

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

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

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

MESSIANIC PSALMS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

LUKE i. 42-45, 46-55, 68-79; ii. 29-32.

(Continued from p. 309.)

WHILE the cosmology of Hesiod cannot be read in harmony with the science of the nineteenth century, that of Genesis cannot be read out of harmony with it; while the oracles of Delphi do not grow in wealth of content with advancing years, those of the Old Testament become more full of revelation and more precious in meaning with every age. But it is a fact which is in harmony with no theory of the nature of prophecy except that one which sees in it a message from God to man, intended, not to write history beforehand, but to give him a support and help in leading a holy life, of equal validity for all earthly time—nay, of increasing value as time rolls on. But if the older prophecies themselves thus become richer in meaning as time advances, and their presuppositions of fact and manner, beyond what was openly declared, become clear through additional revelations on advancing fulfilment; the repetition of the words of the older predictions need not be confined to their earliest and narrowest understanding. The mere fact, then, that all that the Psalms of Luke's first chapter say may be paralleled out of the Old Testament, does not quite exclude an advance in them beyond the revelations of the Old Testament—especially if we are thinking not of what might have been understood from them, but of what was understood from them.

It is important for us to observe this distinction—the distinction between unfolding revelation and growth in

understanding what is revealed. This is all the more necessary that we are dealing with compositions of a kind that take their place in both lines of development—that are both revelations from God and the response to God of pious and instructed hearts. It is not only conceivable, but certain, that Mary and Elizabeth, and Zacharias and Symeon, understood far less than their words express—we do not say less than they can be made to express merely, but less than they actually do express and cannot be made not to express. To ask what the words mean and what they meant to them are two very different questions, and we are to expect for them two different answers. Historically, the answer to the latter question preceded that to the former. Exegetically, the former must precede the latter. This would not be the case if we were seeking the original and typical senses of the words. But it is the case when what we are seeking is the intended and the understood senses. The intended sense is obtained by historico-grammatical exegesis; the understood sense by a further historical enquiry as to how much of this was comprehended by the agents of its delivery to men. This, no doubt, treats the original speakers in some measure as if they were hearers of their own words. But there is no help for it: the phenomena of revelation are peculiar, and demand for their explanation a theory—well, of revelation. The prophets diligently enquired into and sought what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ that was in them pointed unto (1 Pet. i. 10, 11), and delivered messages that even the angels did not at the moment understand; which unfolding years alone could make plain; but which in time, through additional revelation or progressive fulfilment, or both, were to become plain to even the humblest student of the Word.

It must be confessed that when we address ourselves to determining the former of these questions, we do not dis-

cover a great advance in our Psalms, on the revelations made in the Old Testament. That the advent of the Messiah brings blessing to Israel, and begins the fulfilment of God's precious promises; that it introduces a crisis into the world by which its present course is overturned—the imaginations of the proud brought to nought, the powerful cast down and the lowly elevated, the hungry filled with good things and the rich sent empty away; that it is the crowning proof of God's mercy, and brings not only relief from all enemies who make the service of God hard, but deliverance from the burden of sin through a strong redemption; that it introduces the eternal reign of peace; that its blessings will extend even to the Gentile world, and the purchase of them will demand suffering on the part of the Messiah Himself; all this is Old Testament teaching. A close scrutiny is required to discover any advance on the Old Testament at all, and when it is found it is seen to consist not in the enunciation of new particulars, but in the relative prominence given to the old. For instance, the Old Testament leaves the essential divinity of the Messiah little insisted on—especially in the Psalms. Many Psalms are theocratic rather than Messianic, and represent Jehovah Himself as coming for the Redemption of His people. Jehovah's coming and Messiah's coming are thus equally asserted. But the two are not plainly identified. The two lines run parallel. In these New Testament Psalms the identification seems to be made. When we remember that the angel had declared to Zacharias that his son should go before the face of the Lord,¹ and to Mary that her son should be called the "Son of the Most High" (ver. 32), "Holy" (ver. 35), "Son of God" (ver. 35), the humble cry of Elizabeth, "Whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (ver. 43) quickened as

¹ The *αἰτιῶν* of verse 17 must, beyond all question, refer back to *Κύριον*.

it was by the forerunner's leaping joy, takes on most solemn meaning—a meaning which is renewedly certified by the immediate reiteration of the same word "Lord" in an unmistakably Divine sense (ver. 45). In the light again of the preceding revelations by the angels and the song of Elizabeth, as just interpreted, Zacharias' words, "Thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Most High; for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways" (ver. 76), seem to give witness to the Divinity of the Coming One. The spiritual nature of the Messianic work is another point which Zacharias' song places beyond question. By the coming of the Messiah, no doubt, "a horn of salvation is raised up in the house of David; . . . salvation from their enemies and from the hand of all that hate them" (ver. 68-71); but even this outward salvation is declared to be in order that "being delivered out of the hand of their enemies, they should serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all their days" (ver. 74); and the great Messianic work that is on Zacharias' heart is carefully explained in verse 76, to be "giving the knowledge of salvation to His people as consisting in the forgiveness of their sins, on account of God's bowels of mercy." This it is that is the special work of the forerunner to accomplish; and without this the Messiah's way would not be prepared. It almost seems as if the false development of Messianic hopes among the Jews was here recognised, and the purpose of God in sending a forerunner explained to be in order to correct them. There is some reason to believe that Zacharias' song hints further at the typical character of the Old Testament sacrifices, and their fulfilment in the Coming One: he speaks of His advent as working a ransom (ver. 68) for His people, and throughout has his mind on the symbolism of the altar. If this were found likely, it would imply a shadowy hint of the sufferings of the Messiah—a great revelation, not proceeding beyond

the prophecies of the Old Testament, indeed, but very far beyond any expectations of the time. Whether Zacharias obscurely presupposes them or not, Symeon openly declares them (ii. 34, 35): the child that lay in his arms "was set for a sign spoken against," and "a sword should pierce through Mary's soul" on account of Him. And here it is worth our while to observe the gulf that separates these songs from the contemporary, or then recent Pseudepigraphic literature of the Jews. They, as well as these, no doubt expected a superhuman Messiah, but so far from seeing in him a spiritual leader, they looked in him for nothing but a worldly conqueror, and after Symeon, no man who was not taught directly by Christianity, dreamed of a suffering Messiah for a hundred years. Justin Martyr makes his Jewish opponent Trypho—who has been with great probability identified with the famous Rabbi Tarphon—say: "For we knew that he must suffer, and be led as a sheep."¹ And the *Siphre* represents Rabbi Jose the Galilean as quoting Isaiah liii. 5, 6, to prove that the Messiah should be humbled and suffer.² These two contemporary and closely connected Rabbis, somewhere in the second quarter of the second century, represent the earliest dawning Jewish consciousness of the suffering Messiah. If, then, our New Testament canticles cannot be Christian forgeries, neither can they be deemed the natural outgrowth of the unilluminated Jewish consciousness of their time. And when we declare that they move entirely in the circle of thought of Old Testament times, we separate them from contemporary Judaism almost as sharply as from subsequent Christianity.

Let us keep in mind, however, that this is not the same as saying that the singers of those songs were out of sympathy with the hopes of their day. If the Old Testament predictions were misunderstood, why not also these songs?

¹ *Dial. c. Tryph.*, c. 90.

² Wüncke, *Die Leiden des Messias*, p. 65 sq.

It may seem that almost no room is left to doubt that Mary and Elizabeth knew the Divine nature of the child that the former was to bear, when we read the angelic messages and Elizabeth's humble cry, Yet how colourless Mary's own song becomes on such a supposition! And the subsequent narrative leaves no room at all to doubt that they did not at all comprehend what was said either to or by them. That wonderful day at Cæsarea Philippi appears first to have begotten an understanding in men of such ineffable words. In spite of the hints of Zacharias, the spirituality of the kingdom which Christ set up was never understood until He had died and risen again. And the path of suffering which He trod, although Symeon had openly declared it, was an offence to every heart, until He who had suffered, returned again to open their eyes with the cry: "Oh fools and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things?" If, then, when we try to trace the progressive history of revelation itself, we find these Psalms moving entirely in the circle of Old Testament thought; when our object is to trace the growing perception of God's plan of salvation in the minds of His saints, we find even those that were waiting for the consolation of Israel, at the very moment of His coming lagging in their hopes still far behind what had been of old time revealed to the Fathers. The Psalms that they sing under the inspiration of God are Old Testament Psalms—even the essence and sublimation of Old Testament Psalmody. The faith they hold as their personal possession lifted itself in confidence and intensity, but probably not much in nature or contents above that of their time. They needed to wait for the understanding of even what God had spoken through them, for the time when He whom they expected so longingly should return from a sojourn in the grave, before their minds could be opened that they might under-

stand the Scriptures, and know that it was written that the Christ should suffer and rise again the third day, and only so enter into His glory (Luke xxiv. 45, 46). As yet it was "at the first," when they could not understand these things; but "when Jesus was glorified," "then remembered they that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things unto Him" (John xii. 16).

BENJ. B. WARFIELD.

BLAISE PASCAL.

(Continued from p. 320.)

WE pass over the interesting episode of his sister Jacqueline, and the gradual steps by which, after being caressed and distinguished in the best circles of society, she ultimately retired to the seclusion of Port Royal, and spent the rest of her life in its most austere observances. Not that this episode has not features of great interest—among others, the aspect in which it places one section at least of Parisian society. The circle of Port Royal came to be composed of many men in France of birth, position, and learning. Racine studied there, and Corneille was an old companion of Pascal. It was considered at the time that, in point of learning, the Port Royalists eclipsed the Jesuits. Yet these men, strong in their faith, were not found wanting when the time of trial came; and not only were they willing to renounce all the attractions of a world which had open arms to receive them, but they were ready to meet and resist the tide of persecution. That their convictions were sincere, although we may think them in part at least erroneous, cannot be doubted, and sincere conviction is not so common that we can afford to treat it otherwise than with respect.

But there was one man of the Port Royal brotherhood