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THE SECOND ADVENT IN RELATION TO THE MISSION FIELD AND THE JEWISH NATION.¹

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THE Second Advent of our blessed Lord and Saviour is presented to us in Scripture in two stages, viz. the Advent as the Bridegroom for His Church, and after an interval, the Advent of the King and the Judge.

In the first of these the Church of God—"elect from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth"—has her special destiny. The true Church, the existence of which, although indicated in some degree in the old prophetic writings, as I venture to think (for instance in the 45th Psalm and in the Song of Songs) was not revealed in its fulness until the days of the Apostles, especially to the great Apostle of the Gentiles. The present dispensation is that of the Holy Spirit, calling out from Jew and Gentile "a people for His name" (Acts xv. 14). The Church came into existence on the Day of Pentecost, it continues until the Lord Himself shall appear, when all the members both those who have fallen asleep in Jesus and those who are alive and remain, shall "meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. iv. 17).

But this is clearly not "the day of the Lord," for that is treated (in the same Epistle to the Thessalonians, also in the Second Epistle and in many other parts of the New Testament) as being ushered in by many signs and by earthly manifestations. The scene of the first stage of the Advent is "the air," and the people concerned in it are the whole body of believers in Jesus Christ, who by faith have taken Him as their Saviour. In the second stage, the persons concerned are the Jews, and the world. For Israel He comes as the King, for the world as the Judge. Concerning His relation to these, there is in Scripture no mystery, it is clearly foretold in numerous places, the only uncertainty being as to the times and the seasons, though even here, while exact dates are not given,

¹ A paper read at the London Meeting of Lay Churchmen, February 15:

there is a sufficient approximation to enable those who are wise to understand, as in the case of Daniel.

The subject of this paper is the relation of the Second Advent to the Mission Field and to the Jewish nation. This order might advantageously be reversed, for it is evident from Scripture that it will be through the Jewish nation that the great work of Missions will be accomplished. The work of the Church, in the present dispensation, is to preach the Gospel as a witness. By means of this proclamation the Holy Spirit is now calling out, choosing, a people for Christ. It is true that the work has been, in some countries and among some peoples, more successful than in others. It is true that the results of this proclamation are in themselves so beneficial and the urgency of the call so great that every Christian now is bound, as a primary duty, to do everything in his or her power to facilitate this blessed work, and to extend the knowledge of Christ in every land. But it is clear that the work will not be accomplished until the Kingdom of Christ has been established upon earth, and the earth shall then be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Much, however, will doubtless be of value in that dispensation which has been effected now. The translations of the Scriptures in various languages, the establishment of schools and hospitals, and of similar organized works for the diffusion of the gospel, will be doubtless available, yet these are but the external machinery. The power which actuates these will (as far as my humble judgment leads me to conclude) be withdrawn when the dispensation of the Church is ended, until the Lord Himself comes in Person to reign, and His agents, that is His people Israel, have been assigned their task as His messengers and representatives.

Turning our attention, therefore, to the Jews—or rather to Israel as a whole—we find that it appears clear, in the first place, that prior to our Lord's return as their King, they are restored, at least in part, nationally to their own land, in unbelief. This is apparent from several passages of Scripture. We may take, for example the vision of the dry bones in the 37th of Ezekiel. The bones, at first "very dry" and scattered, are brought together, then they are clothed with flesh and sinews and skin, "but there was no breath in them." At the first Zionist Congress at Basle in 1897, it was stated "the Mission of the Jew is finished," but who would

say this twenty years later, when in 1917 the British Government, amid the enthusiastic approval of the Jewish community, announced that it would look favourably on a project for a Jewish state in Palestine? The flesh and sinews and skin are even now covering the assembled bones of the nation, but the restoration to real life—in God's appointed way—is not yet. The national repentance and mourning for their sin in rejecting Him Whom they pierced (Zech. xii. 10) is accomplished after their return to their own land, as appears clear from the context. Hence we conclude that the second restoration, alluded to in many prophetic writings, is (at least partly) prior to the manifestation of the King and His assumption of His Kingdom, and that it is a restoration in unbelief.

We are told by St. Paul (Rom. xi. 25, 26) that "blindness in part is happened unto Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." This language is so strongly like that of our Saviour Himself when He speaks of Jerusalem being "trodden of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke xxi. 24) that although they may not apply to the same event they indicate that there is a definite limit to (1) the casting away of Israel as the chosen vehicle of God's dealings with men, and also to (2) the degradation of Jerusalem as the centre of His worship on earth. If we see one of these accomplished, it is surely probable that the fulfilment of the other is at hand.

Looking on the prophetic message as regards Israel, we see that from the earliest times it was foretold that through them blessing was to extend to *all the earth*, that this blessing was connected with the establishment of the nation on the soil of Palestine, and with the descendants of David. The trust committed to this unique people was fourfold, viz. (1) a witness to the unity of God against idolatry and polytheism, "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am He, before Me there was no God, neither shall there be after Me" (Isa. xliii. 10). (2) Separated to serve and obey God: "Hear, O Israel, and observe to do it, that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily . . . in the land which floweth with milk and honey" (Deut. vi. 3). There are many similar passages, especially in Deuteronomy, which show that the intention was that Israel should be a pattern nation, living in obedience to God's law, protected by His power, and *in a land specially set apart for them*. (3) Israel was the vehicle of God's written law.

The "oracles of God" were "committed to them" (Rom. iii. 2). All the authors of the book of Scripture—the marvel of literature—were of Israel. (4) Through Israel came the Messiah—it was of their race that God Himself was manifest in the flesh (Rom. ix. 5).

It is well to bear these points in mind, because we know that God has not cast away His people (Rom. xi. 1), and His purposes, although hindered for a time by man's unbelief, will yet be accomplished. The land which He assigned to Abraham, from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates, has never been fully occupied, except possibly for a short time under David and Solomon. But it is unquestionably the birthright of Israel, and will be occupied to the full when the Kingdom is established. The geographical position of Palestine, where three continents converge on one of the main routes of the world's traffic, is as remarkable as its topographical features, and if it was important in the days of Egyptian and Babylonian monarchies, much more is it important now in the era of aerial travel and wireless communication. Moreover, if the account in Zechariah xiv. of the physical phenomena which will accompany the return of the Saviour is to be taken literally, and surely the language is literal enough, the result will be a connection both with the Mediterranean and the Gulf of Akaba, and the filling up of the cleft of the Dead Sea, thus making a harbour for vessels of untold magnificence and value.

We are, however, anticipating the prophetic sequence of events.

Terrible judgments are foretold as happening before this. Our Saviour Himself told His followers that there would be in the first place a sudden coming of the Bridegroom and a separation between those who are ready for Him and those who are not, that this would extend to the most intimate relations of personal and family life. Then He significantly adds: "Where the body [carcase] is there will the eagles [vultures] be gathered together" (Matt. xxiv. 27; Luke xvii. 37). The body without the life, what a picture of Christendom when the Church is removed! The forces of evil, unrestrained, have every opportunity for working out their dire influence. All that we have seen in the terrible world war is indicated by Him in a few significant words when He speaks, in Matthew xxiv. 7, 8, of wars and famines and pestilences as "the beginning of sorrows," concurrently with the preaching of the Gospel "as a witness unto all nations."

After this comes the Great Tribulation, foretold both by Himself and by many of His messengers. Yet from this time of awful trial there is still a remnant saved. In Revelation vii. 9 to end we have "the great multitude which no man could number out of all nations and kindreds" saved out of the Great Tribulation, whose robes are washed white in the blood of the Lamb. (It is to be regretted that the authorised version in v. 14 fails to give the very definite force of the original, which very explicitly states that these are saved out of "*the* Tribulation, the Great One.") The terrible nature of that awful time is stated by Christ to be so terrific that it barely admits of any survival of the human race (Matt. xxiv. 21, 22) and human language can hardly depict anything more dreadful than that which is used in connection with it in many other passages. Then the Lord will come, then will be "the day of vengeance of our God" (Isa. lxi. 2).

Here I venture to say that some of the groups of Psalms may be taken as referring in their sequence to the sequence of events in this period. If, as I think reasonable, the 45th Psalm tells us of the Advent of the Bridegroom and the beauty of the Bride (the Church), the 46th may surely refer to the coming of the Avenging King, and the attitude of the believing remnant in its faith "the Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge." The 47th Psalm goes on to tell of the triumph of the King over His foes, and the 48th of the establishment of the King in His capital city. Another group of Psalms is that known as the Psalms of Degrees, giving the various steps taken by Israel in their return after their dispersion, and from their spiritual darkness to the light and liberty of their God, rallying round the sacred city Jerusalem, and rejoicing in their restored national and family life. Yet another little group, the 65th to 67th, tell us the same glorious story, but in the 67th it is added that the result will be "that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among *all* nations."

I think also that in St. John's Gospel we get a prophetic sequence in the 12th chapter, which begins with the feast where the resurrection saint and the waiting saint are gathered round the supper table with the Lord, while the enemies rage without. Then the Lord Himself comes to Jerusalem amid shouts of "Hosanna," and then the Greeks (Gentiles) come asking His disciples, "Sir, we would see Jesus."

I purposely omit reference to Antichrist and to the approximate dates which might be dealt with here, for these do not affect the question of the future spread of the Gospel. That this will be the work of the redeemed Israel is, I think, evident from the prophetic writings, especially of Isaiah. In the 60th chapter of that magnificent poem we have the marvellous result of the restoration and conversion of Israel. "The glory of the Lord is risen upon thee" is twice repeated, and then "the Gentiles shall come to thy light and kings to the brightness of thy rising." The whole passage is of such exquisite beauty that to comment on it seems sacrilegious—it is only possible to bow before the teaching it contains with awe and adoration.

Or take the 72nd Psalm, with its description of the reign of the Glorious King. "Yea, all kings shall bow down before Him, all nations shall serve Him," and His rule shall be specially directed to "the needy when he crieth, the poor also and him that hath no helper." Or the splendid group of Psalms from the 95th to the 100th, where the continual refrain is mercy and truth toward the house of Israel, and all the ends of the earth seeing the salvation of God. The closing verses of Zechariah tell us how in Israel even the ordinary articles of daily life will be consecrated to His service, when Jerusalem as the capital of the world and the seat of the government of the King shall be the focus and centre of the world's worship.

Such is, as I humbly believe, the wonderful vision clearly placed before us in God's Word. I realize how feeble and inadequate is the attempt I have made to unfold even a small portion of its grandeur and beauty. This at least we may say that in the dark and difficult times in which we live it is a source of consolation and of peace to contemplate these glories, and in humble adoration to pray that He Who in His mercy has revealed so much to us may vouchsafe to give us that spirit of fellowship with His great purposes that, as He has taught us to pray "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is done in Heaven," so we may hasten the coming of that Kingdom by watching unto prayer, and by obeying His commandments, translating by word and deed to a world that knows Him not, some portion of His glorious character and His infinite compassion.