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A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

THE MESSIANIC PROMISE OF SALVATION AND THE LATER DISCOVERIES

WE live in an era of discoveries—discoveries in nature, whose secrets have been disclosed ; in history, where past centuries are being forced to tell their secrets. Our historical horizon has been broadened especially by the discoveries which have been made in Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and other Asiatic countries since the beginning of the last century.

Even before this period of explorations had begun, there was always one book which gave information about those lands—the Bible, and especially the Old Testament. It was to be expected, then, that men should compare the new discoveries with the records of Scripture. Yet there was a difference. While some used the new information to confirm the trustworthiness of the Scripture records, others used the same material to attack the trustworthiness of those same records. At any rate, a new interest has been awakened for the Old Testament among scholars, especially in the records of the time of the kingdom of Israel, the accounts of the creation, Paradise, the fall of man, and the flood. And we must add that new interest has also been aroused for the Messianic Promise of Salvation which is recorded upon so many pages of the Old Testament, and which, according to the judgment of many, appears in an entirely new light now that we know what expectations and hopes were cherished by the peoples living on the banks of the Euphrates and Nile.

I

The Hebrew word *masjieach* (anointed) appears several times in the Old Testament, but it does not yet have that meaning which it later received. The anointing with oil was the symbol of induction into some office. The high-priest is called “the anointed priest.” And more often we have the expression “the Lord’s anointed,” whereby Israel’s king was indicated as the one whom Jehovah had chosen and appointed to be king.

This forms the basis for the later use of the word to denote the promised Saviour as “the Anointed One.” The ancient promise of salvation later took on this form, namely, that to Israel there was promised a King, given by God, who should reign

over the people in righteousness and meekness. In later Jewish literature, therefore, this Saviour of the future received the name of "the Anointed King" or "the Anointed One," the "Messiah."

We shall speak here of the promise of salvation in a broader sense. For the Divine promise of the coming Saviour does not speak of Him merely as a king; it also speaks of Him as the seed of the woman, as our prophet, as priest, and as the Man of Sorrows. Besides, there are many statements where the coming salvation is spoken of without any definite reference to the one who is to bring that salvation, through whose instrumentality Israel's God is to bring to pass the fulfilment of the promise. All these promises, no matter how varied, are essentially one and the same. It will be impossible for us to speak of all the phases of this promised salvation. We shall lay stress mostly upon the promise of a King, since this naturally has received the greatest emphasis in the later discoveries.

The Messianic promise of salvation has always occupied a place of honour in the thought-life of the Christian Church and in such theology as has been loyal to the Scriptures. Both the church and theology could plead here the example of Christ and the Apostles, who admitted that there was real significance in the fact that the Old Testament contained the Divine promise of a coming Saviour, and that this promise had received its fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth.

The new theology has chosen another road, saying that there is very little, or no, value at all for our religious life in the Old Testament promise of salvation. This minimising is noticeable also in the writings of many conservatively inclined theologians who are subject at this point to the influence of Schleiermacher, who once stated that he was sorry that there were still so many sincere men who were going to such great pains to find Christ in the Old Testament.

This judgment as to the *value* of the Messianic prophecies is related also to the idea which one has as to the *date* of the prophecies. Now that the witness of the Scriptures has been laid aside, the origin is usually placed in the time of the exile or later. It was in this time of oppression and need—so they say—that men first tried to cheer up themselves and their countrymen by dreaming of a glorious future which must somehow be laid away for the Jewish nation. And to increase the value of their

musings, these men have placed their fantastic ideas upon the lips of such prophets as Hosea and Isaiah, weaving them into their writings. The character of these promises—so they say—is such as to be unworthy of the great prophets. For, do they not find their centre in the expectation that world-power and dominion is to be given to the Jewish people? So that many are of the opinion that it is merely the suppressed Jewish pride that attempts, in all these wild dreams and promises, to ease the humiliation of the present, and to avenge their masters with paintings of a future wherein the rôle will be exchanged.

According to this, there can be no mention of the fulfilment of these promises in Jesus of Nazareth. The kingdom, of which Jesus spoke, which is not of this world, was something entirely different from the visions of an earthly kingdom which comforted the Jews. Many modern theologians have stated, therefore, that the Jews were correct in their violent opposition to the attempts to put an illusion in the place of their national hope;—the Jewish Sanhedrin saw things more justly than do Christian theologians—so they say.

Remembering all this, it is encouraging to notice that serious objections are being offered, even by modern theologians, to the theory of the *late origin* of these promises of salvation. And we are constrained to listen even more attentively, now that we hear that this change of opinion is the result of a study of the documents which have been dug up from the rubbish heaps of the centuries. It has long been a matter of common knowledge that in the century before Christ the classic world already witnessed to a hope in a great King and Saviour who should establish the golden age. But now the assertion is that this same hope burned in the hearts of the people along the Euphrates and Nile.

Copies of Egyptian prophecies which come to us from the sixteenth and fourteenth centuries B.C., while the originals date back still further, speak of a time of trouble which shall come over Egypt; war and uprisings, famine, disease and murder, enemies entering the land, desecrated temples, the drying up of the Nile until it becomes a mere brook, sun and moon darkened, the reign of untruth, right and righteousness trodden under foot. After that there shall come a time of salvation and prosperity which is to be brought about by a Saviour-King, who shall reign long and blessed of God. He shall put to flight the enemies,

and restore the sacred shrines. During his reign the lie will be banished, sun and moon will be light again, seasons shall take up their proper rotation, the Nile will be filled with water, and joy and abundance and peace shall be throughout all the land.

Scholars are of the opinion that just such hopes are expressed in the newly discovered Babylonian literature. First a time of trouble, war and general confusion; and succeeding this a new spring-time shall come over the world, a golden age of blessedness and prosperity. And in the worshipping of more than one of Babylon's kings, they think they find the living expression of the national hope for a Saviour-King.

In view of all this, the conclusion is drawn that it is quite impossible that Israel's hope of salvation should have originated at so late a date. With the entire old-eastern world filled with this hope for a Saviour-King, it is not to be expected that Israel alone, of all the nations, did not have that same hope. But, while this all is a gain, namely that the Messianic hope and prophecies have been restored to a place of honour among scholars, still, the gain is not so large. There is not the recognition of the Divine *origin*, the spiritual *character* and the religious *value* of this promise of salvation. The fact is, that the new discoveries are being used to attack just those claims which Christian theology has made for the Messianic prophecies. Israel's hope has come from the heathen nations, for a large part, is the assertion; and it is clear that with such a presentation the Divine origin and the revelation-character of this Messianic hope are subjected to grave questionings.

II

The first proof given for the proposition that Israel's hope of salvation was borrowed from Babylon and Egypt, is the preaching of the prophets of the "day of the Lord," with its commonly accepted meaning, the day, the era in which Jehovah will reveal Himself in a special way. The prophets portray this day of the Lord not only as a day of salvation, but also as a day of trouble, and it is in this aspect of their portrayal of that day that the above proposition looks for its proof. The fact that the prophets speak of this day of trouble as preceding the time of salvation is a striking proof—so they say—that the idea was taken from Babylon, where the golden age was expected only after the time of a world catastrophe.

It is a universally known fact that the Babylonians, since early days, have been interested in the study of the heavenly bodies. It is thought by some that this study has led them to believe in the coming of a tremendous catastrophe in nature, whereby this present world would be ruined, to be followed by the building of a new and better world. Israel had taken over this idea, it is claimed, and proof is thought to be given by pointing to the prophetic statements of the great and terrible convulsions in the realm of nature; earthquakes, fire, hail, floods, darkness, pestilence, wild animals and much more.

It will be well to exercise the utmost care when considering these things. First of all, the representations of the Babylonian expectations of universal catastrophe and restitution must not be accepted too gullibly, since the sources from which all this has been drawn show, upon close examination, only a few, usually vague, indications in that direction. And even though we were to accept the presented facts as positive, there would still be the question as to the legitimacy of the conclusions.

For instance, in the Babylonian fantasies about nature and the great upheaval, we have mention made of a salvation-bringing *God*, especially Mardoek (also mentioned in Scripture: Merodach), the god of the spring sun, who conquers the darkness and ushers in the new time of light and spring; but this god is in reality nothing more than a personification of a force of nature, and as such the reference to him is merely a confirmation of the natural-mythological character of their hope. But notice the difference between this and Israel's hope! Here, too, we have talk about earthquakes, darkness, storm and other things; but here the meaning is entirely different. These great changes in nature are not the centre of things, nor are they the chief things. In Israel everything is dominated by the one great cry: Jehovah is coming!

Jehovah is coming! It is out of His mouth that holy men have received the words which they speak. It is He that shall come amid the phenomena of the tremendous catastrophe in nature, and at whose coming the mountains shall melt as wax before the fire (Micah i. 4), heaven and earth be shaken, and sun, moon and stars withdraw their light (Joel ii. 10). That is why the day in which all this shall take place, is called "the day of the Lord," that is, the day which belongs to Him and the great work which He shall accomplish. To be sure, even now Jehovah is

in the midst of Israel, and on Zion He has prepared His dwelling place. But on the other hand, the people are assured that God's dwelling in their midst is but deficient and partial. His real abode is not upon the earth, but in heaven, from which He reveals Himself to patriarchs (Gen. xxi. 17 ; xxii. 11 ; xxviii. 12) ; from which He descends upon Sinai (Ex. xix. 11). He fills the heavens and the earth (Jer. xxiii. 24), but even then, the heaven is His throne, and the earth the footstool for His feet (Is. lxvi. 1).

Over against the sin and pride in the world (Hab. i. 2ff) there is placed the intense prayer of the pious that God might rend the heavens and come down (Is. lxiv. 1). In response to this is the prophetic promise that God will do this, that He will come down from heaven to reveal anew His majesty and glory (Micah i. 2ff). Now, this one fact, that the Lord and His coming is the centre of everything, gives to the Old Testament prophecies an entirely different quality, witnesses to the Divine revelation upon which they rest, and shows that they can be objects of religious faith not only to the faithful of the Old Testament times, but that they can also be to the Church of all ages as a light shining in a dark place.

In harmony with this, we note that the *disaster* of which the prophets speak is an essentially different phenomenon from the fantastic nature-catastrophies of which Babylonian and Egyptian literature speak. The prophets talk about the *judgment* of the Lord upon the sins of Israel or the whole world. It is not strange that they should make mention of disturbances in the realm of nature alongside of this Divine judgment ; for, even now, nature is subject to the curse which was spoken out over the sin of man (Gen. iii. 17) ; and even now, famine and pestilence are instruments of God's wrath, whereby He brings judgment upon the sins of mankind. This coming judgment has been spoken of by the prophets in various ways. They have not always definitely described it as the " Day of the Lord " ; they have sometimes given it more earthly colour, in terms of national suffering and desolation. But even this is placed in the light of the message that the Lord has a day of judgment (Is. ii. 12ff). The God who in former times showed forth His greatness in the midst of Israel, will do it again at His coming.

The judgment announcements of the prophets can be explained only by this faith which was based upon revelation. The certainty of their message could not have been based merely upon

the political conditions of their day, since Amos and Hosea utter the same prophecy in times of prosperity; and neither could they base this certainty upon the traditions of other Eastern peoples concerning the end of the world. Their own statement gives the only explanation: "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets. The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophecy?" (Amos iii. 7ff). Any other explanation will not suffice; nor need we any other.

There is no doubt but that there was a great difference between the prophets' conception of the day of the Lord and that of the masses. "Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! to what end is it for you? The day of the Lord is darkness and not light" (Amos v. 18). It appears that many people in the time of Amos had a foolish notion that the day of the Lord would bring light and glory to Israel. Amos contradicts this folly in the name of the Lord. The day of judgment is a day of darkness and of terrible doom.

But those who seek the origin of this expectation in heathendom, say that Amos is concerned here with the *form* which the heathen expectation assumed when it came into Israel's thinking, and that Amos gives a nobler content to the idea by making it the vehicle of his judgment-preaching. But this is impossible! First of all, the heathen conceived of the day of the Lord as merely a great disaster in nature, destroying the world. Secondly, is it not very strange to suppose that this people of Israel should take just that idea and change it about so much that they apply it gladly to all people except themselves, and for themselves, a foolish and sinning nation, expect not only to be saved in that hour, but entertain constantly a longing for the approach of that day?

This whole matter can become clear only when we take notice of the witness of the Scripture concerning the entire inner history of Israel. God had, in the past, revealed Himself at various places and times to this people, especially upon Sinai and in their battles with enemies. It is in harmony with all this, and with other promises of God, that the nation constantly looked forward to a great act of God whereby, as of old, He would display His glory and His power in defence of His people—a hope which was robbed of its deep spiritual basis by a very sensual people, and changed into a caricature. And Amos' message is

in harmony with all this. He points out the logical consequence which lies wrapped up in the expectation of the day of the Lord, and which a light-headed people are overlooking, namely, that when Jehovah comes, an apostate people will not be saved, but judged.

The difference between the prophet and the people is a matter of an application of the question: what will this day of the Lord mean to an apostate people?

On the other hand, this day of the Lord is also described as a day of salvation. To be sure God will appear as Judge, but He will come as Judge because He is King! And the thought: Jehovah comes as Judge, is subordinate to the broader: Jehovah comes as King! It is for this reason that in prophecy and psalms this day is described as the day in which Jehovah shall come in kingly majesty to sway His sceptre over the world. For the true Israel this is a prophecy of salvation and release.

According to the witness of the Scriptures, the end of all the ways of God is to be found in this development of the kingship of God, to the praise of His name and in the salvation of His people. The Paradise-promise already suggests this when it announces an enmity which God places between two forces, and in which struggle the seed of the woman shall conquer the power of evil. The promise to Abraham was that out of his loins a people should come forth, who shall possess this land (Gen. xii. 1, 2), and who shall have the Lord as their God (Gen. xvii. 17). The idea of a kingdom which is expressed in the promise which Jacob utters over the head of Judah, finds its first fulfilment in the people of Israel over whom God assumes kingship (Deut. xxxiii. 5). Therefore it is Jehovah who defends His people against the Egyptians (Ex. xiv. 25), against the Canaanites in the days of Joshua (Josh. v. 13ff), and of Deborah (Judg. v. 4, 11). Therefore He is the Lord of Hosts, and the God of the armies of Israel. As Israel's king, Jehovah is the one who will lead and rule and bless His people if they will walk in His ways, but who also will punish them when they depart from those ways. This initial fulfilment of this kingship is the basis for the promise that God shall come as King. On the one hand, God is already King, on the other hand, He must still come in the absolute regnancy of his Kingship.

God's revelation of His Kingship to Israel is, in very nature of the case, partial and incomplete. To begin with, the limiting

of this Kingship to Israel, is a shrinking of the area in which from the very beginning God had revealed His power and right as King. And this limitation must give way to a revelation of His Kingship to all peoples. Again, the fulness of God's reign is hindered in Israel by the people's sin; each did what was good in his own eyes. Heathen have been their rulers. "O Lord, our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us." (Is. xxvi. 13.)

It is not difficult to understand that these prophecies of the rule of Jehovah and His Anointed over the destiny of His people, should have formed the ground into which, in perilous times, the pious Israelite anchored his hope. And as their hope pierced into the future, they looked forward to the great day when Jehovah should come to relieve and bless His people, as of old. Of course, this hope could and would degenerate, in the hearts of a sensual people, into a mere earthly expectation of earthly prosperity, whether or not they did abide by His precepts. For this purpose it became the duty of the prophets to warn them that for an apostate people the day of the Lord would mean judgment, which accounts for their silence, at times, respecting the blessings of that great day.

This entire history of the words and deeds of God make one golden chain; and the last links—the prophetic utterances—cannot be set loose from the first. For those who stare themselves blind looking at heathenish expectations concerning great nature-fantasies, it will always be a wonder how Amos and his contemporaries could hope for the day of the Lord as a day of Israel's glory. But by the light of Israel's wonderful history the riddle becomes plain and we understand that in dark days God is again seen by the lighted eye of prophets and saints, revealing Himself in full lustre as of old on Sinai (Hab. iii.):

God came from Teman,
The Holy One from mount Paran.
His glory covered the heavens,
His praise filled the earth.

III

In Israel there was not only the prophecy of the day of the Lord, but also the expressed hope that after that terrible day there would come a golden age, a time of prosperity and peace. Well—so they say—this is true also in Babylon and Egypt. There

we find not only the pictures of a golden era that has passed, but also a golden era which is to come, and which shall be brought about by a King and a bringer of salvation. To prove this, we are told to notice those places in Babylonian and Egyptian literature wherein certain kings are glorified as saviours and initiators of a time of prosperity; and wherein they are at the same time described as having been born of wonderful parentage, as sons of the gods, or even as gods, and as born of a virgin.

Now this—so they say—is found in Israel, too. For instance, in the 110th Psalm the ruling kings have world-rulership assigned to them; an idea which could not possibly have come up in little Israel, but which must have come from the countries of the Euphrates and the Nile. This also explains—so they say—the reference to the king as a son of Jehovah (Ps. ii. 7), and the fact that everlasting life is spoken of in reference to him, and that he is even addressed with the name of God (Ps. xlv. 7) etc. So all along the line. Israel received her ideas from the other countries.

From the point of view of Scripture it is not difficult, but very easy to believe that the older nations of heathendom have not only had memories of the lost Paradise, but also hopes for a Paradise regained. But we must abide by the truth here. And then it must be stated that there is much that is uncertain in the above references to the golden age and the Saviour as found among Babylonians and Egyptians. For they make no mention of a King of the *future*, but sing praises to a king of the *present*.

It was thought, for a time, that some Egyptian texts seemed to support the contention that there was really a reference to a *coming* king, who would bring in the reign of prosperity and peace. But scholars have, upon closer investigation, questioned the value of these texts. One of these manuscripts, which was given the date 2000-1800 B.C., contains a text which, as far as the form is concerned, does speak of the future, but seems to be no more than a song of praise to Amenemhet I by one of his contemporaries, who chose this form of expression. He places the records of this monarch upon the lips of an ancient priest who, in turn, utters them as prophecy. Another text, dated 1300 B.C., from which the same conclusions had been drawn, was shown later on to be mistranslated, so that the former reading was entirely put aside. There are other texts which have been found, but their date is so late that the possibility exists that the hopes here expressed have come under the influence of the Jews.

For the time being it remains that there is as yet no certain witness concerning a Babylonian or Egyptian expectation of a great future Saviour-King.

The objections to the *conclusions* which have been drawn from these facts are even more serious. We begin with the comparisons which have been made in matters of style. The kingly style of some of the Psalms, for instance, has been attributed to the influence of the Babylonians. But this cannot be.

The ideas of kings and the kingship as found in Israel were entirely different from those found in Babylon and Egypt. In these latter countries where the kings ruled as despots, and where polytheism had wiped out the line between the Creator and the creature, one would expect kings to be hailed as gods, and divine qualities ascribed to them. But it is folly to say that that terminology was taken over in full by the Israelites where the king was an instrument of Jehovah and ruled as such for the welfare of the people, and where the purer knowledge of God kept them from confusing the divine and the human. And it is even greater folly to suppose that the prophets enlarged upon these heathen ideas, since the prophets used their utmost power and eloquence to remind kings that their pride and greatness was sin, since God alone was great.

Therefore it is impossible to conclude that the superhuman qualities which were ascribed to the great King of the future in the Jewish literature were taken from the heathenish deification of a human king. Even when in some of the Psalms there is mention made of a human king, followed by a statement of superhuman qualities, we must understand that to be an expression of the consciousness of the divine nature of the coming King, of whom the earthly kings such as David and Solomon were but faint shadows. From the glory of the present the poet leaped out to the greater glory of the future, which future glory was already foreshadowed in the present glory of the kings.

We come again to the heart of the matter: *the essence of the promise given to Israel of a coming Saviour and a future salvation, is so wholly different from that which Babylon or Egypt may have expected, that it is not possible that the one could rise out of the other.*

If the old-eastern peoples really looked forward to a golden age, it would not be difficult to find similar sound in the writings of the prophets of Israel. Reference is made to Hosea's prophecy

of the time when God shall make a covenant for Israel with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the earth ; a time when He shall put away the bow, the sword and all war (Hos. ii. 17). Or think of Isaiah speaking still more clearly of a Paradise-period when the wolf and the lamb shall live together and the leopard and the goat (Is. xl. 6ff.). And in like manner such natural and earthly features enter into the word-paintings of the coming Saviour and King, so that there is indeed a similarity between some of them and some of the utterances concerning the Egyptian or Babylonian rulers. It is not difficult to understand that this similarity should exist because of the similarity between the land of Canaan and the old-eastern world. But this similarity need not be a sign of relation or of dependence. For beside this similarity there is a great difference.

According to the Scripture the essence of the promises of salvation in Israel, has never consisted merely of an earthly hope. In Paradise the evil over which the seed of the woman shall triumph, is essentially a spiritual power. The fact that *Jehovah* is the God of Shem is the heart of the blessing which Noah gives to this son above the others ; and the promise to Abraham and his seed has its centre in this, namely, that *Jehovah* will be a God unto him and his seed.

The spiritual nature of the blessings which will be brought by this King are placed in a constantly clearer light by psalmists and prophets. Their painting of the external blessings which shall come show that for them the spiritual and the material were not antithetical. But the heart of their message of salvation and of the greatness of the coming King, is spiritual.

This is involed, first of all, in the attaching of the promise of salvation to the " day of the Lord ". If *Jehovah* is coming to save His people, then there can be no doubt as to the character of the blessings which He brings. His greatness and glory may be shown in strange happenings in the heavens and upon the earth, but the centre of all is, that the Spirit of the Lord will be poured out upon all flesh (Joel. ii. 28ff), and that He shall live in Zion (iii. 21). Then will He come to judge the world in equity and the people with His truth (Ps. xcvi. 9), and thus take up His kingship over the whole world.

Similar promises of spiritual blessings are given by other prophets where the suggestion of the day of the Lord is placed in the background. Israel shall receive a renewal of the tender love

of Jehovah (Hosea ii. 18); forgiveness (Micah vii. 19; Zech. xiii. 1), a new heart (Ezek. xxxvi. 26), wherein the law of the Lord is written and the knowledge of the Lord dwells (Jer. xxxi. 33ff). And a greater than any outer glory is the reputation of the new Jerusalem, for it shall be called: "The Lord is there" (Ezek. lviii. 35).

The same is true about the promise of the coming king. This promise is bound to the house of David, and this man after God's heart is called upon to rule over Israel in Jehovah's name, Nathan telling him that out of his loins shall come forth a dynasty which has an everlasting appointment, and which can, therefore fulfil its appointment only through One who is greater than David or Solomon (2 Sam. vii. 12ff). And this promise is repeated and worked out more closely in psalms and prophecies. The spiritual purpose of His coming is shown in other ways, for instance, in the word-pictures which are given of this future King, He is often painted as a man, but other qualities are given Him which are not human. He shall slay his enemies with the breath of His lips (Is. xi. 4), and His name is the "Mighty God". Upon the lips of Isaiah this can have no possible relation to Babylonian deification of creatures. Even when speaking about the humanity of this King we notice that there is none of that exaltation of the human which is found in the Babylonian descriptions of their kings. The greatness of the Messiah is not a thing of this earth. He comes as a rod out of the stem of Jesse (Is. xi. 1), and is born not in the palace, but in lowly Bethlehem (Micah v. 1). The secret of His greatness shall consist in the fact that the Spirit of the Lord is upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord (Is. xi. 2). It must be said of Him even as it has been said of His kingdom, that His greatness comes from above, being essentially this, that in Him Jehovah comes to His people; therefore He is "the Lord our Righteousness" (Jer. xxiii. 6).

This all carries added weight when we remember that alongside of the prophecies about the great King from David's house, there are other prophecies which mention Him in an entirely different way. He is mentioned not only as King, but also as *Prophet* (Deut. xviii. 15ff.), and as *Priest* (Ps. 110; Zech. vi. 13). And the sketch of His kingly office is given an added and different light in the vision of Daniel, who described Him as One "like

unto the son of man," coming with the clouds of heaven, and to whom, as representative of the saints, the kingdom and eternal dominion is given. So, too, is the prophecy of the *suffering servant of Jehovah* (Is. xlii, xlix, l, liii) important. Here the kingly, prophetic and priestly offices are combined in one picture. The coming One is here spoken of as the Light of the Gentiles, and it is said of Him that He is led to kingly glory by the way of suffering for the sins of His people. All these references, and more which could be made, establish the contention that the promise of salvation given to Israel is spiritual and, as such, is essentially different from the hopes of the Babylonians and Egyptians, and hence cannot have originated among them.

This is so evident, that the spiritual character of the Jewish promise of salvation is recognised in a greater or lesser degree by most scholars. But they try to evade our conclusions by saying that the heathenish fantasies, which were already changed somewhat when taken up in the national hope of Israel, were given a deeper, spiritual meaning by the prophets. The task of the prophet was really—so the scholars say—not to preach the coming salvation, but rather to witness to Israel of her sins and the coming judgment of God. They were "birds of the storm, announcing judgment." The fact that they took up this preaching of salvation was really a concession to the people, but was not their main task nor purpose.

But this cannot be true. If the spiritual character of the hope of salvation is a product of the higher knowledge of God which the prophets had, and that hope itself is not a product of divine revelation, but of a common opinion of the people, then, surely, the prophets must have been aware of this. Let us speak clearly. If they ventured to speak of a great King of the future, who should reign in righteousness, then, surely, they could not have forgotten that while righteousness was a moral ideal, for the truth of which their own personalities were evidence, the promise that this King should one time come, could not possibly be asserted to their hearers with the same certainty. That is, this promise could never have become a resting point for the faith of these men, and they could never have passed it on to their hearers as the source out of which they should draw the power of their lives.

How totally different do the facts show the case to be! Think of Isaiah. In the midst of the world-shaking affairs of

the day, this watcher upon Zion's walls sends out the Word of God which was absolutely opposed to every human thought which allowed itself to be guided by the appearance of things. When the allied armies of Syria and Ephraim go up to Jerusalem, so that the hearts of both king and people are paralysed with fear "as the trees of the wood are moved by the wind" (Is. vii. 2), then Isaiah is the only one who battles against this fear with the word "It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass" (v. 7). And when king Ahaz, rejecting the help of God, leans upon the arm of flesh of Assyria's world-power, and hope returns into the hearts of people and king, then it is Isaiah who announces the judgment of God upon this infidel-politics (viii. 5ff.). And when later on the Assyrian armies appear in Syria and Palestine, and plunder the peoples like a bird's-nest the eggs of which one gathers (x. 14), then it is the same man of God who announces that the water will reach up to the neck of Jerusalem (viii. 8), but it shall not go higher, for by the mountain of the daughter of Zion the world-conqueror will meet a Mightier One, the Lord of Hosts, who shall humble the haughty (x. 33).

If one asks for the secret spring from which Isaiah could draw such wonderful faith in those dark days, we give as the first answer that he knew the Holy One of Israel, who alone is to be feared, but who is, at the same time, the only ground for trust (viii. 11-14). But let the prophet describe for himself the object of his faith. In the midst of the raging of the world powers he raises aloft as a banner the age-old promise of God, given to David's house, and he shouts out: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." (ix. 5.) This is the special reason why the counsel of Syria and Ephraim to divide Judah and to replace the house of David by the son of Tabeal (vii. 6) shall not stand. Here we have the secret of that hope of Isaiah which, even in the most terrible times, was fixed upon the future: "And I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for Him" (viii. 17).

Isaiah and all the other prophets and psalmists, and all those who accept the Word of God spoken by these men, have all received strength even in the darkest days, for they have walked as those who sought a fatherland. They all lived in the hope of

it, because they saw the better future not merely as a poetic fancy of a national hope of questionable value, but in the clear light of the promise of God which had been spoken to the fathers, and which had found an echo in their hearts.

And—this faith has not been put to shame. Whatever may have been the dreams of world-power and earthly happiness dreamed along the banks of the Euphrates and the Nile, these dreams have all vanished with the kings and kingdoms which formed the centre of them. But in the fulness of time there came to Israel He whom God had promised to the fathers, the Prophet, Priest and King, who was not known of the wise and the Scribes, and who was rejected by the majority of His people, but “unto as many as received Him, unto them He gave the power to become sons of God” (John i. 12).

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