

God's Plan for Evangelizing the World.

BY THE REV. F. L. DENMAN, M.A.

KNOWN unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world" (Acts xv. 18). God has a plan whereby the nations are to be brought to know Christ as Saviour. His promise, "As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord" (Num. xiv. 21), must be accomplished—but how?

In the present age the individual Jew and Gentile, by the preaching of the Gospel, are being gathered in "one by one"; but the whole nation of the Jews and all the nations of the Gentiles will not become Christian *en masse* in this Dispensation. That all the ends of the earth shall fear God is a consummation to be earnestly prayed and worked for, but it will not come to pass before the return of Christ. The work of the Church to-day is to make known the Gospel "to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile." "Without ceasing," by "work of faith and labour of love," we are to beseech the Almighty God, in the words of our Burial Service, "that it may please Thee, of Thy gracious goodness, shortly to accomplish the number of Thine elect, and to hasten Thy kingdom."

The fifteenth chapter of the Acts makes this plan clear. In the early days of Christianity difficulties arose as the Church obeyed her Master's command to "preach the Gospel to every creature." This led to the summoning in Jerusalem of the first Church Congress in A.D. 51. The point at issue was whether believers were under law or grace, with special reference to the Gentiles. On the way up to Jerusalem the delegates held missionary meetings, causing great joy. The Congress opened with the story of the magnificent results that had accompanied the preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. At once, as related in verse 5, the leaven of the Pharisees crept in. Jewish believers in our Lord wanted to retain the old ceremonialism and legalism of the Mosaic Dispensation. They

maintained that if Gentiles wanted to join the Church they must conform to the Law given by God to Moses. Such a ruling, if it had been carried out, would inevitably have led to disruption, and have caused untold injury to the growth of the Christian Church.

After much discussion, the Apostle Peter gave a generous-hearted decision, containing views completely different from those he formerly held as the Apostle of the Circumcision, and before the inspired vision described in Acts x. His noble pronouncement was that no ceremonialism should be imposed on Gentiles who wished to become Christians, and that salvation did not depend upon the observance of the precepts of the Law, but on "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ." In other words, as St. Paul in later days wrote to the Church at Rome, "Whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. x. 13; *cf.* Acts ii. 21). Then Barnabas and Paul told again the wonderful story of God's redeeming grace, as shown by their recent labours amongst the Gentiles. It was plain that the salvation of the Gentiles was the will of God, and as such to be sought, and that rich blessing was resting upon obedience to the Lord's commands to preach the Gospel to all nations.

The following facts would doubtless be noted by various speakers. The nations, at all events representatively, were to go up to Jerusalem to worship and pray (Isa. ii. 2, 3; Zech. ii. 11, viii. 22, xiv. 16, etc.); yet large numbers of Gentiles were joining the Church with no thought of Jerusalem as a centre for the gathering of the faithful (St. John iv. 21; Acts xiii. 48, xiv. 27). They were being filled with the Holy Ghost (Acts x. 45, xv. 8), and even before baptism (Acts x. 47). As Jews it would be known to them that the Gentiles were to be blessed as well as they (Deut. xxxii. 43). Many Psalms spoke of the Gentiles praising the Lord. Many utterances of the Prophets would also be recalled testifying to world-wide blessing (Isa. xi. 10; Joel ii. 28; Hab. ii. 14).

Other facts, though familiar, must to some have presented

difficulties. Before all the Gentiles could become Christian, Jerusalem must be "a praise in the earth" (Isa. lxii. 7), whereas the Lord had said that "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled" (St. Luke xxi. 24); the Jews as a nation were to have Christ as their Light (Isa. lx. 3, lxii. 9), whereas the Lord had said that they were to become "desolate" (St. Matt. xxiii. 38), and that He should not be seen by them as Lord, until they had nationally recognized Him as the Blessed One, the promised Messiah. Again, before all the Gentiles could join the Church the Jews nationally must be restored to the favour of God after repentance (Ps. lxxvii. 1, 2, 7; Zech. xii. 10, xiii. 1; Rom. xi. 15), whereas as a nation they were still rejecting Christ, and unable to witness for Him. The Temple must be standing (Zech. vi. 12, 13), whereas the Lord had uttered the startling prediction that soon not one of the stones of the Temple would be left upon another (St. Matt. xxiv. 2). In view also of the above, how could the prophecies immediately come to pass foretelling that the Lord of Hosts should reign in Jerusalem? (Isa. xxiv. 23; Mic. iv. 7; Zech. xiv. 9; St. Luke i. 32, 33).

After a pause, St. James, probably the first Bishop of Jerusalem, gave his judgment as president of the Congress (Acts xv. 13, etc.). He appealed to the Scriptures, as containing the best solution of every difficulty and problem. His quotations show that he understood "the mystery of Christ" (Eph. iii. 4-6), and the reason why our Lord, in reading Isa. lxi., left off at a comma (St. Luke iv. 18, 19). He saw in God's plan the parenthetical dispensation of the Holy Spirit, "the acceptable year of the Lord," which ends when the Church of Christ is complete, ushering in "the day of vengeance of our God." Until "the day of Pentecost was fully come," the Jews specially (Amos iii. 2) had been visited (St. Luke i. 68), but they knew not the time of their visitation (St. Luke xix. 44). Now (Acts xv. 14) God was beginning also to "visit the Gentiles, and take out of them a people for His Name." This gathering out of Jews and Gentiles to form the Church of God (1 Cor. x. 32) is now

going on. When it will be finished is unknown (St. Mark xiii. 32, etc.).

In Acts xv. 15 the Lord says, "After this I will return," etc. After what? Clearly, after the ecclesia, God's called-out ones, the accomplished number of God's elect, the Bride of Christ, has been made complete. As regards human effort, the elect number of Jews and Gentiles in a state of salvation cannot be limited; in God's election the full number must necessarily be known to Him who knows all things. Our task is not to convert nations, but as individuals to witness for Christ to individuals. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, "to the Jew first," not Jews, "and also to the Gentile," not Gentiles. If we would see the Lord's Christ before we die, we must seek with all our heart and soul and mind and strength to fulfil the ecclesia, the Church of God, loving our neighbour as ourselves; for as long as the Church remains incomplete, Christ does not will to return. To hasten His coming again is our life-work. If we have been delivered out of the hand of our enemies, we ought to serve the Lord God of Israel without fear, and to give knowledge of salvation unto His people for the remission of their sins. It is as much our duty to proclaim this "so great salvation" (Isa. vi. 9, etc.; Ezek. ii. 3, etc.) as it is the duty of the Jews to accept it (Acts xxviii. 24). Unless we pray and work for their salvation, how can they "understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed"? (Isa. vi. 10). If Christ has been a "light to lighten us Gentiles," let us not forget that it is our part to make Him "the glory of His people Israel."

The work of the Church in this dispensation is fully brought out in Rom. xi. On the one hand there is the "remnant according to the election of grace" to be taken out from amongst the Jews, and on the other "the fulness of the Gentiles" must be gathered out from amongst the Gentiles. How many more Jews are needed to complete the "remnant" of saved Jews we cannot know, nor can we tell how many more Gentiles are required to make up "the fulness of the Gentiles" in a state of

salvation. But it is certain that there is one soul in the foreknowledge and election of God that will accomplish the number of His elect. It may be a Jew, it may be a Gentile, but that soul is known to God. What greater privilege could there be than to be the favoured one—it may be a reader of this article—to bring in that last soul which will complete “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ”? The winning of that one soul will cause the wheels of His chariot to descend into the air in order to meet and catch up His Bride to “ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess. iv. 17). Pray, plead for that one soul; watch, work for that one soul; at all events, have your holy share in the salvation of that Jew, that Gentile, and be not “the last to bring back the King.” Remember the advice of the late Bishop Ryle: “Do not go to heaven alone, but be sure you take one soul with you.”

Acts xv. 16 describes what is to follow on the return of the Lord Jesus, after an interval often referred to in the Bible. Immediately after the Church of Christ has been caught up from grave and earth to meet Him in the air (1 Thess. iv. 16, 17), “the day of the Lord” begins. This period is connected with destruction, pangs and sorrow (Isa. xiii. 6, etc.), vengeance (Isa. lxi. 2, lxiii. 4), trouble (Jer. xxx. 7), darkness (Joel ii. 1, 2, 11; Amos v. 18), distress (Obad. 15), and wrath (Zeph. i. 15). It has its centre as regards the Jews in Jerusalem (Joel iii. 1, 2; Zech. xiv. 1, etc.). It is a time when Elijah the prophet will be sent to the Jews to prevent the earth being smitten with a curse. It was referred to on the great day of Pentecost by St. Peter, when he said, “This is that which was *spoken* by the prophet Joel,” not, that it might be *fulfilled* which was spoken. There was only a partial accomplishment then; “all flesh” has not yet received the Holy Spirit, nor has the world yet experienced the terrors and the judgments foretold then (Acts ii. 17-20). This “day of the Lord” is still future as the climax of fulfilment. It is a day to be accounted worthy to escape from having to pass through (St. Luke xxi. 36). It is a day that must not be confused with similar phrases—“the day of the Lord Jesus”

(1 Cor. v. 5; 2 Cor. i. 14), "the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. i. 6), "the day of Christ" (Phil. i. 10, ii. 16), and "the day of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. i. 8). These always refer directly or indirectly to believers, whilst "the day of the Lord" invariably bursts upon those who have not accepted Christ as Saviour "in that day." In 2 Thess. ii. 2, "the day of Christ" is rightly, as in the Revised Version, "the day of the Lord." Towards the close of the latter—which runs concurrently with the seventieth week in the vision of Daniel (ix. 25, etc.), and with those days which our Lord said would be shortened for the elect's sake (St. Matt. xxiv. 22)—in His wrath God remembers mercy toward the Jews, who are then in the greatest straits (Jer. xxx. 7; Zech. xiv. 1, etc.). In their affliction they seek the Lord (Hos. v. 15), and a great wave of repentance passes over the nation (Zech. xii. 10). In answer to their cry His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives (Zech. xiv. 4); and once again "upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance" (Obad. 17), as He fights for these Jews, the nation the Lord formed for Himself (Isa. xliii. 21). The result is they shall know the Lord, as their Messiah, Saviour, King (Isa. xxv. 9, lii. 9; Zech. xiii. 9).

After this comes the full restoration of the Jews to the favour of God as His chosen witnesses (Isa. xliii. 10-12), to show forth His praise (verse 21), to be "the Priests of the Lord" (Isa. lxi. 6), and His missionary nation to make known His saving health to all nations (Ps. lxxvii. 2, 7, xcvi. 3); for then "out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa. ii. 3).

The one great object, then, when "all Israel shall be saved," is the salvation of all the Gentiles. To them the receiving of the Jews into the Church of Christ will be as "life from the dead" (Rom. xi. 15, 26). The world will then see, as it has never yet seen, the love of God in Jewish hearts nationally manifesting itself in love for Gentile souls (Isa. lxi. 9). Then the saved nation of Jews will be God's instruments of salvation (Zech. viii. 22, 23) to the unsaved Gentiles "to the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts i. 8; *cf.* also Ps. lxxvii. 7).

To sum up the above : from the call of Abraham to the day of Pentecost, comparatively speaking, God was gathering out *many* Jews and *few* Gentiles for His Name. From Pentecost until the Second Coming of our Lord, comparatively speaking, *many* Gentiles and *few* Jews are being similarly gathered out for His Name. After our Lord's return, and as a result, "*all* Israel shall be saved," and through Israel "*all* the Gentiles upon whom My Name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things" (Acts xv. 17). In other words, as someone has said, God's plan of evangelizing the world centres round three words—"election, selection, and collection." May He give us each grace to be forwarding His purposes of mercy, through the death and resurrection of Christ, "to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile," and so hasten "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him."



Buddha or Christ ?

BY THE REV. W. ST. CLAIR TISDALL, D.D.

A FEW months ago the daily papers announced the formation in London of a Buddhist Society, in which only a few members were natives of Eastern lands. There are reviews devoted to the spread of Buddhistic and other Eastern philosophies in our midst. These require and receive a great deal of diluting with Christian ideas before they are fit for European consumption, and those sciolists who, in adopting a brand-new Europeanized pseudo-Buddhism, pride themselves upon liberality and advanced thought, little know what that system really is of which they ignorantly profess to be admirers. Some years ago the publishers of a well-known poem, in which the learned author had borrowed from the Evangelists' palettes most of the colours he had used to paint an attractive picture of Buddha, announced that they were able to issue a cheap edition