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OLD TESTAMENT QUOTATIONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE SECOND CHAPTER OF MATTHEW

THE subject of this paper is one that, in some ways, is not a little baffling, and that some modern scholars find to be bristling with difficulties. Occasionally we have rash and extreme pronouncements on this subject. Take a typical example. "St. Matthew," one modernist roundly declares, "in his first two chapters proves the events, which he describes, to have been prophesied by citing Old Testament passages—two of which conspicuously refer to entirely different matters, and do not mean at all what he suggests (Matt. ii. 15, 23)."¹ The difficulties are certainly there, but that method of disposing of them is altogether too flippant, and may be shown to be due to shallow thinking.

It is well to recognise quite frankly, at the outset, the existence of difficulties. Sometimes, Old Testament passages are quoted in the New Testament in such a way that we rub our eyes and wonder, Is that really meant? Did Isaiah, or David, or Moses, as the case may be, see that meaning in the words? Perhaps not, but does that prove that the meaning was not there? *The Expository Times* said recently,² in its "Notes of Recent Exposition": "The preacher is exposed to two temptations; the first is that of seeing too much in his text, the other is that of seeing too little The men who wrote the Bible, we may be sure, saw deep into the essence and mystery of life, and few things are more astonishing than the large and almost illimitable meaning to which their simple words lend themselves, when we learn the art of giving them the earnest consideration to which they are entitled." Shall we deny to the writers of the New Testament all knowledge of that "art"? That would be the very acme of absurdity, especially in view of the fact that the Spirit of Truth had come to them to guide them into all the truth.

¹ T. R. Glover, *The Jesus of History*, Chapter III.

² June, 1928.

With regard to many a verse in the Old Testament we may say, Who ever saw to the uttermost depths of it? Peter says of the Old Testament Scriptures: "Holy men of God spake as they were moved of the Holy Ghost."¹ Let us go a little further back in that passage, and read Peter's words in Weymouth's translation: "No prophecy in Scripture will be found to have come from the prophet's own prompting; for never did any prophecy come by human will, but men sent from God spoke as they were impelled by the Holy Spirit." The figure of speech in the word "impelled" is that of a ship impelled by a strong wind. There was a wind from the unseen bearing the writers of Scriptures out to regions beyond the reach of their own unaided intellects. "To those high bards thoughts beyond their thought were given." It may be very difficult to understand what exactly was involved in inspiration. That great scholar and great saint, the late Bishop Moule, says:² "I find nothing to define, in any full or exhaustive way, the *mode* of the supreme Author's management of the subordinate authors . . . 'Our theory is not to have a theory.' But I do find abundant testimony . . . that a humanitarian, naturalistic view of Scripture is wholly and gravely inadequate to meet the mysterious facts." While the *mode* of inspiration may ever elude us, the *fact* of inspiration must ever be taken into account and, if we desire to know *the Mind of the Spirit* in the Old Testament, we must surely sit humbly at the feet of the men who stood nearest to the Lord Jesus Christ and who, in fulfilment of the Lord's own promise, had the Spirit of Truth as their Guide into all moral and spiritual truth. Thomas Goodwin says: "The Holy Ghost has vast aims in writing of the Scriptures." Therefore, should we not say, when an Old Testament text is quoted in a strange and startling way in the New Testament, "here is the Holy Ghost showing me the depth of meaning that is in His own words, showing me His 'vast aims' in the Scriptures"? It is certainly supreme folly to say right off, out of our own heads, without any deeper inquiry, that the New Testament writer who makes the quotation has completely misunderstood it.

"We limit not the truth of God
To our poor reach of mind."

"The Lord hath yet more light and truth
To break forth from His Word."

¹ 2 Peter i. 21.

² In *Veni Creator*, pages 53 and 54.

It is deeply instructive to listen to Our Lord as He quotes the Old Testament. He takes words spoken by Jehovah to Moses at the Bush, and He shows us what they involve. "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."¹ "I *am* the God," not "I was." These men, therefore, "the world's grey fathers," are still alive, for God is not the God of a few handfuls of dust, that is blown about the desert, or "sealed within the iron hills."² He is the God of living men, who can still love Him and adore Him, to whom He can still speak, and who can still speak to Him. Further, God is not to be for ever the God of bodiless ghosts, but the God of *men* of complete personality, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. Therefore, our Lord says, the words spoken long ago at the Bush in the desert not only involve personal immortality, but also point to a resurrection of the body. Perhaps no one dreamt that the words spoken to Moses had that fulness of meaning until our Lord "opened" that Scripture to men. Some stars are so far away that it takes thousands of years for their light to reach the earth. A star of revelation gleamed in the sky of the world's night when Jehovah spoke those words to Moses at the Bush, but the fulness of light that is in them did not illuminate men until it was gathered together and focussed in Him who is the Light of the world.

Sometimes, it must be admitted, as we read the New Testament, we come upon a quotation that perplexes us. Sir George Adam Smith, in the first Lecture in his book, *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, refers to Paul's methods of quotation, and seems to insinuate that, in one or two instances, they are decidedly doubtful. "In one instance," Smith says, "he (Paul) calls the literal meaning of an Old Testament passage impossible, and substitutes for it a metaphorical application of his own, although there can be no doubt that the literal meaning was that of the original author." The reference here is to 1 Corinthians ix. 9, where Paul quotes from Deut. xxv. 4 the words, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn," when enforcing the claims of preachers of the Gospel to support from the liberality of their hearers.³ "Who goeth a warfare at his own charges? Who planteth a vineyard and

¹ Exodus iii. 6; Matthew xxii. 31, 32.

² Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, Canto LVI.

³ These words are quoted again, with a similar application, in 1 Tim. v. 18.

eateth not of the fruit thereof ? Or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock ? Say I these things as a man ? Or saith not the Law the same also ? For it is written in the Law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God care for oxen ? Or saith He it altogether for our sakes ? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written. . . .” “Deut. xxv. 4,” says Sir George Adam Smith, “forbids the muzzling of the ox which treads out the corn. In 1 Cor. ix. 9 Paul denies that this can be the intention of the Holy Spirit. ‘*Doth God take care for oxen ? Or doth He say it altogether for our sakes ?*’ The latter, he asserts, in spite of the fact that one of the most beautiful traits of the Book of Deuteronomy is the tenderness with which it makes provision for animals.”¹

Paul, one dares to say, had sufficient insight to discern that “beautiful trait.” Surely, even apart from special inspiration, a man of Paul’s mental acumen and of his good sense would never seek to prove that any metaphorical application of so plain a verse as Deut. xxv. 4 is the *only* meaning that verse can have. When we examine his words carefully and dispassionately, we find that Paul does *not* call “the literal meaning of this verse impossible.” We find also that he does not say that God has no care for oxen ; the force of his argument surely is that the God who cares so much for oxen will surely care much more for His servants, His children. Compare Matt. vi. 26. We find further that Paul does not assert that God says *this altogether* for our sakes ; what he does assert is that God speaks these words for the sake of the oxen, and also for our sakes, that there is *a message for us* in the words of the Law, and there is a great principle embodied in those words that finds an application in higher realms than that of the threshing floor. Professor G. G. Findlay says on Paul’s words : “The right of Christ’s ministers to ‘eat and drink’ is safeguarded by the principle that gives the ox his provender out of the corn he treads,” and he proceeds to point out that Paul’s method in such interpretations is radically different from the allegorising fancies of a Jewish interpreter like Philo. “Philo destroys the historical sense ; Paul extracts its moral principle.”²

As is well known, quotations from the Old Testament are very frequent in the first Gospel, which has over fifty of them.

¹ This quotation is taken from a footnote to Sir George Adam Smith’s Lecture.

² Expositor’s Greek Testament, *in loc.*

The formula "That it might be fulfilled" occurs oftener in that Gospel than anywhere else. No doubt, that Gospel was written primarily for the Jews, and the aim of the writer was to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was the Antitype of all the types of the Old Covenant, the realisation of all the visions, the fulfilment of all the hopes of the Old Testament. In his first two chapters he has no less than five quotations, four of these being in the second chapter. These four present a beautiful cluster of shining jewels, and they lead us along various roads of fruitful thought, while at the same time they raise not a few questions.

The first of them¹ is from Micah v. 2. There, prophecy definitely singles out Bethlehem-Judah as the birthplace of the Messiah. Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, is to become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest (Micah iii. 12), and out of the little country village of Bethlehem the Promised King is to come, the King "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting . . . And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of Jehovah His God . . . ; for now shall He be great to the ends of the earth." The king is not to be "born up there in the capital, foster-brother of the very nobles who oppressed them, but born among the people, sharer of their toils and of their wrongs."² From among the shepherds of Judah, God says, the Governor shall come forth who "shall be shepherd of my people Israel."³ Twice in Matthew ii we read of "Herod the King,"⁴ and we are thus reminded of the depths of degradation into which the people of God had sunk, with a filthy wretch like Herod on the throne. Matthew recognises in the Babe of Bethlehem the true King, whose Kingdom is to cover the whole earth, and whose Name will be as ointment poured forth ages and ages after the name of Herod has rotted away.

The second quotation in Matt. ii raises far more difficulties. Matthew tells us that Joseph "took the young child and His mother by night, and departed into Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt have I called my Son."⁵ Now, when we examine the passage in Hosea, we see that the prophet is thinking exclusively of the nation

¹ Matt. ii. 5, 6.

² G. A. Smith on Micah v. 2, in *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*.

³ Matt. ii. 6, R.V.

⁴ vv. 1, 3.

⁵ Matt. ii. 14, 15.

of Israel. Israel is Jehovah's son ; compare Exodus iv. 22, where Jehovah says to Moses : " Thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Israel is my son, my firstborn." In Hosea, in many places, Jehovah reminds His people of all His mercies in the days of old, in the early days of their national history. " When Israel was a child," God says, " then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." " God's eyes, that passed unheeding the adult princes of the world, fell upon this little slave boy, and He loved him and gave him a career."¹ God then proceeds, in one of the homeliest and most tender passages in the Bible, to tell how He taught the infant nation to walk in the way of righteousness, taking them by their arms, as a father guides the uncertain, stumbling steps of his child across the floor, healing their wounds when they slipped and fell, winning His people's obedience, not by the violence that is suited to an unruly heifer, but with the cords of a man (cords such as man can bear) and with bands of love.² In what sense, then, can the words of Hosea xi. 1 be applied to Christ ?

Some light may be thrown on that question by a study of the " Servant of the Lord " passages in the Second Part of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah (chapters 40-66). That, in itself, is a big question, and we can only indicate a line of thought. When we study those passages we see how the prophet passes from the idea of *Israel* as Jehovah's Servant to that of a wonderful *Person* who is to realise the ideal of service which Israel had miserably failed to realise, and who is, further, to accomplish a redeeming work which is quite beyond the power of " mere man " to perform. There are three outstanding passages in Isaiah dealing with the " Servant of the Lord." In the first (Isa. xlii. 1-4)³ he appears as a great Teacher and Emancipator, whose mission is to be world-wide. In the second (Isa. l. 5-7) he appears as a Martyr, with hair plucked out, his face covered with " shame and spitting," his back scored by the cruel scourgings of the " smiters." There is a real progress of thought in Isaiah's delineation of the Servant, until he brings us to the glorious culmination in the grandest and deepest passage of all (Isa. lii. 13-liii. 12). Sir George Adam Smith has asserted that " none but prejudiced

¹ G. A. Smith, *op. cit.*

² Hosea xi. 3, 4.

³ In Isa. xli. 8, 9 Israel is the Servant of the Lord, but in Isa. xlii. 1, as the present writer thinks, the figure of a personal Servant over against Israel begins to come into view ; see v. 6, where He is said to be given as " a covenant of the people " (Israel). It is true that later on, in chapters xliiii. 10, xlv. 1, 2, 21, xlv. 4, etc., the Servant is again Israel.

Jews have ever denied that this great prophecy, known as the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, was fulfilled in One Person, Jesus of Nazareth, and achieved in all its details by Him alone."¹ Indeed, that great prophecy reads as though it had been written at the foot of the Cross.

We see, therefore, that Israel was called the Son of Jehovah and the Servant of Jehovah, but Israel proved utterly unworthy of that high honour, an honour bestowed by grace. These lofty titles also pointed forward to a Person who should be worthy of them, a Person who bears the title "Son of God" by right, and who became God's Servant "for us men and our salvation." This Person, Matthew says, entered fully into the experiences of the nation from which, according to the flesh, He sprang. "In all their affliction He was afflicted."² He, too, had to go down into Egypt. "He learned obedience by the things which He suffered,"³ and never were the "cords" and the "bands" needed in His case, for He "was not rebellious, neither turned away back."⁴ As Paul says, He was the true "Seed of Abraham."⁵ "In Him the race was summed up, as it were. In Him it fulfilled its purpose and became a blessing to the whole earth. Without Him its separate existence as a peculiar people had no meaning. Thus He was not only the representative, but the embodiment of the race. In this way the people of Israel is the type of Christ; and in the New Testament parallels are sought in the career of the one to the life of the other."⁶

The third quotation in Matt. ii is made in connection with the massacre of the babes of Bethlehem. "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken of by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted because they are not."⁷ The quotation is from Jeremiah xxxi. 15. The prophet sees in vision his exiled countrymen passing in doleful procession through Rama, somewhere to the north of Jerusalem, on their way to Babylon, and he says: "The sorrow of Rachel has broken out afresh because of the woes of her people." The narrative of Rachel's death, "when there was but a little way to come to Ephrath,"⁸ is one of "the most

¹ The Book of Isaiah, Vol. II, Chapter xvi.

³ Heb. v. 8.

⁵ Gal. iii. 16.

⁷ Matt. ii. 17, 18.

² Isa. lxiii. 9.

⁴ Isa. i. 5.

⁶ Lightfoot on Gal. iii. 16.

⁸ Gen. xxxv. 19.

beautifully touching passages in sacred writ," as Dr. Thomas Chalmers said. The question of the exact site of Rachel's tomb presents some difficulties. But, in a highly poetical passage like that of Jeremiah, such questions seem rather out of place. "The words even in their original place," says Dr. A. B. Bruce, "are highly imaginative. The scene of Rachel weeping for her children is one of several *tableaux*, which pass before the prophet's eye in a vision, in a dream which, on awakening, he found to be sweet. It was poetry to begin with, and it is poetry here," in Matthew.¹ "Rachel weeping for her children" is a phrase that speaks of the agony of the mother's heart, whether in Ramah or in Bethlehem, or wherever a mother's heart did break. When Jerusalem went into exile, that was a time of weeping and lamentation, and waters of a full cup were wrung out by many broken hearts, but when the sword of Herod swept the nurseries of Bethlehem, and the little feet were stiffened for ever, then the cup of suffering humanity was fuller still. There were *fulfilled* the words of Jeremiah. "A lesser and a great event, of different times, may answer to the single sense of one passage of Scripture, until the prophecy is *exhausted*," says Bengel. Rachel has now come all the way to Ephrath, and she has drunk the cup of her sorrow to the very dregs. "Joy born at Bethlehem" is the title of one of Spurgeon's sermons. The sorrow of the world, too, the sorrow which is one of the bitter fruits of sin, had poignant expression when the forces of hell, in blindly feeling for the Divine Babe, swept so many helpless infants from the arms of their mothers.

A writer of a past generation, Dr. Patrick Fairbairn, in his very full and painstaking work, *The Typology of Scripture*, which may still be consulted with profit, has some interesting remarks on Matthew's quotation here. He says:² "The wail was that of a fond mother, whose family prospects seemed now to be entirely blasted. And, amid all the outward diversities that existed, the Evangelist descried substantially the same ground for such a disconsolate grief in the event at Bethlehem. For here, again, there was another, though more disguised enemy, of the real hope of Israel, who struck what was certainly meant to be an equally fatal blow. Though it was but an handful of children that actually perished, yet, as among these the Child of Promise was

¹ Expositor's Greek Testament, *in loc.*

² Volume I, Appendix A.

supposed to be included, it might seem as if all were lost ; Rachel's offspring, as the heritage of God, had ceased to exist ; and the new covenant, with all its promises of grace and glory, was for ever buried in the grave of that Son of the Virgin—if so be that He *had fallen* a victim to the ruthless jealousy of the tyrant." But, things are never as dark as they seem. The Jews of Jeremiah's time are assured that their exile is not to last for ever ; the promises of God shall be fulfilled, and their children " shall come again from the land of the enemy."¹ And, when the black clouds that have brooded over the homes of Bethlehem have lifted, what do we see ? We see a dead Herod, and a living Christ. " And He shall live . . . His name shall endure for ever : His Name shall be continued as long as the sun : men shall be blessed in Him : all nations shall call Him blessed."²

The last quotation in Matt. ii is this : " He (Joseph) came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth ; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene."³ Here is a real *crux interpretum*, for no such passage can be found. According to the dictum of Dr. T. R. Glover, quoted in the opening paragraph of this paper, we have here an Old Testament passage which does not mean at all what Matthew suggests. He might have revealed to us his secret, and might have told us where the passage is to be found.

To begin with, we may well agree with the Rev. A. Carr, when he writes in *The Cambridge Bible* : " The meaning of this passage was probably as clear to the contemporaries of St. Matthew, as the other references to prophecy vv. 15, 17 ; for us it is involved in doubt." It is also evident at once that the evangelist has no one passage in mind here, for he does not point to any one solitary prophetic oracle, but uses the more general and vague phrase, " in the prophets."

The usual view—and it has much to recommend it—is that there is a play upon words involved here. Such plays upon words are familiar to all students of Old Testament prophecy ; see, for example, some striking instances in the first chapter of the Book of the Prophet Micah. The writer of the First Gospel is steeped in the Old Testament, and is the most thoroughly Jewish of the four evangelists, and a play upon a word such as seems to be

¹ Jeremiah xxxi. 16, 17.

² Psalm lxxii. 15 and 17.

³ Matthew ii. 23.

involved here comes naturally from him. The view referred to is that we have here a special, though not an exclusive, reference to Isaiah xi. 1, where we read about the "Branch" (נֶצֶר—*netzer*) which is to grow out of "David's roots." According to the verses which immediately precede that oracle, the mighty Assyrian empire is to go crashing down to utter ruin. As Sir George Adam Smith puts it: "The Assyrian when he falls shall fall for ever like the cedars of Lebanon, that send no fresh sprout forth from their broken stumps. But out of the trunk of the Judæan oak, also brought down by these terrible storms, Isaiah sees springing a fair and powerful Branch. Assyria, he would tell us, has no future. Judah has a future." The nation of Judah shall be almost exterminated, the house of David shall sink into a very lowly condition, the dynasty of David shall be hewn down to a stump, but then, out of that stump, this tiny shoot or sprout will appear, and with it will be bound up, not the hopes of Judah only, but the hopes of the world.

That prophecy has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. When the fortunes of Judah were at a very low ebb He appeared, and from very insignificant and lowly beginnings, in accordance with hints given here and there "in the prophets," His religion is now marching towards the conquest of the world.

"The best explanation of the origin of this name (Nazarene)" says the Commentary of Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, "appears to be that which traces it to the word *netzer* in Isaiah xl. 1—the small *twig*, *sprout*, or *sucker*, which the prophet there says 'shall come forth from the stem (or rather 'stump') of Jesse, the branch which should fructify from his roots.' The little town of Nazareth—mentioned neither in the Old Testament nor in Josephus—was probably so called from its insignificance—a weak twig in contrast to a stately tree; and a special contempt seemed to rest upon it—'Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?' (John i. 46)—over and above the general contempt in which all Galilee was held, from the number of Gentiles that settled in the upper territories of it and, in the estimation of the Jews, debased it. Thus, in the providential arrangement by which our Lord was brought up at the insignificant and opprobrious town called *Nazareth* there was involved, first, a local humiliation; next, an allusion to Isaiah's prediction of His lowly, twig-like upspringing from the branchless, dried-up stump of Jesse; and yet further, a standing memorial of that

humiliation which 'the prophets,' in a number of the most striking predictions, had attached to the Messiah."

A superficial glance at some of the Old Testament quotations which occur in the New Testament may sometimes make us think that those who make the quotations have grossly blundered. Deeper study causes us to revise that opinion very speedily.

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