

# Israel in the Past and Present.

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*Paper 6 of 20 'Plain Papers on Prophetic and Other Subjects'.*

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It has been remarked, in *The Doom of Christendom*, that "when Christendom, the wild olive, shall have been for its non-continuance in God's goodness cut off, the natural branches are again to be grafted into their own olive tree; and that, as far as human instrumentality is to be employed in that work, they are to be the instruments of subduing the whole world to Christ's sway." We hope, ere long, to present the Scripture-proof of this to our readers.

But first, it may be well to glance rapidly along the current of Scripture testimony as to Israel's calling and past history. Israel's importance, as the centre of God's earthly arrangements, is most forcibly expressed in the well-known passage, Deut. 32: 8-10, "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance." The division of the earth was in the days of Peleg. (See Gen. 10: 25.) Peleg preceded Abraham by several generations. Nevertheless, "when the Most High divided to the nations their Inheritance," that which formed the central and controlling thought in His arrangements, was His foreknowledge of the number of the children of Israel. Israel was dear to Him above all the other nations, — "his portion, and the lot of his inheritance." The nations were to be both placed and governed in relation to Israel; and hence, in this primary appointment of the bounds or limits of their respective dominions, all was settled with reference to Israel. Could anything more emphatically declare the pre-eminent place which Israel occupies in divine counsels touching this earth — its government — and its inhabitants?

There are many Christians who seem to suppose that we have nothing in Scripture but what bears immediately on the question of individual salvation. Now this is a great mistake, and serious in its consequences, however pious and gracious those may be who are under its influence. It results from not sufficiently recognizing the great end God has in view in all His actings and in all His dispensations. This end is not our salvation, important as that may be, and surely is to us. God's end is His own glory; and it is in Christ that all His glory is manifested and accomplished. It is true that in the accomplishment, and display of His glory in Christ the salvation of all who, through grace, believe in Him is made sure. Still, the salvation of such is not God's final object, but a means of promoting it. *His object is to glorify Himself in Christ!* In doing this, He saves us, blessed be His name! by His sovereign and almighty grace; but it is important that we should be able to distinguish between the end God has in view, and the means (momentous as these may be in themselves) by which He effects His design. This is important for many reasons, — and among others, for this — that God's object embraces many things besides the salvation of His people. In glorifying Himself in Christ, He not only saves for ever all who, from the beginning to the end of time, are the subjects of His grace, but He reveals Himself in a wondrous variety of relations to Christ, to mankind at large, to creation, to particular portions of the human family, yea, in some instances, to single individuals. Abraham and David are remarkable examples of this. Then there is the whole subject of God's government of the

world. Christ Himself is the centre of divine counsels and the subject of all Scripture; but God made Israel the centre of His earthly government. "In consequence," (as another has said) "even the profane history of nations centres round it. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, all contend for Israel's land, are known in connection with it, or actually get their full imperial possession and character at the time they acquired possession of it — I do not say *by gaining possession of it* — but at the epoch at which they did. Though clouds of dark traditions, scarce pierced by modern researches, hang over all the rest of the nations, and obscure their history while revealing their existence, in the neighbourhood of Israel all is light. The light of Israel's history is shed on all the nations around them. It is preserved almost with modern accuracy, when a few fragments scarce rescue from entire oblivion other ancient histories. We have to disentomb the remains of the Thebes and the Ninevehs to get at the history of their ancient monarchs, and to know their dynasties; while, by God's providence, that which gives some historic data to the glories of Mizraim and Ashur, confirms in its detail that of which we have already the minutest particulars in Israel's authentic history. We find, in pictures yet fresh on the lore-covered walls of the country of the Pharaohs, the very kinds of overseers over the Jews making their bricks, of which Moses speaks in the book of Exodus. Modern research alone has given the place and importance to those countries which the Scriptures had already assigned them."\*

\*"The Irrationalism of Infidelity."

The immediate occasion of the call of Abraham seems to have been the prevalence of idolatry in those early ages of the world. While those survived who had witnessed the deluge — or indeed those who had held intercourse with such as had — we may well suppose that the fear of another such interposition of God's power in judgment would have a strong hold on men's minds. Satan, finding probably that it would be vain to attempt to eradicate these fears of supernatural agency, succeeded in turning them to his own account by inducing men to substitute for the true God, whom they traditionally knew, a host of imaginary deities who began to take God's place in their minds, as the objects of their homage and their dread. Satan himself, under this disguise, became the object of worship. These dupes of superstition and idolatry might not be aware of this; but Scripture tells us, that "the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God." (1 Cor. 10: 20.) The history of all this, as to the moral process by which it was brought about, we have in Rom. 1: 21-25. When men generally had thus given up God for idols, "God gave them up" to all the well known horrors of paganism. Three times in the passage just referred to, we have this expression, — "Wherefore God also *gave them up*." (Ver. 24.) "For this cause God *gave them up*." (Ver. 26.) "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God *gave them over* to a reprobate mind." (Ver. 28.) It was from amid this mass of idolaters, that Abraham was called. When God "gave men up" to the delusions they had chosen, He did not leave Himself without witness among men. "And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood (i.e. the river) in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac." (Joshua 24: 2, 3.) Four hundred years and upwards elapsed before Abraham's offspring, were manifested as a nation. This was not till their redemption out of Egypt; and with that event and those which

immediately succeeded — the passage through the wilderness, and their entrance into Canaan — their national history, properly speaking, begins.

Two things must be obvious to every serious reader of the Old Testament. First, the nation of Israel was designed to be a standing testimony against idolatry — a testimony to the unity of God, and to the fact that Jehovah is the one, true God. Secondly, Israel was designed to be a specimen of the happiness — the prosperity — of a people living under the immediate government of Jehovah. As to the first point, need I quote such Scriptures as the following? — "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. *Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*" (Ex. 20: 2, 3.) "Hear; O Israel: *The Lord our God is one Lord.*" (Deut. 6: 4.) "Therefore, *ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God.*" (Isaiah 43: 12.) With regard to the second point, consider such Scriptures as these: "If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time; and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land. . . . For I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and establish my covenant with you. And ye shall eat old store, and bring forth the old because of the new. And I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people." (Lev. 26: 3-12.) All this was conditional indeed on their obedience. So also are the blessings promised them in Deut. 28. But the following passage is prophetic:— "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them. Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens shall drop dew. Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places." (Deut. 33: 26-29.) Hear the words of David also, "And what one nation in the earth is like thy people Israel, whom God went to redeem to be his own people, to make thee a name of greatness and terribleness, by driving out nations from before thy people, whom thou hast redeemed out of Egypt? For thy people Israel didst thou make thine own people for ever; and thou, Lord, becamest their God." (1 Chr. 17: 20, 21.) Not to multiply quotations, I give but one out of many which describe the effect upon the nations of Israel's future restoration: "And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them: and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity, that I procure unto it." (Jer. 33: 9.)

Such being God's objects in His dealings with the nation of Israel, let us now consider a little the way in which He has acted to bring them to pass. First of all, we find that He made choice of Abraham as the father of this people, and to him He made unconditional promises that his seed should possess the land of Canaan for an inalienable inheritance. These promises He even confirmed to him by an oath. He repeated the promises to Isaac and to Jacob. It is to be observed, moreover, that promises were made to Abraham that all the families of the earth should be blessed in him (Gen. 12: 3) and in his seed. (Gen. 22: 18.) That Christ was descended

from Abraham, the Holy Ghost has been careful to note, at the beginning of the Gospel by Matthew. The Apostle Paul explicitly applies to Christ the term "Abraham's seed." "He saith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ." (Gal. 3: 16.) This may be supposed by some to nullify any special application of the promises to Abraham's seed according to the flesh — that is, to the nation of Israel. But surely it has no such meaning or intent as this. It simply shows that, whether the subject be Israel's special privileges and blessings as promised to Abraham, or the participation of Gentiles in the promise that in him and in his seed should all the families of the earth be blessed, it is in Christ, the true seed of Abraham, that all will be fulfilled. All nations were not blessed in Abraham, or his seed, while the seed were under the law. The promised Seed had first to come. The true Isaac had not only *in intention*, but *in fact*, to be offered up. He had to be received back, not "*in a figure*," but *in reality*, from the dead, ere this promise could be fulfilled. The extension of the Gospel to us, sinners of the Gentiles, is in part the fulfilment of this promise: it waits its full accomplishment, when Christ, *the true seed*, shall be known and confessed by Israel, *the natural seed*. The proof of this will fall under the second head of our present inquiry. I only notice the principle here. Gal. 3: 16 is supposed by many to set this principle aside; and it would scarcely have been fair to quote the passage, as above, without noticing what some have thus alleged respecting it.

The promises to the fathers were unconditional: so were all the dealings of God with the nation of Israel, in redeeming it out of Egypt, and conducting it in grace as far as to Mount Sinai. There the law was given, the people having consented to receive it and promised to keep it, as the condition of their continued blessing. With what result I need not inform my readers. Their dancing round the golden calf, which Aaron had made for them to worship, was but the beginning of a course of disobedience and rebellion which characterized them throughout. God had long patience with them, and bore with their evil ways, introducing first one principle and then another, on which He could graciously exercise His long-suffering towards them. The varied institutions and agencies in which these principles of God's ways were embodied were all typical of better things to succeed. The tabernacle, with its priesthood, its sacrifices, and its services — the judges and the prophets who were raised up from time to time, as well as the royal dignities and authority of David and his offspring, all sustained this double character. Each, for the time being, was a link between God and the nation; while all were shadows of good things to come. Priesthood, royalty, and prophecy, were the three great institutions, by which God maintained His connection with Israel. The latter, indeed, could scarcely in strictness be termed an institution, as prophecy was not successional, but dependent on the sovereign actings of God in grace, who raised up prophets, and sent them according to His own will. It is affecting to notice, how each institution became in man's hands corrupt, powerless for good, and even sometimes positively active in evil. When the nation had begun to depart from God, after the death of Joshua, and God visited them with one chastening after another, judges were raised up, by whom God delivered them out of the hands of their enemies, and governed them — generally throughout the life-time of the judge. But, for the whole of this period, the abiding, visible link between God and the people, was the tabernacle at Shiloh, with the priests who ministered there. In the days of Eli and his two sons, the priesthood itself became totally corrupted, and God not only gave the people into the hands of the Philistines, but put an end to the order of things which He had instituted at Shiloh. The ark was taken; the priests were slain; Eli, their aged father, fell down and brake his neck; and the wife of Phineas expired, naming her son, to whom she was giving birth, "Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was

taken, and because of her father-in-law and her husband." (1 Sam. 4: 21.) It is of this crisis in Israel's history, that the Psalmist writes thus: "For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images. When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: so that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; and delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand." (Psalm 78: 58-61.) It was not long, indeed, before God vindicated His own name, and compelled the Philistines to restore the ark. But the ark and the sanctuary were never re-established at Shiloh; and everything was in an unsettled state till the son of Jesse was raised to the throne. After he had been used of God in subduing Israel's enemies all around, he brought up the ark in triumph to Jerusalem; and there, in the temple reared for it by his son, it found a resting-place during the days of the kingdom.

It was in the counsels of God from the beginning, that royalty should be established in Israel, and that He whom we know as the blessed Heir of all things — David's son and David's Lord — should, amid all His other glories, sit "upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice for ever." (Isaiah 9: 7.) This was the purpose of God from the beginning; but the due time for its disclosure had to arrive, ere it was made known. From Moses to Samuel, the government of Israel was a pure theocracy - God was their king. He raised up officers, indeed, such as Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and the Judges, by means of whom He administered the government of the nation; still there was no, king, but "the King eternal, immortal, invisible." In the law itself, however, God had provided for the event of a king being placed over the nation, and directed both who should be appointed ("him whom the Lord thy God shall choose") and how he was to conduct himself when he had been placed upon the throne. (See Deut. 17: 14-20.) All this was anticipative; and, like all God's gracious provisions for man's need, its application was reserved, till man's sin afforded the occasion for its actual introduction. It was Israel's sin, in the days of Samuel, to ask a king — thereby rejecting the Lord from being their king; and Saul, the first king who reigned over them, was an answer in judgment to their request: — "I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath." (Hosea 13: 11.) It was with David that the kingdom, according to God's thoughts and counsels, began. He was the "man after God's own heart." With him God made a covenant. Some things in this covenant were conditional; others were unconditional. Of his son, who was to succeed him on the throne, God said, "If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men." (2 Sam. 7: 14.) So far the covenant was conditional. But it is immediately added, "My mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee." Nothing was to cause the total forfeiture of God's mercy and favour by the house of David. However his sons might fail, and whatever chastening they might in consequence endure, nothing should interfere with the fulfilment of God's covenanted mercies. "And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever." It is well for us distinctly to bear in mind this two-fold character of the covenant with David. On the one hand, there were pledged and secured to him, and to his seed, an unfailling house, and an inalienable kingdom. On the other hand, if any of his offspring should commit iniquity, the transgressors were to be chastened with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men. In either case, it is with the *house*, and the *throne*, of David, that Israel stands or falls.

The conditional provisions of the covenant soon came into requisition. Solomon, the first of David's successors on the throne, so departed from God in his old age, that some strokes of the rod were inflicted even during his lifetime. Immediately after his decease, ten tribes were rent away from the house of David. Even then it was said, "Unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light alway before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there." Conditional promises are made to Jeroboam, the first king of the ten sundered tribes — *but conditional promises only*. The whole communication to Jeroboam concludes with the remarkable words, "I will for this afflict the seed of David, BUT NOT FOR EVER." (1 Kings 11: 36-39.) David's seed had now come under the rod of the covenant; and we see little afterwards but its inflictions, and the multiplied and multiplying iniquities, which, notwithstanding all the patience with which God bore with them, brought these inflictions upon the guilty nation, and its more guilty kings. The history of the ten tribes is one dark picture of evil, without a single relieving feature, from beginning to end. At last, the whole kingdom of the ten tribes is carried away captive, by the king of Assyria. (2 Kings 17.) The kingdom of Judah still continued a while, under the government of the house and the throne of David, and the mercies which God had pledged to that favoured line.

But, even in Judah, one king arises after another, of whom there is the emphatic record — "and he did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord his God, like David his father." These are the exact words used of Ahaz, in whose reign evil made such rapid strides, that we begin to find, in prophecies written during his reign, and those which succeeded, predictions of utter desolation against Jerusalem, and the land, and its inhabitants. It was even a little previous to his reign, that Isaiah had the vision of the Lord's glory, of which he writes in Isa. 6. At the close of that chapter, he is instructed that judicial blindness should fall upon the nation; and when he anxiously inquires, "Lord, how long?" the answer is, "Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, and the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land." (Ver. 10-12.) Still, it is intimated that a remnant should be preserved for ultimate blessing.

It is from this epoch that prophecy, in the sense of its having been recorded and preserved for us in the Scriptures, properly dates. It embraces three leading themes. First, the prophets dwell on the wickedness of the people then around them, and call them to repentance, with all its practical fruits, promising mercy from the Lord if the people will but hearken, and presenting various motives to influence them to do so. Secondly, foreseeing the rejection of their message, and the consequent hardening of the people in iniquity, they predict the judgments of God which were to overtake them. They generally begin with those judgments which were then at hand, and pass on to the final judgments, which are to precede or attend the second coming of Christ. Thirdly, they predict the coming of Christ, But, as His first coming to suffer was an event still future when they wrote, we find them, just as we might expect, blending together in the same prophecy predictions which relate to His first coming, and predictions which relate to His second; and that often, without any intimation in the passage that He would come more than once. Then, besides, they seldom treat of the coming of Christ without passing on to its glorious results, in the overthrow of the nations, which have been the Lord's rod to punish Israel, and the introduction of His glorious reign, in which Israel, restored and saved, is to be pre-eminent among the nations, and the seed of blessing to the whole earth. Such is prophecy. How gracious of God to introduce such a light for any poor feeble ones who really trembled at His word, when

the darkness of apostasy and rebellion was so rapidly overspreading the scene, and when the gloom of approaching judgments was beginning to darken the horizon.

It was in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, and by means of him, that the long-threatened judgments began actually to be inflicted. The house of David had, for the time being, utterly corrupted itself, and the nation was given up to captivity. The throne of David was not transferred to another Israelitish line, as that of Saul had been transferred to David. That could not be. But the throne of David was nevertheless cast to the ground; the royal family, and most of the inhabitants of the land, were made captives and transported to Babylon; and the City and temple were entirely overthrown.

Three things have characterized the condition of Israel ever since the epoch just referred to, which did not attend any of the previous chastisements which had befallen them. One is, the loss of all that marked and manifested the presence of Jehovah among them. It has not been a temporary, short captivity of the ark among the Philistines, terminated by their being compelled to return it, with every token of profound homage to the power of Him whose throne and dwelling-place it was, but a removal of the glory from Jerusalem, and the earth, altogether. Ezekiel, who prophesied among the captives by the river of Chebar in Chaldea, saw in vision the departure of the Shekinah, or cloud of the divine presence and glory, first "from off the threshold of the house," (Ezek. 10: 18,) and then from the city altogether. "And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city." (Ezek. 11: 23.) The prophet Hosea bears testimony to Israel's condition, thus denuded of all that outwardly marked the presence of God among them, and declares that it should be of long continuance. "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim." (Hosea 3: 4.)

Secondly, God has disowned them as His people. "Then, said God, call his name Lo-ammi: (that is, not my people:) for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God." (Hosea 1: 9.) In all their previous calamities, they had still been owned of God as His people, and He had owned Himself to be their God. This was what constituted, in fact, the great distinction between them and other nations. But this was now in judgment set aside.

Thirdly, God's throne at Jerusalem — the throne on which He had placed David and his sons — being overturned, royal power was conferred of God on the chief of the Gentiles. It was not simply, as before, that the incursions of surrounding nations were permitted as a chastening for Israel's sin, but the whole order of God's government of the earth was changed. He had dwelt between the cherubim, in the temple at Jerusalem, and governed Israel by His laws, blessing or chastising them according to their ways, and dealing with the surrounding nations according to the course they pursued with regard to Israel. Now, Israel was given up — abandoned — and supreme power on the earth was bestowed on the king of Babylon. He did not inherit the throne which God had set up at Jerusalem; but that throne being, for Israel's incorrigible wickedness, overturned, Nebuchadnezzar was made chief over the nations; universal dominion being confided to him of God. "Thou, O king, art a king of kings; for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the

beasts of the field, and the fowls of the heaven, hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold." (Dan. 2: 37, 38.)

The three features just mentioned have characterized Israel's state to the present moment. The return from Babylon, in the days of Cyrus, Ezra, and Nehemiah, did not reverse or cancel one of them. There was no return of the glory — there was no remission of the sentence, "Lo-ammi, not my people;" and there was no setting aside of the dominant power of the Gentiles. To what end, then, was the return from Babylon, after the seventy years captivity? A most important question, and deserving of the most serious consideration.

My readers may have noticed in Scripture, that all the visitations of the divine displeasure on Israel, down to the point to which we have traced their history, were mainly on account of idolatry. 1 Samuel 7: 3, and Psalm 78: 58, prove this decisively as to Shiloh; the whole history proves it as to the kingdom of the ten tribes; and, as to Judah's captivity, let the following passages decide: "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah: because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands: therefore my wrath shall be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched." (2 Chr. 34: 24, 25.) "Moreover, all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much, after all the abominations of the heathen, and polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes and sending; because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age; he gave them all into his hand." (2 Chr. 36: 14-17.) Thus it is evident, that the special sin for which these judgments overtook the nation of Israel, was that sin of idolatry, the prevalence of which, among the early inhabitants of the earth, was the occasion of Abraham's being called out from the mass of mankind. Israel was destined to be a special standing testimony against idolatry, and to the unity of the true God — Jehovah — who had deigned to call them His people, and to call Himself their God. When they themselves became incorrigible idolaters, what remained, but that God should give them up to judgment and desolation, as He did? They had ceased to be, by the exclusive maintenance of His worship, a witness for the true God. He now made them an involuntary testimony, by the judgments with which he visited them, and by which they have been pursued to the present day!

He had indeed promised, by Jeremiah, that there should be a return from the Babylonish captivity, at the expiration of seventy years. We are all aware that this return took place. But, precious as was this touching proof of God's faithfulness and mercy to the few who returned to Jerusalem, and to the land of their fathers, there was not then, and there never has been since, a restoration of the nation at large to the blessings forfeited by their fathers' sins. They were but very few who did return; the mass of the nation remained in Babylon, and the countries where they had been scattered. The ten tribes. never returned at all. There was indeed a second temple erected; but no ark of the covenant was enshrined within its holy of holies; and there was no

shekinah of glory as the sign of the presence of Him who once dwelt between the cherubim. The restored captives had renewed possession of the land; but it was not by the tenure of an unconditional gift from God, but by permission of their Gentile masters. The sentence, "not my people," still rested upon the nation; and so distinctly was this marked, that (as has been observed by others) in the three prophecies which were written after the return from Babylon, God never addresses them as His people. There are predictions, *that in days yet to come they shall be so called*; but, in the way of actual address to the then existing inhabitants of the land, God does not so own them. This is surely a circumstance deserving our most grave attention.

There can be no doubt, that the great design of the return from Babylon at the end of the seventy years captivity, was, that Israel might be in the land when the hour arrived for Christ's appearance among them. All the divine counsels as to Israel, just as with regard to everything besides, have Christ for their centre. He is the seed of Abraham, to whom the promises were made. He is the Son of David, the hope of Israel, and of David's house. It was to Him, and the stability of God's purposes in Him, that all the unconditional part of the covenant with David referred. Everything in the whole course of God's dealings with Israel had been steadily pointing onwards to Him. All the typical persons, places, offerings, and acts, celebrated in Israel's history, or enjoined in Israel's laws, were but shadowy representations of Him. Of Him the prophets had largely spoken; of Him the psalmists had sweetly sung. There were indeed mysterious indications, both in types, and psalms, and prophecies, of His coming in humiliation — of His coming to suffer and to die. Looking back on the past, in the light of New Testament revelations, all this seems clear enough to us. And, doubtless, it ought to have been clear to them. *Faith would have made it so*. But, alas! it was to be demonstrated, by the result of Christ's coming, as well as by all previous dealings of God with man, that neither faith, nor love, nor anything according to God, is native to the heart of man, — poor, fallen, sinful, rebel man. Yea, it was to be shown, that with every advantage that the Jew possessed, after all the cultivation bestowed on him of God, for so many centuries, even his heart, when fairly tested by the mission of Christ, had nothing in it to respond to "the grace and truth" which "came" by Him. This is a humbling view of the subject, and a deeply practical one, dear reader, for our own souls. But it is a view fully presented to us in the word of God.

The great object of Christ's coming was, beyond doubt, to accomplish redemption, and thus lay the basis for all the subsequent actings of God in grace, whether, at present, with regard to the Church gathered out of all nations, or, by and by, with regard to the nation of Israel, and the entire population of the millennial earth. Christ's death was, besides, as we are assured, the ground on which, anticipatively, God had saved individuals from the beginning. But let me again remind my christian readers, that the measure of what is revealed in Scripture is not what was needful for our salvation, but what God was pleased to do, and to make known, for the display and accomplishment of His own glory in Christ. And it was for His glory, not only that Christ should die to put away our sins, but that this should be at a time when it had been made fully manifest that less than this would not meet the desperate necessities of our ruined state. There was a "fulness of time," at which "God sent forth his Son." It was "in due time" that "Christ died for the ungodly." Let us remember, also, that both in His life and death Christ had relations to Israel *nationally considered*. Caiaphas prophesied (and we are told "he spake not of himself") "that Jesus should die *for that nation*." And, while the death of Christ is thus the meritorious ground of all the abundant blessing and prosperity which are yet to be Israel's portion, in days to

come, its perpetration, regarded as man's deed, was the crowning act of Israel's national iniquity; and this is the ground on which judgment has been executed upon them, by means of all the calamities which have since befallen them.

We have seen how, for their sins in general, and for the sin of idolatry in particular, they have been under God's righteous judgment, and the victims of Gentile oppression, ever since the days of Shalmaneser and Nebuchadnezzar. But the prophecies abound with predictions of their final and complete restoration, and of interminable blessing, to be enjoyed by them when so restored. These predictions associate the restoration of Israel with the coming of Messiah, and their penitent reception of Him as their long-promised Deliverer and King. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." (Ps. 110: 3.) Psalm 118 treats largely of their deliverance and subsequent prosperity and joy, and represents them as exclaiming, "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord." Isaiah represents them as saying, "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." (Isa. 25: 9.) Again, "Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee." (Isa. 26: 8.) In another passage, the Lord Himself is represented as saying, "For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, even I, will tear and go away: I will take away, and none shall rescue him. I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction, they will seek me early." (Hosea 5: 14, 15.) In the next verses they are represented as saying, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us: he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." Many — perhaps it might be truly said most — of the passages which foretell Israel's restoration, foretell also this humbled, penitent state of the nation at the time of its accomplishment. In the Gospels we find Christ presented to the Jewish nation — His person, His miracles, His ministry, the circumstances of His birth, everything, in short, to the minutest detail, corresponding to the prophecies of their Messiah; and the nation is thus put to the test as to whether it is in the penitent, humbled state, in which these prophecies represent it to be, when Messiah is received and the nation restored. Alas! my readers are aware of the result. While certain prophecies were fulfilled in His being thus presented, the people, in their blindness and unbelief, fulfilled other prophecies in rejecting and crucifying their Messiah and King. They saw "no beauty" in Him "that they should desire him." He had to say, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and in vain." They "smote the Judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek." "They parted his garments among them, and cast lots upon his vesture." "They pierced his hands and his feet." Such was the result of this last trial, to which this favoured nation of God's choice was subjected. "Away with him! Crucify him, crucify him!" was the wild, infuriate outcry, with which they answered all the tender tones of love in which He had besought them to know the day of their visitation!

Reader, there is something more than prophetic light in what we are now considering — there is instruction for our souls of the most solemn and wholesome character. We see here what man is: what *we* — *what you and I* — *are!* The nature which expressed itself thus, in the rejection of Christ by Israel, is the nature which we ourselves possess. There is no more preparedness in our hearts to receive Christ than there was in Israel's heart. If we have received Him, it is because grace, sovereign grace, has wrought in us the disposition to receive Him: even as the same sovereign grace will yet produce in Israel the state of heart which was found so totally wanting when Christ came at first. "Oh, to grace how great a debtor" is the language of each one whose

heart grace has touched — of each who has tasted that the Lord is gracious. Such will be Israel's confession by and by; but first they had — and they still have — to taste the bitter consequences of refusing the One, mighty to save, on whom their help had been laid.

On God's part, all was ready when Christ was here. He was the Seed of Abraham and the Son of David — the Prophet like unto Moses, whom God had promised to raise up unto His people — the One who was to be "a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec." His people were, it is true, in an abject, degraded state. An Edomite was on the throne; and he ruled by Caesar's permission, or rather by the power of Caesar. Caesar's superscription was on the coin with which all their commerce was transacted; and there was scarcely a badge of national degradation which they did not wear. The royal lineage was so reduced in circumstances, that the mother of its last-born heir — the true heir — was unable to procure accommodation in the inn on her way to be taxed by the Gentile stranger. The Son of David was born — in David's city indeed, but — in a stable, with the manger for the cradle of His earliest infancy, in the land and in the world over which He is yet to reign in glory. But there He was; and the question arose, Was the nation ready to receive Him? Ah! if it had been. Would it not seem as though the Saviour Himself indulged the thought of what might have been, even then, had the nation been prepared to receive Him? How else are we to understand His broken words? — "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace." "If thou hadst." He says not what would have been had this been so — and it is not for us to supply the ellipsis. We may not speak where He was silent. But is it doing so, or is it taking any liberty with Scripture to suggest, that while His words were interrupted by His tears, His musings were on what would have been, or might have been, had that city, so much beloved, known the day of her visitation? But she did not. The things belonging to her peace she had no eye to discern; and weeping, as the Saviour did, over her folly and unbelief, with all the dismal consequences which were about to ensue, He could but acquiesce in their justice, though His tears proclaim what it cost Him to contemplate the desolation of the city where His throne ought to have been planted, and where universal hosannas ought to have hailed Him, as "the King that cometh in the name of the Lord." "But now they are hid from thine eyes." Yes; the son of the lord of the vineyard had come, seeking fruit of the husbandmen to whom it had been let out. All previous messengers they had treated with scorn or cruelty; and now they were preparing to cast out of the vineyard, and to slay, the Heir and Lord of all. "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours." Nor was it only as seeking fruit that He was thus rejected by those whose place and responsibility it was to have yielded it. He came in grace to gather Israel. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." (Matt. 23: 37-39.) Sovereign grace will yet, as other Scriptures teach us, put this cry into their hearts and into their lips; and then they shall again see their once-despised and long-rejected Lord; but, for the present, they were to suffer the terrible consequences of having set Him at nought.

But judgment is God's strange work. He is slow to anger, and of great mercy. If we see this anywhere, we see it in His dealings with Jerusalem and the Jews. When, after their long rebellion and many sorrows and adversities, the "Healer of the breach, the Restorer of paths to dwell in,"

appeared, and was rejected and crucified, and sentence pronounced upon them, of more terrible woes and calamities than any which they had as yet endured, there was no haste in the execution of the sentence. Nay, more; before it was executed at all, the One whose rejection by the nation was its crowning sin interceded on their behalf. The vine-dresser pleaded for the barren fig-tree, and obtained for it another year, with such added care and culture as it had never received. Jesus prayed, when on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." What was the answer to this prayer? Forgiveness, after such a sort, and to such an extent, that the Holy Ghost was sent down from heaven to proclaim to them full forgiveness, absolute remission, with the full enjoyment of all their forfeited national blessings, if even now they would repent of their enormous sin, and look to Him whom they had rejected and slain. This very plea, "They know not what they do," is what, in other words, the Holy Ghost puts into the lips of Peter, when, addressing them, he says, "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." (Acts 3: 17.) It is in immediate connection with these words, that Peter calls on them to repent and be converted, that their sins might be blotted out, when the times of refreshing should come from the presence of the Lord; "And," says he, "he shall send unto you Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you, whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3: 20, 21.) There are "times of restitution of all things, of which God has spoken by the mouth of all the prophets." All the prophets connect these times with Israel's repentance, and Israel's restoration, and with the coming of their Messiah. He came once, "came to his own," but "his own received him not." Peter, in this very discourse, charges them with having denied the Holy One and the Just, with having killed the Prince of life, whom God, however, had raised from the dead. Then, in the words we are considering, he calls on them to repent and be converted, and promises, though they have rejected Christ, that if they do but now repent, God will send Jesus Christ, whom the heavens had received till the promised times of restitution.\* And what is this, but the plain declaration of what the Saviour intimates in His closing words as He left the temple: "Ye shall not see me henceforth till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord?" Till ye shall say. Does not this intimate that they shall see Him when they do say this? And so Peter assures them, that if they would repent, God would send Jesus Christ. Of course, it was foreseen that this last offer, like every previous one, would be rejected, and the Church was to be formed during the interval which was to succeed. But "it was foreseen, that Christ would be rejected, when He was here in humiliation; and His death, which is salvation to all who believe, is attributed to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, as well as to the wicked hands by which he was actually slain. Alas! this proffered mercy was rejected. They as stubbornly refused the testimony of the Holy Ghost to an exalted Christ, as they had refused Christ Himself when here in humiliation. "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye." (Acts 7: 51.) These are the solemn words of Stephen, in his last address to his countrymen, just before they ran upon him, and stoned him with stones till he died. Down to this point, mercy had lingered over Jerusalem, and no testimony had been borne to Christ risen and ascended, save there. Now, the testimony leaves Jerusalem, passing first to Samaria, then to the Gentiles. Philip preaches at Samaria; Peter is sent to Cornelius and his house; and Saul of Tarsus, one of the chief persecutors, is converted, and becomes the apostle of the uncircumcision. Even still, the mercy of God lingers over the Jews; and, throughout the Acts of the Apostles, "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek," is the principle acted upon by those messengers of God's love. Everywhere they preach first in the synagogues; and it is not till rejected there, and generally driven out, that they

turn to the Gentiles. The extension of the apostle's ministry to the Gentiles is the last stumbling-block to their national pride and prejudice, and this they cannot brook. "And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. And they gave him audience unto this word, and then they lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live." (Acts 22: 21, 22.) "The Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us: and they please not God, and are contrary to all men; forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway; for (which) the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost." (1 Thess. 2: 14-16.)

\*I need hardly say that this language means, "till the times of restitution" arrive — not till they expire.

Wrath has come upon them to the uttermost! First, for their idolatry; secondly, for their rejection of the Lord Jesus, whether here in humiliation, or proclaimed to them as ascended, by the Holy Ghost come down from heaven; thirdly, for their hatred to the mercy now extended to the Gentiles. But grace is yet to triumph, in their full restoration, and in their becoming the seed of universal blessing to the nations of the millennial earth.