety and wisdom had gathered. The writer of the book of Daniel worked up the material afresh with much skill."<sup>(1)</sup>

CHAPTER NINE, *verses iii-xix*

"And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes, I prayed unto the Lord and made confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments; we have sinned, and have dealt perversely, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even turning aside from thy precepts and from thy judgments: neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faith as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass . . . against thee. O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face . . . To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses; for we have rebelled against him; neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even turning aside, that they should not obey thy voice; therefore hath the curse been poured out upon us . . . for we have sinned against him. And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet have we not intreated the favour of the Lord our God, that we should turn from our iniquities, and have discernment in thy truth. Therefore hath the Lord watched over the evil, and brought it upon us; for the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth, and we have not obeyed his voice. And

(1) *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, one vol., pp. 175-6.

now, O Lord, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day ; we have sinned, we have done wickedly. O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, let thine anger and thy fury, I pray thee, be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain ; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are round about us.

Now therefore, O our God, hearken unto the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate ; for the Lord's sake, O my God, incline thine ear, and hear ; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name ; for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear ; O Lord, forgive ; O Lord, hearken and do ; defer not ; for thine own sake, O my God, because thy city and thy people are called by thy name."

15

"PREPARE YE THE WAY"  
FROM "DANIEL" TO JOHN BAPTIST

THE task of restoring Temple worship and of re-establishing ritualism in a supreme place in Israel's religious life, was begun by Ezekiel. Haggai and Zechariah, Ezra and Nehemiah, brought his work to its completion. Thus it came to pass that the great Prophetic watchwords of Repentance and Righteousness—Repentance and Righteousness above and before all else—gave place to "ritual *plus* righteousness." "Already to Haggai, Yahweh's demands centred round the Temple and its ritual, and in "Malachi" the process seems to be complete.

Over a long period the true Prophetic voice was silent in Israel. It is significant, however, that immediately before the advent of Jesus, almost as though it were absolutely necessary to "prepare the way" for the most stupendous event in history—the birth of the Lord Jesus—the Prophetic voice, as powerful and as challenging as in the days of old, should be heard again in Judah. "In those days cometh John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand . . . bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance."

John Baptist's life was severed almost completely from Temple worship and ritualism. His was the hard school of the desert, of keen thought, of lonely meditation and waiting upon God. His word, when at last he went forth, was simple to the point of abruptness. It was again the old, unequivocal, Prophetic demand, Repentance and Righteousness. Repentance and Righteousness, first and foremost, above and before all else.

A brief survey of Israel's religious and political development from the days of "Daniel" to the coming of John Baptist and a knowledge of the religious and political

background of the Baptist's day, enables one to understand more clearly how striking and disturbing were the desert Prophet's person and message. Israel, for the most part, was a spiritual wilderness when John Baptist heralded the coming of the Lord.

"Once again, we have to look at environment—at the unhappy land of Palestine, the thoroughfare of rival kings of Egypt and Syria as of old, at the growing chaos and meaninglessness of the world in the last two centuries before Christ, at the helpless posture of true religion between Seleucids, Herods, and Romans without and false friends within, liberators turned tyrants, and priests proved secular-hearted. Once again, there was much to endure, much to explain; and, as in such times, questions were asked; religion needed 'theories and justifications' if it was to go on; Antiochus was too serious a problem to leave religion 'a delightful matter of course'; the thinker had once more to justify the ways of God to men, and it was no easy task."<sup>(1)</sup>

During the century and a half between Antiochus and John Baptist, Israel enjoyed a fairly long period of political independence. Simon the Hasmonaeon delivered Jerusalem from the power of the Seleucid armies in 142 B.C., and it remained free until Pompey annexed Syria and brought the Hasmonaeon rule to an end in 63 B.C. "For eighty years there were once more Jewish sovereign princes reigning in Jerusalem, just as there had been in the great days of old, before the kingdom of the house of David had been destroyed by Babylon. Crowns sat uneasily, however, on kingly heads. In 153 B.C., Jonathan, the brother of Judas Maccabaeus, was appointed high priest by Alexander Balas, a pretender occupying for the time being the Seleucid throne. Ten years later Jonathan was murdered by another pretender to the throne, and his brother Simon succeeded to the high priesthood. In the first year of Simon's leadership "the yoke of the heathen was taken away from Israel."

(1) *Progress in Religion*, T. R. Glover, pp. 311, 312.

Judas Maccabaeus and his brothers had shown remarkable courage and tenacity in their defiance of pagan rulers who sought to keep Israel in subjection. By their powers of political and military leadership they gained at length their desired end, but that very power robbed them of true religious and spiritual zeal. In the crimes they committed, in their personal and family feuds, in their greed for territory, in their political cynicism and ruthlessness, they matched the pagan rulers whom they so strenuously opposed. "The house of Hashmon in possession of the power showed anything but a saintly character. . . . the pious in Israel came to regard this family of prince-priests with abhorrence, as usurpers who defiled the sacred things they handled."

Judas Aristobulus was high priest from 104-103 B.C. In his brief reign he succeeded in the conquest of Galilee and adopted the harsh policy of compelling the non-Jewish population to accept the Jewish faith. "It is possible, therefore, that some of the twelve Apostles were descended from Gentiles, converted forcibly, a century before, to Judaism." The conquests of King Jannaeus Alexander (103-76 B.C.) mark the height of the Hasmonaeen power. Jannaeus appears to have been devoid of any religious sentiment. "He was just a savage barbarian, cruel, vindictive, and drunken. The illness from which he died had been brought on by intemperance."

The excesses of the ruling houses and their immediate followers, their utter religious bankruptcy and total lack of concern for Israel's spiritual life, stiffened the determination of those of their countrymen who desired not only political independence, but wished also to preserve the nation's religious life and worship. There were those in Israel for whom the Law was still God's word; a word that must be obeyed, and, if need be, defended at the cost of life itself.

The breach between the ruling houses and the religious parties gradually widened. The beginnings of the sects of the Pharisees and Sadducees are obscure. The Pharisees

set the Law above all else. They would have it observed in every detail; for them it was determinative in all the activities and relationships of life. As their attitude hardened over the years in the conflict with their political rulers, they came to look upon all who would not zealously observe the Law as "sinners."

The name *Pharisees* means "the Separated." The Pharisees of these days were the "puritan element" during this hard, transitional period in Israel's history. Unfortunately, the fine contribution they made towards the preservation of Israel's spiritual life bred in them, in later years, a spirit of harsh intolerance and religious pride. Their obsession with the myriad details of the Law—"a burden grievous to be borne"—their strong tendency to outward display rather than to inner reality in religious matters, their hard legalism and lack of concern for human considerations, their self-righteousness and religious play-acting, called forth from Jesus the sternest denunciations: "Woe unto you, Pharisees, hypocrites,"—actors! Nevertheless, in extenuation it must be said that, but for the Pharisees of earlier days, much that was best in Israel's religious genius and tradition might have been lost altogether.

The aim of the Sadducees was to preserve Temple worship in Israel according to the demands of the Mosaic Law. They looked askance, however, at anything approaching religious zeal. They favoured a strong government of the type that would protect the interests of the more favoured classes and inflict severe penalties on wrong-doers. They disliked the apocalyptic views held by many of the Pharisees; and were generally sceptical in their attitude to the Apocalyptic writings which came into being and exercised such a great influence in the days of Israel's bitter sufferings under Antiochus. They further denied belief in the resurrection of the dead and in any doctrine of rewards and punishments after death.

Mr. Claude Montefiore points out in his book *The Synoptic Gospels*, "the Sadducees rather than the Pharisees

were responsible for the condemnation of Jesus to death. Caiaphas and Annas were Sadducees."

A third religious party in Israel was the Essenes. They were a somewhat strict, monastic Order, having community of goods and pledged to continence. They rigidly observed the Sabbath and Purity laws, but repudiated animal sacrifice, and in later years embodied other Eastern mystical ideas in their beliefs.

The conflict between the religious parties and the political forces in Israel grew stronger with the passing years. When Jannaeus was defeated by the Nabataean king Obodas he returned to Jerusalem as a fugitive. The people, under the leadership of the Pharisees, opposed him. There was civil war for six years. When Jannaeus with his Gentile mercenaries proved to be too strong for the Jewish people under arms, they called to their help a Seleucid underling, Demetrius III Eukairos. Jannaeus was defeated and fled, but fear that Demetrius might try to bring Jerusalem again under Seleucid power caused many who had opposed Jannaeus to offer him their support. He returned to Jerusalem, beat down the Jewish army that still opposed him, and entered the city in triumph. "He had eight hundred of his captives, no doubt in large part Pharisees, crucified in rows together, so that he could enjoy their dying agonies from his palace terraces, where he caroused with the women of his harem."

Pompey, the Roman, arrived in Damascus in 63 B.C. Jewish representatives visited him and implored him to bring to an end the Hasmonaean power and to appoint a high priest after the manner of olden days to rule in Jerusalem. Pompey eventually compelled the surrender of Aristobulus and "took him away to Rome with him, so that the 'King of the Jews' might walk at his triumph amongst the train of captives whom the conqueror of the East brought back to exhibit to the Roman people." The priests who defended the Temple-hill held out for three months. Pompey did not touch the Temple treasures, but he entered the Holy of Holies—"an outrage which



entered deeply into the heart of the people." The Roman appointed Hyrcanus to be high priest and civil ruler in Jerusalem. He was given the title "Ethnarch," not king. The house of Hashmon was now too weak to cause much trouble. For the next sixty years another power was to dominate Jewish life.

Two generations earlier John Hyrcanus had subjugated the Humaeans and compelled them to be part of the Jewish state. Now, one of their number, a clever intriguer, Antipater, became a power to be reckoned with. His wife belonged to a powerful Jewish family settled among the Nabataeans. The followers of Aristobulus made several abortive attempts to regain Jerusalem. Rome supported Hyrcanus and Antipater. "From the war between Pompey and Julius Caesar which broke out in 49 B.C., to the war between Mark Antony and Octavianus Caesar, which was ended by the battle of Actium in 31 B.C., the chiefs of the Roman aristocracy were largely engaged in fighting each other with Roman armies over the wide area of the empire."

Antipater sought to keep on the winning side. Caesar set Aristobulus free that he might go to Palestine to recover his inheritance. Caesar's enemies, the Pompeians, caught and killed him. Antipater's position was now considerably strengthened, and Caesar recognised him as ruler in Palestine equally with the high priest. He appointed Phasaël, his elder son, to the command of Judea, and Herod, his younger son, to the command of Galilee. It was Malichus, a rival of the Idumean, who caused him to be poisoned, but Phasaël and Herod avenged their father's death by murdering Malichus. The rise of Mark Antony and Octavianus Caesar caused the Jews to appeal to Antony to break the Idumean yoke. Herod secured Antony's favour, however, and he and his brother were given the title of tetrarch.

When, in 40 B.C., the Parthian armies overran Syria, Mattathiah Antigonus, a surviving son of the Hasmonaeen Aristobulus, put himself at the head of a force of his countrymen, marched on Jerusalem, and was welcomed by the populace. The Parthians killed Phasaël. Herod

hid in his fortress of Masada on the Dead Sea and later escaped to Rome.

The fact of Antigonus established in Jerusalem strengthened Herod's appeal for Roman help. Siege was laid to the city, but three years passed before it capitulated. Antigonus was beheaded, and Herod reigned in Jerusalem as King of the Jews. To appease the old priestly aristocracy who still desired the re-establishment of the house of Hashmon, Herod took as one of his wives the Hasmanæan princess Mariamne. His claim to the right to nominate whom he chose to the office of high priest was resented. The appointment of Mariamne's younger brother, a boy, Aristobulus, caused such an outburst of unpopular feeling that Herod had the boy drowned.

Herod supported Antony and, at Cleopatra's instigation, fought against the Nabataeans. Octavian's victory in 31 B.C. put Herod in an embarrassing position, but he succeeded in currying the favour of Octavian, and when, in 27 B.C. his new overlord became the Emperor Augustus, Herod's position was unassailable. By the new Caesar's favour he considerably extended his possessions.

The religious Jews adopted a compromising attitude towards Herod. They would not acknowledge him to be a true Jewish king, yet it seemed better to them to be under Herod than in direct submission to a Roman official. Herod and his court lived resplendently at Jerusalem, but he showed respect for the Jewish Law, he gave generous help when drought ruined harvests and created scarcity, and he sought to establish himself still more securely in the favour of priests and people by rebuilding the Temple. He gave them a magnificent building; the central part of it was nearly twice the height of the former building. There was some trouble when he set up the figure of an eagle over one of the main doors. The two Rabbis who urged the crowd to tear it down were burnt at the stake.

Herod's military position was so strong that open rebellion was out of the question. Most of the Pharisees refused to take the oath of allegiance; they would not

recognise Herod as their king, but paid tribute money instead. A powerful priestly group in Jerusalem who still looked for the restoration of the house of Hashman, bowed before the inevitable when Herod put to death forty-five of their richest men.

"The reign of Herod is divided by most historians into three periods. The first from 37-25, the period during which he consolidated his power. The second from 25-13, the period of his greatest prosperity. The third from 13 to his death in B.C. 4, the period of family feuds." In his closing years the crimes and intrigues within his own polygamous household nearly drove him insane.

Three of Herod's sons by different wives were now set up over his divided kingdom. One son, Archelaus, ruled over Judea, Samaria, and Idumaea. He was given the title of Ethnarch, not king. Antipas ruled Galilee and Peraea, and Philip the districts of Batanaea, Trachonitis and the Hauran. Each had the title of tetrarch.

The death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C. was the signal for spontaneous revolt. It was quelled by a massacre. Other revolts followed, and increasing measures of repression served only to intensify the hatreds and passions of the people. The longing for deliverance from the despotism which had extended now over several decades increased the eagerness of the Jews to see the advent of a true king, the Anointed One, who should save the people Israel. As a boy Jesus must have heard of the insurrection suppressed by Varus the Syrian legate, when two thousand Jews were crucified.

The Herod who died in B.C. 4, "of a loathsome disease," is the Herod of Matthew ii. Apart from the account in Matthew there is no record of the murder of the infants under two years old in Bethlehem, yet such an act was "exactly consistent with his character."

Archelaus was a cruel and vicious man; "the worst of all Herod's sons that survived." His despotism and ruthlessness were such that the people of Judea and Samaria appealed to Augustus to deliver them from his cruel

tyranny. Augustus summoned him to Rome and then banished him to Vienna in Gaul.

Herod Antipas, called by Jesus, "that fox," is the Herod responsible for John Baptist's death.

After the banishment of Archelaus, Judea was put under the control of Roman officials called Procurators. The term means simply "governor" or "officer." The Procurator had fairly wide powers, but in the case of trouble which he could not control he appealed to his superior, the Legate of Syria. The first Procurator, appointed in A.D. 6, was Coponius. Three others succeeded to that office between 9 and 26 A.D., and in that year there was sent from Rome a relatively obscure man who would have been "astonished to learn that his appointment was to bring him a fame beyond that of the Emperor himself, and that in the ages to come his name would be repeated every day all over the world: Pontus Pilatus."

Such, in brief, is the political background of the Gospels. The religious life of Israel in those days was strong, but it was torn by party faction, it was hard and legalistic, it was degraded by political intrigue and compromise, it lacked spiritual power and zeal for righteousness. Moved by Apocalyptic writings, it looked for a Messiah who would combine in himself the military prowess of a David and the political skill of a Solomon and thus break the power of Rome—"Israel had fought with Rome for nothing less than the empire of the East." Israel knew not the things that belonged to her peace. There was lawlessness in the land and a bitter hatred of the Gentile peoples. "No gift of prophecy was needed when our Lord foretold that the savage pride which already made the Temple a house of merchandise would soon make it a den of brigands, and in the end would bring the Romans to destroy their place and nation."

Against this religious and political background and into these conditions, "there was a man sent from God, whose name was John." Amid the clash and clamour of those days a new and strange voice was heard—a Prophetic

voice—"the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight . . . . Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Amid the confused and conflicting opinions of men, amid the disappointments and frustrations, the hatreds and jealousies, the wrongs and cruelties, the harsh and strident demands of opposing parties, sects and nations, in a quiet hour of the night, when, for a moment, the tumult was stilled, another voice was heard: "Fear not, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be *to all people* . . . . Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

A much more detailed study of this period, Antiochus, 164 B.C., to John Baptist, is given in the article, *Herod*, A. C. Headlam, *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. II, and in the article, *Environment, Social, Political, Intellectual, and Religious, of Israel, from Maccabees to our Lord*, Edwyn Bevan, *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, Vol. I. Most of the quotations in the above chapter are from these articles.

## 16

## JOHN : THE BAPTIZER

Yea, and thou child, shalt be called the  
prophet of the Most High :  
For thou shalt go before the face of the  
Lord to make ready his ways ;  
To give knowledge of salvation unto his  
people  
In the remission of their sins,  
Because of the tender mercy of our God,  
Whereby the dayspring from on high  
shall visit us,  
To shine on them that sit in darkness  
and the shadow of death ;  
To guide our feet into the way of peace.  
(Luke i, 76-79).

THE life of John the Baptist is overshadowed by the life of Jesus. Had John lived a little earlier in history his life and work might have been recorded in greater detail. As it is he takes his place as one of the outstanding characters of the Bible. Jesus testified to his greatness. "Among them that are born of women there is none greater than John . . . ." (Luke vii, 28). He is the last of the great Prophetic messengers who heralded the coming of the Lord.

Of the place and date of his birth we are not sure. He may have been born at the village of Ain Karim, not far from Bethlehem, six miles west of Jerusalem, but we have no clear evidence of this. His childhood, youth and young manhood were to be spent in strange surroundings. God's spirit was to be mightily upon him and he was to grow into a strange and heroic man ; yet, of the story of his life from his birth to the day when he came forth to call the people to repentance, we are told only, "the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the desert till the day of his shewing unto Israel." (Luke i, 80).

Zechariah, his father, and Elizabeth, his mother, were elderly when John was born. Elizabeth was a relative of

Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Mary visited her before John's birth. That the child should be named John came as a surprise to all: "None of your family is called by that name." Zechariah and Elizabeth were both of priestly descent and both belonged to a type in Israel of whom it is said they were "quiet in the land." They did not look to methods of violence or to outbursts of intense national fervour to deliver their nation. They looked, rather, for that coming of the Kingdom of God of which Prophet and Psalmist spoke. In the "New Age" they hoped to see, there would be a strong consciousness of God's sanctifying presence among the people, a cleansing from sin and a strengthening in righteousness, and from a spiritually newborn Israel the power of the Divine presence would spread to the peoples of all nations.

When John came forth from the deserts he surprised the people by his appearance. For clothing he wore a garment of camel's hair with a leather belt about his waist. His food consisted mostly of an edible kind of locust and of a kind of vegetable honey which exudes from fig trees and palms. The lot of the Prophet was generally a hard one. John lived hard. The leather girdle recalled Elijah. (ii Kings, i, 8).

"Desert" and "wilderness" in the Bible are not great sandy wastes like the Sahara. They are stretches of hard and bare land with only scanty vegetation; the soil is thin, rocks and stones abound, and there is little or no moisture. Often they presented a scene of utter desolation, and the moaning winds caused them to be spoken of as the "howling wilderness." Many people thought that demons (devils) and evil spirits had their abode there. In Judæa and along the whole valley of the Jordan there are a number of such "wildernesses."

John's challenging call to his countrymen was for repentance, the sincerity of which was to be outwardly expressed in an act of baptism and by living before God a new life in righteousness. "Bring forth fruits therefore

worthy of repentance." "The word of God which came to John" in the wilderness had given him a strong sense of the Divine judgments. John "heard God's voice in nature as well as in His word ; as he brooded on the signs of the times, the barren trees of the desert, fit only for burning, and the vipers fleeing before the flaming scrub, became emblems of the nation's peril and lent colour to his warnings of impending wrath."

After a silence of over three centuries the voice of a Prophet was heard again in Israel. Israel's history since the Maccabees—a century and a half before John—had been turbulent indeed. There had been wars of independence and of territorial expansion, civil wars and violent party strife. Kingly high-priests, utterly devoid of any sense of spiritual vocation, had degraded all that was noblest and best in Israel's religious genius and tradition, and nothing short of a religious and spiritual rebirth could save the nation. Irrespective of class or person, John Baptist called for repentance. Like his great prophetic predecessors he would have rulers and people alike understand that God's judgments are moral judgments, sincerity of motive and goodness of character count with God, not claims of pedigree and descent from Abraham. The externals of religion, however conscientiously observed, are useless without true faith in God, goodness of heart and love of righteousness.

The note of urgency and power in John's preaching stirred the conscience of the people. Many responded to his appeal. "The whole of Judæa and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him, and were baptized in the Jordan, confessing their sins." (Matt. iii, 5, 6).

How long John had been preaching before Jesus began His ministry we do not know. The Baptist recognised Jesus as the Messiah, the Chosen One of God. "This is he of whom I said, He that cometh after me is become before me ; for he was before me." When John was



reluctant to baptize Jesus, Jesus insisted. "And John bare witness, saying, I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven ; and it abode upon him . . . and I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God." (John i, 32, 34).

John's great prophetic ministry soon came to an end. Herod Antipas—called in the New Testament Herod the Tetrarch—had him imprisoned. Herod's wife was a daughter of Aretas, king of the Nabataeans. When in Rome, Herod had fallen in love with Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. Herod's own wife, knowing of his intention to divorce her—or worse!—so that he might marry Herodias, fled to her father for protection. Soon afterwards Herodias and her daughter Salome came to live at Herod's palace at Tiberias on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Herod had feared John's teaching. Evil men do not like to hear moral truths courageously asserted! It may be, too, that Herod feared some political trouble arising from John's power over the people. The Baptist's open declaration that Herod ought not to marry his brother's wife led to John's imprisonment. If Herod feared John, Herodias hated him. She seized her opportunity when, on Herod's birthday, in the presence of his chief officers and generals, he foolishly promised the girl Salome any request she might make to the extent of half of his kingdom. Her demand for John Baptist's execution made Herod angry but in the presence of those who had heard his rash promise he had not the courage to refuse. A soldier was sent to the fortress of Machaerus, beyond the Jordan. John was made to kneel. A sword flashed and the Prophet's head rolled to the ground. It was taken to the palace, placed on a dish, and given to Herod, who presented it to Salome to give it to her mother.

John's death closed the Old Testament period of Prophecy. His followers were allowed to have his body.

There is a tradition that it was buried in Samaria.

Herod, cruel, superstitious, crafty, was once referred to by Jesus as "that fox." He was finally banished from his territory by Agrippa and sent to Gaul. Some authorities say he died in Spain.

John closed the old order of the Law and the Prophets. He was the last of many forerunners of Him who came not to deliver Israel only, but to be the Redeemer of mankind. John was privileged to see in the flesh Him whom other faithful men had seen only by the eye of faith. With Jesus came a new order and a new dispensation. As another John was soon to say : "The *Word* was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John i, 14).

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Although nothing is recorded of the Baptist's activities during his long desert years, we may reasonably assume that they would not be idle years. That much time would be given to prayer and meditation we cannot doubt, nor is it unlikely that the Prophet gave some time to a study of Israel's religious literature and to the historic development of his nation. He would not be without knowledge of the strong political divisions, national aims and aspirations, and the deep religious cleavages among his people during their long history, and particularly since the terrible days of the Maccabees. Also, it is impossible to think that the records of the lives and teaching of his great Prophetic predecessors did not influence him profoundly.

It would seem, indeed, that he reduced their teaching to the basic terms of repentance before God : a repentance to be made manifest in lives of religious sincerity, moral goodness, and daily obedience to God's righteous commands. This teaching he applied comprehensively : to the Herods as well as to his own people, to rulers and ruled, to rich and poor alike. All must learn the righteousness

of God and be persuaded that His judgments are inescapable.

Of the Baptist's own Prophetic self-consciousness and his mission as the Herald of Him who "coming after me is preferred before me," there can be no doubt.

## 17

THE ABIDING SIGNIFICANCE OF THE  
PROPHETIC WORD

WE have seen in brief outline the beginnings and development, aim and purpose of Hebrew prophecy over one thousand years before Christ. As God gave them utterance the Prophets declared His word and will to rulers and people alike. In their teaching they insisted that true religion can never be divorced from morality, that all religious practice is suspect and dangerous that has not faith in God and obedience to His holy will as its main-spring, that all ritualism and ceremonialism unrelated to a striving for righteousness is a bane rather than a blessing, that all worship that does not find its consummation in the pursuit of goodness, in acts of justice and mercy, forgiveness and love, is an offence unto God. Jesus confirmed the Prophetic word. No one ever denounced more fiercely than He the type of religion that concerns itself with externals and is empty of spiritual power and moral earnestness, that is devoid of the attributes of truth and righteousness, mercy and love.

Dr. T. R. Glover's significant words demand our earnest consideration :

"A religion is always conditioned by the character it gives to God. The Hebrew prophets kept the personality of God—kept it triumphantly, and abolished all other claimants to the Godhead. God is personal, and God is one ; God is righteous and God is kind—they are the four great tenets on which to base any religion, and they were not lightly won. They were the outcome of experience, hard, bitter and disillusioning—a gain acquired by loss of all kinds of hopes and beliefs, national and personal, tested in every way that man or devil can invent for the testing of belief. The prophets got the religion of Jehovah detached, or detachable, from shrine and cult, just when the deportation and the exile in Babylon made it imperative that the religion must do without shrine or cult or perish for ever. They cut it clear from priesthood and tradition and law-book, though their successors entangled it with these again. They struck the blow of which idolatry died.

They made righteousness a thing no more of ritual and taboo but of attitude and conduct and spirit. They set religion free from ancient follies and reviving horrors . . . But there was another chapter of religion yet to write, and Hosea and Jeremiah saw what it would be about. They did not read, nor yet divine, all its contents ; but they knew it would turn, not on what Jehovah requires of man, but on what Jehovah will do for man, how He feels for him and what He will give him. For the days were coming when the Hebrew, like the Greek, would ask a great deal of his God—Immortality, for a beginning, and other things more wonderful.”<sup>(1)</sup>

Such was the immeasurable contribution of the Prophets. On the foundation they laid Jesus built. In His revelation of the Father’s love He surpassed even the most inspired Prophetic vision. All the Prophets would eagerly have made John Baptist’s words their own : “He that cometh after me is preferred before me. For He it is from whose fulness we have all received, and grace upon grace.”

Thus, in any consideration of the Prophetic life and work, we are made to realise that the view of the Prophet as a visionary and dreamer, living in a world removed from the stern realities of life and seeking in some magical way to probe the future that they may foretell some startling events, is a dangerous caricature of the Prophet and his God-given task. The Prophets had their feet firmly planted in history.

Their message, in the first place, was for their own day, but because it was God’s word, concerned with Righteousness and Justice, Mercy and Truth, demanding repentance from sin and obedience to the Divine commands, insisting on the Divine Sovereignty yet inspired by the certainty of the Divine compassion and love, it is, therefore, God’s word for every age. It is a *Living Word* ; a Word to be pondered prayerfully and carefully, its precepts applied with conviction and courage, a Word relevant to the true life and the deepest needs of mankind in every generation, a Word which men and nations ignore at their peril. It is to the neglect of this Word that we owe, in no little part, the dire tragedy that afflicts the nations of the world today.

(1) *Progress in Religion*, pp. 143-4.

The revelation of Divine truth given to the Prophets and the spiritual insight they enjoyed, gave them religious stability, vision and foresight. They never wavered in their belief that their witness would issue in a glorious consummation; and the day of that consummation they ever saw by the eye of faith.

The disasters and tribulations that befell Israel compelled hard and sanctified religious thinking. Disasters and tribulations always do. Prophetic thought is always progressive; in a very real sense it is also a unity. "A great connecting purpose runs through it, binding it all together . . . . It is part of a still greater and more august unity. It is an essential element in the Divine scheme of the redemption of the world through Christ. His work rested on theirs. His revelation of the Father was the consummation and the vindication of the revelation of the God of Israel. 'God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son.' "(1)

The Prophets tenaciously held to the view of God's Covenant relationship with Israel, but recognised that its form may change. City and Temple may be destroyed, yet God is not bound by either; their destruction can neither limit His Spirit nor finally frustrate His eternal purpose. Jeremiah lifted the idea of the Covenant relationship to its noblest and most intimate form when he declared it to be personal between God and every individual soul: "I will put my law within them, and write it on their hearts . . . for they shall all know me, from the least unto the greatest of them . . . ."

Again, the Prophetic mind was always sensitive to God's holiness. He always is the righteous, just and ever-loving God. It was this profound belief which more than anything else, perhaps, gave spiritual direction, initiative and moral determination to their lives. Knowledge of this truth was the "consuming fire" in their bones; by its power they met triumphantly all tribulation, scorn and persecution.

(1) Dr. G. C. Joyce, *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, p. 430.

Had they been speaking for themselves they would not, they could not, have endured to the end as "seeing Him who is invisible." Nor could they have proclaimed the nature and character of Him through Whom, one day, not Israel only, but all mankind would be blest.

If sometimes, there is a tendency to make the Prophetic declaration, "Thus saith the Lord," bear rather more than is justified, it remains true, nevertheless, that without the Righteousness that is rooted in the nature of God Himself, man has no spiritual or moral anchorage. Without that Righteousness man becomes a law unto himself; that which he desires for himself, his class or nation, and which by force he can get, becomes the right.

It is a significant fact that it is still God's word that frightens evil men. Whenever they would enslave the bodies, minds and souls of their fellows, whenever they would exalt cruelty, oppression and vice, their method of procedure is ever the same. Religion is mocked and derided, worship is ridiculed and scorned, belief in God and the authority of His righteous word undermined in every possible way. This leads to a weakening of faith and religious convictions, to be followed inevitably by a dulled conscience. The line of demarcation between right and wrong becomes more and more blurred. Very soon the stage is reached when that is right only which a man wants to be right; thus, too often, evil becomes a man's good and good his evil.

In these conditions what remains of religious life becomes an ineffective quietism; an obsession with the saving of one's own soul, with no concern at all for the application of religious truths to the affairs of men and nations. The Church, as an ecclesiastical institution, becomes increasingly the helpless tool of a corrupt state. The true Church becomes a persecuted minority, driven underground. So it was in Russia in pre-revolution days. So it is to a large extent in Germany, Italy and Central Europe in our day. The same danger has not been unknown in our own history. When it threatened it was

only overcome by the determined, suffering witness of those who would allow neither political rulers nor ecclesiastical officials to rule in the realm of conscience ; who would allow neither man nor state to usurp the place of God and the abiding authority of His word in their souls. All that is best in the religious heritage and tradition of our land we owe to Christian minorities who, in the face of dire persecution, were prepared to say in effect, "Our God, in whom we believe, is able to save us, but, if not, we will not bow down to thee . . ."

Had Russia, and Europe generally, over the centuries, known a Christianity spiritually virile, morally vigorous, inspired and strengthened by the Prophetic word, free from state patronage, prestige and control, concerned first and foremost to uplift Christ, to honour God's word, to insist on the application of His righteous principles in all the relationships and activities of life, the history of the peoples would have been different and happier. It is when there is no true Prophetic spirit and utterance in a nation's life, that evil men in both political and ecclesiastical institutions are enabled to exploit their less fortunate fellows, and to suppress all efforts to achieve religious and economic emancipation.

In the synagogue at Nazareth Jesus outlined the programme of His ministry in the words of a Prophet. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ; for he has consecrated me to preach the gospel to the poor, he has sent me to proclaim release for captives and recovery of sight for the blind, to set free the oppressed, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour." (Luke iv, 18, 19 ; Isaiah lxi, 1).

It is when there is no Prophetic word in a nation's religious life that Christianity is reduced to the appalling travesty revealed in Ambassador William E. Dodd's Diary.

"May 18th, 1935.—I went to the Catholic Cathedral near the old Kaiser's palace to attend the service in honour of Pilsudski, who was being buried in Cracow, Poland, at the same time. The Church was crowded. Hitler took his seat of honour on the right of the altar. Von Neurath, Goebbels, and the generals of the



Reichswehr were seated in the first row behind Hitler, whose distinguished position in a chair with an altar just in front of him looked suggestive.

"It was amusing to note all the white gloves in the church on a moderately warm day. It was strictly formal, though swords in a Christian Church seemed to me to be in bad taste. What would Jesus have said if He had seen such evidences of war spirit? He would probably have left the place.

"Promptly at 11 the Papal Nuncio came up the aisle with an escort of twelve priests, a long, red robe suspended from his shoulders and extending at least twelve feet behind him, two men holding it up so that it would not drag along on the floor. He took his seat on a sort of throne on the right side of the great altar where candles were burning and priests were chanting in Latin, which no one understood, and occasionally falling on their knees and scattering incense, which I think Jesus never used. It was the medieval ceremony from beginning to end and nobody, save perhaps the priests, understood anything that was said or sung.

"To me it was all half-absurd. I do not know much about Pilsudski, except that he was a dictator who put people to death when they opposed him. Why so much religious ceremony when no one could have imagined him to be a Christian? But there was probably not one follower of Jesus in the whole of the congregation. I wondered how German Lutherans and Catholics would honour Hitler, a professed Catholic, if he should die. He has murdered or caused to be murdered hundreds of innocent people. Yet all of us diplomats would be called into the churches to pay tribute to him as a Christian in case of his death.

"I came away from the cathedral at 12.20 rather relieved to be free from so much hypocrisy. Some people may not feel as I do. To me the actual teachings of the simple, direct-minded Jesus were exceedingly important and early Christianity really democratic. Now neither the Catholics nor the Protestants believe in, nor practice, Christian or democratic principles . . . I have come slowly to recognise the insincerity of people who call themselves Christians and I have been compelled out of honesty to cease attending church services, save on certain official occasions. If men were Christians there would be no war, also none of the terrible exploitations which our business men have applied to our people."<sup>(1)</sup>

These are scathing words. Not all would acquiesce in the full and absolute condemnation in the last paragraph, nor feel able to the same extent to plead the faults of others, grievous as they may be, as an adequate reason for absenting

(1) *Ambassador Dodd's Diary*, 1933-1938, pp. 252-3.

oneself from Christian worship and service, but the revelation of the statement as a whole makes one realise how desperately urgent is the need for Prophetic power and utterance in the religious life of the nations today where Christianity is accepted at all.

It behoves us, then, to bring our minds to bear on the Prophetic word. We are not called to give a type of perverted sanctity to their particular word forms, but we are under a solemn obligation to seek to grasp the fundamental religious, spiritual and moral truths revealed to them and, by a faith like unto theirs, to defend such truths and diligently to apply them.

"All progress has been by those called and endowed for it ; and the significance of Israel for the knowledge of God and of His rule no doubt meant special gifts and experiences of special persons. Yet prophecy is not exalted, ecstatic, individual manifestations, but is an interpretation of experience for all to verify by insight and consecration. Nor is there any finality ever offered except ceaseless loyalty to the inexhaustible Divine purpose. Hence the honest people to whom it still commends itself are those who believe wholly in the eternal expansion of truth, seek with perfect heart the beauty of holiness, hunger and thirst after righteousness, and humbly and faithfully follow the highest God has given them to know. Religion speaks of faith, not courage, but faith is just inspired courage to follow the beckoning of the highest. Whatever human elements have been mixed with the receiving we can accept, not as part of faith, yet as a necessity of man's part in believing." (1)

It has been painfully brought home to us in our day ; as in previous generations, that if men do not live by the power of a valid faith and a true religion, they will exalt degraded national and racial ideologies to that high place in life and thought which a living faith in a living God alone should occupy. It is an oft-repeated truth in the Prophetic word that God's name is truly honoured only by man's obedience. Jesus set this at the forefront of prayer : "Hallowed be Thy name ; Thy will be done." Lip service to God is not enough. His will must be *done*. All

(1) *Honest Religion*, John Oman, p. 71.

worship, whatever its forms and externalities, must issue in obedience to the Divine will. On that basic fact the Prophets stood as on an immovable rock.

The assertion frequently made that if the Church does not do this, that or the other, it will perish from the earth, has little to support it either in history or experience. The Church is here to stay. There can be no doubt, however, that when the Church does not truly love, honour and obey her Lord, when the Prophetic voice is silent within her, when her zeal is for anything but Righteousness and the Kingdom, then she is drastically purged, she is made to pass through the fires that, refined and purified, she may be fitted again for her Prophetic, Redeeming task among men.

So for us, as for his own people in a distant day, Jeremiah's word demands attention. "Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths." It is a call to serious reflection, to a consideration of the right and wrong paths of life. "There is no breadth of judgment without help from the past, but there is no using the past to good purpose without independent judgment on it of our own conscience of truth and right. And if the old foundation was not so tested, may that not be the reason why the bricks are fallen; and may it not be as foolish in religion as in politics to say we will build thereon with hewn stone?"<sup>(1)</sup>

We need in the world today a new manifestation of the Prophets' dependence on God, and their independence of men because of that dependence. We need men with true Prophetic spirit who will demand to know if custom and convention in religion really serve righteousness, men armoured by a deep consciousness of the Divine presence and sustained by a profound faith in God's over-ruling power and goodness, who will not be intimidated by the scorn and worldly power of evil men.

"What Hosea rejects is very modern if we put the name of almost any armed state for Assyria. On all outward showing the organised might of Assyria was irresistible and riding upon horses

(1) *Honest Religion*, John Oman, p. 14.

the terrible incarnation of it. Among his people Hosea was almost alone in refusing to bow down to it. The conviction in which he stood was that not violence however armed, or wickedness however entrenched, but mercy and righteousness rule the world. Just because it was his own conviction won in the face of the most overwhelming experience of outward disasters both in his public and private life and of the inward agony of a sensitive and sympathetic spirit, it is no mere speculative notion. A faith which could triumph over an evil that had wrecked his own home and a violence that was about to lay waste his country, for both of which his heart bled in anguish, deserves our regard as tried in all things and still sure.

"His faith went against all appearances, and as it is precisely when all seems to be against us that we most need its support, no other faith is of value . . . . All the other prophets after him accepted Hosea's faith in face of the same overwhelming experience of public disaster and personal scorn and opposition."<sup>(1)</sup>

In the days of the Prophets as in our day men were prone to think that they could enjoy certain fruits of life without paying attention to the roots. They assumed, as many do today, that morality can stand on its own feet, that the spiritual and moral values—decency, justice, honesty, truth, mercy, goodness—come of themselves and stand in their own right. They do not and cannot. They are the fruits of a living faith in a righteous God, they spring from the deepest and purest religious beliefs of men, they are the product of the highest and noblest religious teaching, the choicest fruits of a spiritual heritage.

The Prophets declared these truths; their grasp of them gave power to their utterances, and saved them from narrow and restricted views of God and life and history. They saw history, indeed, in grand conspectus; to them was revealed something of the glory of God's eternal purpose for the world and the Divine judgments manifest therein.

They laid hold of the truth that God's holiness and righteousness, His purposes and judgments stand when all else fall; and that man is never so foolish as when he ignores these truths. Ultimately there is no escape from them, nor from the consequences of denying them. For

(1) *Honest Religion*, John Oman, pp. 59-60.

to seek to escape them, says Amos, is "As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him, or hid in his house, and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him." (v. 19).

In failing to recognise this, clever men have gone astray. They have accepted and practised the moral virtues, but many have never paused to ask how they came to have them or why they have applied them in their own lives. Failing to ask this question they have sometimes implied, if they have not openly stated in their writings, that man is sufficient in himself, that by his own knowledge, strength, wit and sagacity, he can save both himself and society. It has come as no little surprise to discover that great numbers of people not born into the religious and spiritual heritage into which they themselves were born, have no regard at all for the moral virtues; that they see no reason at all why they should have that regard; that, being devoid of faith in God or any sense of responsibility to God, they have no concern with anything but their own selfish desire and are determined to serve their own ends despite everything.

The Prophetic word is strong against men who believe that they are sufficient in themselves, who look to their own power, knowledge and skill for their salvation, who have no faith in God, and no sense of responsibility to God. It is a word which needs to be spoken today, for faithlessness and unbelief are still faithlessness and unbelief even under the respectable guise of "science" or "philosophy" or "psychology."

It is when men know God in Christ, when they live by faith in Him, when they live with a sense of responsibility to Him and desire in all things to hallow His Name by a willing obedience to His will, that they sanctify all their skill and knowledge and consecrate all the products of their inventive genius to the glory of God and to the highest welfare, physical, intellectual and spiritual, of their fellow man—and not before. Man's cleverness defeats its own ends when he will not stop "to hear what God the Lord

has to say." He enslaves himself until he is freed by a willing submission to the Divine love and righteousness. He enslaves and kills his brother until the Prophet Jeremiah's word is fulfilled in his heart: "They shall all know me, both great and small."

"Our study of Carlyle forces us to the conclusion that only a re-born religion can save Europe. Neither Germany nor Russia nor England can be redeemed except by the birth of *a new reverence for the sanctity of the individual*; and without redemption there can be no amity between them. Only a religion that inspires and insists upon this reverence is capable of providing the dynamic of a new Christendom."<sup>(1)</sup>

We label our various problems Political, Economic, Social: each in its sphere is rightly so-called. But, basically, all our problems are Religious and Spiritual and Moral. That is true from the problems of personal life and the home to the most vexed problems of international affairs. Man's deepest need is for a living faith in a living God; a new sense of dependability upon God and of responsibility to God; a *living faith* that will give man a quickened conscience and a new zeal for *righteousness*, that will give him the reverent mind and the sanctified will, that will give him a new vision of the true dignity and nobility of human life made possible in Christ. Whatever may be the Political, Economic and Social systems that prevail, unless men exercise conscience and have a high regard for righteousness in their dealings with each other, unless they wholeheartedly believe that "Peace on earth and Goodwill among men" is not only God's message to them, but His *method* for them, the "law" of Cain will continue.

We must still bitterly confess, "Our life is *not* a mutual helpfulness; but rather, cloaked under due laws-of-war, named 'fair competition' and so forth. It is a mutual hostility. We have profoundly forgotten everywhere that *Cash-Payment* is not the sole relation of human beings; we think, nothing doubting, that *it* absolves and liquidates all engagements of man . . . . Verily Mammon-worship is a melancholy creed. When Cain, for his

(1) *Carlyle, Prophet of Today*, F. A. Lea, p. 172. (Italics mine).

own behoof, had killed Abel, and was questioned, 'Where is thy brother?' he, too, made answer, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' "(1) The choice before mankind today is, indeed, a straight one; is it to be Cain or Christ?

Micah's Prophetic word still needs to be heralded before men: "He hath shewed thee, O Man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to humble yourself to walk with God?" It is as true now as in olden days, "Man cannot live by bread alone." In Christ is to be found the "More Abundant Life"; and His assuring command is, "Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you." We have there, surely, the distilled essence of the loftiest utterances of Prophetic thought.

It is the first duty and the supreme task of the Church to believe, to proclaim, and courageously to apply those spiritual and moral principles of the Prophetic word established now and for ever on the foundation that is laid in Jesus Christ. For the Church so to consecrate herself to this God-appointed task is to save her soul alive, to become truly the Body of her Lord, expressing vitally His Mind and Spirit and Power, mediating His Divine grace to a world sick unto death of sin; a world which only the redeeming love of God in Christ can heal.

We need the fire and inspiration of a vision like William Penn's: "Oh, great is God's work on earth. Be universal in your spirits; and keep out of all straitness and narrowness; look to God's great and glorious Kingdom and its prosperity." If the churches, with all their differences and varied types of worship, were caught up in this great vision and truly consecrated to a suffering witness to this great end, would they not soon be brought together in that Union of the Spirit without which all other "unions" will avail little or nothing?

Like the Prophets of old the Church must insist that if men wilfully ignore the righteous truths of God and the

(1) Carlyle, quoted in *Carlyle, Prophet of Today*. F. A. Lea. pp. 90-91.

salvation which is in Him through Christ, then whatever their ability, knowledge, sagacity and skill, they will build on sand and, sooner or later, the rains and the floods will come and the house will fall ; but it need not be so, for whosoever shall build on God's Eternal Word builds on a foundation of rock, and against the rock of this Word the gates of hell—the powers of evil—shall not only beat in vain, they shall, ultimately, dash themselves to pieces.



## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLES

No dates can be ventured before Abraham, and the dates for Abraham and the Exodus are only conjectural. Dr. A. S. Peake writes, "If Amraphel is to be identified with Hammurabi, king of Babylonia, 2123-2081 B.C., then Abraham would be in Canaan about 2,100 B.C. . . . no certainty can be felt with reference to his date."

"The date of the Exodus has been much contested . . . the usual view that it fell in the Nineteenth Dynasty (1328-1202), in the reign of Merenptah ii (1234-1214), still seems most probable. The Pharaoh of the Oppression would be Rameses II. It is quite uncertain how long the residence of the Hebrews in Egypt lasted. No definite conclusions are possible as to the period from the Exodus to Saul, beyond the general statement that, assuming c. 1230 as the date of the Exodus, the period lasted about two hundred years.

"For the period of the monarchy we are much better informed, and the Assyrian records are often available to correct the O.T. figures." (1)

c. 1230 B.C., the Exodus from Egypt

1025	Saul
1010	David (Nathan)
970	Solomon

(Division of the Kingdom, I Kings, 12)

	JUDAH	ISRAEL
933	Rehoboam	Jeroboam I
916	Abijam	
914	Asa	
912		Nadab
911		Baasha
888		Elah
887		Zimri
887		Omri
876		Ahab

(1) Peake's *Commentary on the Bible*, pp. 119-120, from which are taken also the dates given below.

873	Jehoshaphat	
854		Ahaziah
853		Jehoram
849	Jehoram	
842	Ahaziah	
842	Athaliah	Jehu
836	Jehoash	
814		Jehoahaz
798		Jehoash
797	Amaziah	
783		Jeroboam II
779	Uzziah	
750	Jotham regent	
743		Zechariah
743		Shallum
743		Menahem
740	Jotham	
737		Pekahiah
736	Ahaz	Pekah
730		Hoshea
727	Hezekiah	
722	Fall of Samaria	

## JUDAH

698	Manasseh	
643	Amon	
640	Josiah	
608	Jehoahaz	
608	Jehoiakim	
597	Jehoiachin	
597	Zedekiah	
586	Destruction of Jerusalem and exile to Babylon	
538	Edict of Cyrus	
516	Dedication of Second Temple	
458	Return under Ezra	
445	Nehemiah's First Visit to Jerusalem	
444	Public Reading and Acceptance of the Law	
432	Nehemiah's Second Visit to Jerusalem	
332	Submission of the Jews to Alexander the Great	
320	Palestine under the Ptolemies	
198	Antiochus III of Syria conquers Palestine	
168	Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) attempts to suppress the Jewish religion	
167	The Jews revolt, led by the Maccabees	
165	Jerusalem recaptured and Temple worship restored	
160	Death of Judas Maccabaeus	
160-142	Jonathan	

142-135	Simon Maccabaeus
142	Jews gain independence of Syria
135-105	John Hyrcanus
105-104	Aristobulus I
104-78	Alexander Jannaeus
78-69	Salome
69	Aristobulus II
65	Pompey captures Jerusalem, Palestine becomes a Roman province
40-37	Antigonus
37-4	Herod the Great

\* \* \* \*

The dates set out below give the probable periods of Prophetic activity, or the time when certain Prophetic or other books were probably written and the periods they cover :—

c. 760-750 B.C.	Amos
c. 750-735	Hosea
c. 730-700	Micah
c. 740-700	Isaiah
c. 626-586	Jeremiah
c. 600-570	Ezekiel
c. 549-538	"Isaiah," chapters 40-45
520-518	Haggai and Zechariah
c. 450	"Isaiah," chapters 56-66. (Certain passages in these chapters are of later date).
c. 400-350	"Job"
c. 300	"Ezra-Nehemiah" was written. The records cover the period 537-433 B.C.
c. 450-250	"Jonah"
165	"Daniel"
c. 25 A.D.	John the Baptist

NOTE.—The "c." for Haggai and Zechariah's date is omitted purposely.

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