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Jeremiah Burroughes (1599-1646): A Theology of Hope

by A. R. Dallison

Mr. Dallison, minister of the joint charges of Old and St. Andrew's, Livingston, West Lothian, is a student of seventeenth-century millenarianism: he contributed a chapter and an appendix in this field of study to the symposium Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel, edited by Peter Toon (1970). We are glad to publish this further study in our pages.

"THEOLOGY rules there", said Grotius of Puritan England in 1605, two years after the death of Queen Elizabeth I. One aspect of Puritan theology which is receiving a good deal of contemporary interest and historical research is the subject of Puritan eschatology, until comparatively recently a fairly neglected field of study. One reason for the revival of interest is no doubt due to the similarity of our own times to those of the Puritan era. Our twentieth century has been convulsed by wars and revolutions, the rise of totalitarian regimes and the threat of nuclear warfare. It is haunted by the prospect of the end of the world through famine, over-population, exploitation of the limited natural resources of the planet, the upsetting of the delicate balance of ecology. It is no longer the theologians alone who are speaking of the "end of the world", but respected scientists, economists, ecologists and politicians have expressed deep concern over the future of mankind. It is natural, therefore, that theologians, feeling the tempo of our times, are turning with fresh interest to the subject of eschatology.

The Puritan era, too, was a period of great upheaval and uncertainty. The Turkish Empire, though on the decline, still posed a threat in the background to Christendom. The influence of the Roman Catholic Church in Europe had but recently been destroyed. There was widespread political uncertainty and unrest. These were exciting times for the newly liberated Protestant Churches to discover their identity and to become established in theology and church polity. But the temptation was strong to believe that they were living in the "end-times" and to interpret the prophetic and apocalyptic sections of Scripture in terms of contemporary events. It is no surprise that the Puritan era, then, produced a bewildering flood of books, pamphlets and sermons on the reign of the Saints, the prospect of a golden age, the future of the Jews, the overthrow of the Turks, the interpretation of the "thousand years" of Revelation 20, the identification of the "beast" of Revelation 13, and related matters.

From the time of Calvin onwards there was, of course, a firm body of opinion within Reformed Protestantism which was strongly opposed to any form of millenarian ideas. In the seventeenth century, the spokesmen for this view were mostly Presbyterians and Anglicans who found themselves ranged against the Independents, not only on the question of church polity, but because the Independents were the main champions of millenarianism. For example, Robert Baillie (1599-1662), Professor of Divinity at Glasgow and one of the Scottish commissioners to the Westminster Assembly, found himself in the role of one of the chief spokesmen against the more extreme millenarian views. He contended against the influence of these views held by some of the Independents in the Westminster Assembly itself but his chief contribution to the growing debate was through his book *A Dissuasive from the Errours of the Time; Wherein the Tenets of the principall Sects, especially of the Independents, are drawn together in one Map, for the most part, in the words of their own Authors, and their maine principles are examined by the Touch-stone of Holy Scriptures* (1645).

One of the leading millenarians to be singled out for special criticism in this book was Jeremiah Burroughes. According to Baillie, Burroughes had the distinction among the "millenaries" of recommending that the doctrine of the millennium should be used "as a necessary and most comfortabe [*sic*] ground of Christian Religion, to be infused into the hearts of all children by the care of every parent at the Catechising of their family". Indeed, next to Thomas Goodwin, Burroughes received from Baillie the most detailed attention of any of the millenarians mentioned in the *Dissuasive*.

Jeremiah Burroughes (1599-1646) was born in East Anglia and educated at Emmanuel, Cambridge, the great Puritan College, from which he graduated in 1624. He was forced to leave the University on account of his growing nonconformity, and for a while he assisted Edward Calamy as minister of Bury St. Edmunds. In 1631 he became Rector of Tivetshall, Norfolk, but soon afterwards he was suspended by Bishop Wren and consequently forced to take refuge with the Earl of Warwick, one of the protectors of the Puritan clergy. He crossed the Channel in 1637 and became teacher to the English congregation at Rotterdam, a pastorate which he shared with William Bridge. He returned to England in 1641, where he became preacher at Stepney in London at a Puritan 'lecture' held early in the morning. Burroughes and William Greenhill, another congregationalist who lectured in the same Church at a later hour in the day, became known respectively for their great preaching ability as the "Morning and Evening stars of Stepney".

It was in these lectures, many of which were devoted to an exposition of the prophet Hosea, and which were subsequently printed as *An Exposition of Hosea*¹ that Burroughes expressed his teaching on the millennium. The other main source of his millennial views is found in a little book of three sermons, evidently preached in London around 1645, entitled *Jerusalems Glory Breaking forth into the World. Being a Scripture-Discovery of the New Testament Church, In the Latter days Immediately before the Second Coming of Christ*. It is an interesting, and perhaps significant, fact about this book that it was not published until nearly thirty years after the author's death. The book itself is dated "London 1675" and contains a preface by William Adderley explaining that as Burroughes had not intended to publish these sermons during his lifetime, they might be found to suffer from imperfections of style which the author would otherwise have corrected. We can only surmise that Burroughes considered the matter of the sermons too controversial at the time to risk putting them to the Press. His very similar teaching on the millennium in certain parts of the *Exposition of Hosea* did, at least, have the merit of being scattered throughout the lengthy exposition, and so might be rendered more palatable to those for whom the very idea of a future millennium was anathema. Whatever the reason may be, in these two sources we have the substance of Burroughes' thought on the last things. We will look first at the *Exposition of Hosea* and then at the more concise teaching in *Jerusalems Glory Breaking Forth*.

Burroughes had published his exposition of the first three chapters of Hosea by 1643, and it was evidently this early edition with which Robert Baillie was familiar. The subject of the millennium is mostly dealt with in the exposition of the first chapter, so that we may let this speak for the rest of his treatment as well. In his comment on Hosea 1: 10 ["the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, it shall be said to them, Ye are the sons of the living God"], Burroughes wrote, "To whom did this refer? It was not a promise to any who then lived, but to be fulfilled in future ages, yet introduced by the prophet as a comfort to the people of God then

¹ The *Exposition of Hosea* appeared in several instalments, the first three chapters appearing in 1643 during Burroughes' life-time. The subsequent volumes were edited jointly by Thomas Goodwin, Sydrach Simpson, William Greenhill, William Bridge, John Yates and William Adderley, in 1650-1651. The exposition reached only as far as Hosea 13: 11. However, the *Exposition* was re-published at Edinburgh and London in 1863 in one volume, the incomplete chapters being rounded off by the Rev. Thomas Hall and Bishop Edward Reynolds. All quotations are from the 1863 edition.

living".² The prophecy, he admitted, had been fulfilled in part by the calling of the Gentiles to become spiritual sons of Abraham, but this was only

the first fruits of the fulfilling of those promises and prophecies; the accomplishment of them is yet certainly to come, when the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in, and the Jews be converted. Then not only the spiritual seed, but the very carnal seed of Abraham shall have this promise made good, and be multiplied, and come into the faith too, Rom. xi. 26.³

This future time, when multitudes would be brought into the profession of the faith, would mark the commencement of Christ's kingdom:

Christ is promised to have the "heathen for his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession", Psalm 2 v. 8; he shall possess them. A King does not possess a kingdom who only possesses some town, or one shire of it; Christ shall possess the uttermost parts of the earth. Yea, it shall be said, "The Kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ", Rev. 11 v. 15. They are the Lord's indeed in some sense always; but he speaks in a special sense, wherein it shall be said not only a few congregations [alluding to our Lord's words in Luke 12: 32] are the Lord's, and his Christ's, but the whole kingdoms of the earth, which, with their great kings, shall come and bring their glory into the Church.⁴

The centre of this kingdom would be a restored Jerusalem whose glory would far surpass any glory it might have had during Old Testament times, and the sceptre of the kingdom would be in the hands of Jesus, the Head of the Church. However, Burroughes was cautious with regard to affirming a personal reign of Christ Himself on earth:

Christ is the Head of the Church, say some, even personally, so as to come and rule in the world in a glorious manner, personally. They think that this may be interpreted [Hosea 1: 11] that Christ shall be a Head, that he shall come personally and rule and govern things even in this world. As Christ in his own person exercised his priestly and prophetic offices, so they think in his own person he shall exercise his kingly power and office. Which opinion, because the further discussion of it I suppose generally you are not able to bear yet, therefore in modesty I will forbear . . . yet out of conscience I dare not altogether deny it, but so we will leave it, to see what truth may be in it.⁵

He believed, from Revelation 3: 21, that Christ was at present sharing his Father's throne in heaven, but that scripture spoke of *another* throne which was truly His *own*, which He would occupy during the millennium before He finally delivered it up to His Father at the day of Judgement.⁶ Still on Hosea 1: 10-11, Burroughes expounded the meaning of "the great day of Jezreel" as applying to conditions during the millennium, for which the deliverance of Judah from the

² *Exposition of Hosea*, p. 28, column 1.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 29, col. 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30, col. 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44, col. 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47, col. 1. Burroughes was dependent for this idea on Robert Maton's *Israel's Redemption* (1642).

Babylonian captivity had only been a foreshadowing. He listed an eight-fold description of what this long "day" would be like.⁷ It would be a great day in which the glory of God would appear to build up His Church in a special way. It would see the incoming of the Jews into the Church, to the enrichment of the Gentiles. There would be a resurrection of martyrs and favoured saints at the same time as the calling of the Jews, for which Burroughes cited Daniel 12: 2.⁸ It would be a day of refreshing for the saints (Acts 3: 19) and there would be a restitution of all things as promised in Acts 3: 21, and in fulfilment of the many Old Testament prophecies which spoke of future glorious times. It would be "the day of a new creation", when Peter's prophecy of the "new heavens and new earth" (II Peter 3: 13) would be fulfilled, along with Isaiah's vision of the new world (Isaiah 65: 17). It would be a completely different world in which all things would be put in subjection to Christ, according to Hebrews 2: 5-8. Moreover it would be a "great day" because "all former things shall be even forgotten because of the lustre and glory of that great day". And finally, it would be glorious because "it shall be a day after which there shall be no night . . . the saints shall be raised to such a state of prosperity and happiness, that it shall never be darkened more". The churches would be delivered from "woeful affliction", their adversaries subdued, and a glorious presence of Christ be felt amongst the saints, "let it be personal, or what it will, we determine not". (It would, however, be "a more glorious presence of Jesus Christ among His people than ever yet was since the beginning of the world".) Glory would be put upon the saints as a result of this, so that their gifts and graces would be heightened and enlarged. This would be accompanied, too, by "a wonderful change of all creatures, and glorious, fruitful times"⁹ when a multitude of all nations would flock to the Church. That Burroughes felt these glorious conditions were on the brink of being fulfilled was shown by his exhortation to Christian parents to instil this teaching into their children:

All of you labour now to instruct your children in the knowledge of God and of Christ, bring them up in the fear of the Lord, that they may be seed for that day. Acquaint them with these things, for though perhaps you may be dead and gone before this great day, yet they may live to see it; therefore catechise them, and instruct them, and drop into them those principles that may fit them for meeting Jesus Christ their Bridegroom.¹⁰

⁷ *Exposition of Hosea*, pp. 50-52.

⁸ Practically all the Congregational millenarians regarded this resurrection as different from, and prior to, the general resurrection at the last Judgement. They identified it with the "first" resurrection of Revelation 20.

⁹ Burroughes quoted from Lactantius here, a favourite authority with the millenarians.

¹⁰ *Exposition of Hosea*, p. 54, col. 1.

It was this particular exhortation which had alarmed Baillie so much and which had equally alarmed Alexander Petrie, the Presbyterian minister of the Scottish Kirk in Rotterdam, who had also written against the "millenaries", one of whom was Burroughes himself, the former co-pastor of the Independent Church at Rotterdam, charging them that he had "heard this errour [of the millennium] preached instead of the doctrine of Christ (albeit it was first broached by the enemies of Christ) by some of the Authores of the Apologetical Narration for Independencie".¹¹

Turning now from the *Exposition of Hosea*—though not before noticing that Burroughes' views were heavily dependent on those of Thomas Goodwin, with whose *Glimpse of Syons Glory* Burroughes was doubtless familiar—we come to his *Jerusalems Glory Breaking Forth*, preached in 1645, though not published, as we saw, until thirty years later. In the first of the three sermons of which the book is composed, Burroughes expounded the text of Isaiah 62: 7 ["And give Him no rest, till he establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth"]. He assumed that it was a prophecy which had never yet been fulfilled and that therefore a literal fulfilment was still to be expected, though he understood "Jerusalem" to be a figurative expression for the Church. The New Testament counterpart of this prophecy, he maintained, was Revelation 21, where "Jerusalem" signified the Church on earth during the millennium and where the "first" resurrection was a literal resurrection of martyrs and saints. He then gave an elaborate description, under eleven aspects, of the conditions during this time, some of which were not on his previous list. All tears would be wiped from the saints' faces and Christ Himself would go out against their enemies. "Then shall the expressions of the Churches glory that we have in the Old Testament in a tipical way, be fully made good, and that visibly. It shall be visibly and apparently to the world made good."¹² The titles of the Church in the Old Testament [e.g. Jeremiah 12: 10; Isaiah 19: 25; Jeremiah 12: 7; Exodus 5: 19; Isaiah 7: 60; Ezekiel 7: 20] would be a true reflection of the Church's state during the millennium. All the Old Testament prophecies concerning future glory would then be fulfilled. In his second sermon, Burroughes continued to supply details of the Church's exalted state. There would be a wonderful confluence of people joining in the worship of God, Jews, Gentiles, and "marriners" [Isaiah 60: 5, "the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee" (!)].¹³ Yet in spite of the great confluence of diverse peoples, the Church would remain a "pure Church". The gifts and graces of the saints would be "ex-

11 *Chiliasto-mastix* (1644), Epistle to Reader [unpaginated] p. 5.

12 *Jerusalems Glory breaking Forth*, p. 28.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 45 ff.

ceeding raised and enlarged",¹⁴ and there would be a glorious presence of Christ amongst them. Moreover, "godlyness, and the saints, shall be honoured in the world". There would be a "blessed union of the Church" when "devisions [*sic*] shall be taken away"¹⁵ and there would be a great change in the world as expressed in Romans 8: 20-21—"therefore there is a time for Heavens and Earth and Plants and Beasts to be in another condition than now they are".¹⁶ The final point that Burroughes made was that though the Church would enjoy such conditions, there would be no danger of her exalted position in the world becoming a cause for spiritual coldness, for "prosperity shall do it no hurt". In his third sermon, Burroughes outlined the need for caution in handling matters concerned with the millennium:

These things, the nearer the time comes, the more they shall be known. I think it very useful at some time or other, that people should be acquainted [*sc.* with this teaching]; only Ministers had need have a spirit of sobriety and moderation, because not yet being fulfilled, they are not thoroughly understood, and therefore we must not dare to be too bold in our guesing [*sic*] at things that are not clear. But such things as appear clearly, so as we may see there is footing for, we should exercise ourselves in, and labour to make others acquainted with.¹⁷

It might appear that Burroughes himself needed to hear this warning, for the only two matters in which he displayed any real caution were with reference to Christ's *personal* reign on earth, and the date for the inauguration of the millennium. He was aware of the various schemes then current for calculating the exact date, though he expressed hesitation about following them in detail: "But I think, God hath not left it fully clear to determin [*sic*] about the time, only this, God by his strange kind of working amongst us, doth seem as if he were hastening of the time, as if it were near at hand".¹⁸ One of the indications that this was so, he thought, was the new way in which the Book of Revelation was being interpreted. Its interpretation had hitherto been "darkened by Satan" so that the glorious conditions of the Church had been attributed to a *heavenly*, rather than *earthly*, reign. But now, at last, the true meaning had been made clear. A second indication of the nearness of the millennium was that the slaying of the two witnesses (Revelation 11: 1-10) had not yet taken place. He understood the slaying of the witnesses, as the millenarians commonly did, to refer to the persecution of the faithful Protestant churches under a resurgence of antichrist's [Rome's] power, and he was sure that this persecution, evidently of a very severe nature, had not yet taken place—though its fulfilment,

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 54 ff.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

he felt, could not be very far off, and with it, the inauguration of the millennium. Burroughes' concluding paragraph is worth quoting in full, to show the tremendous seriousness with which he adhered to the millennial hope as a source of comfort both in life and death:

So you may speak to your children, ["I die now, I must not see this new Jerusalem, but there is hope that God will bring you into it, though I perhaps shall not see it, and close your eyes with this belief when you die, 'I die, yet in the Faith that there is a time coming that the Lord will make Jerusalem as the praise of the whole earth'"].¹⁹

Jeremiah Burroughes, as he himself expected, did not live to see the Church established as "the praise of the earth". He died in the year following the preaching of these three sermons, apparently from injuries he received after a fall from his horse. But his graphic descriptions of Christ's impending millennial kingdom lived on long enough to stimulate the imagination and to command an interest well into the 1670's, though by that time the events of the post-Restoration years had rendered the ramifications of the subject much less credible than had been apparent thirty years earlier.

In conclusion, several things may be said in regard to Burroughes' eschatological scheme. There can be no question that he clearly believed in a period of "latter-day glory" for the Christian Church, a view which was held in common by all the leading Independents and some of the Presbyterians, and which was embodied in the *Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order* (1658), Chapter 26, Section V. What is less clear is whether he believed in a pre-millennial return of Christ to inaugurate the period of "latter-day glory" on earth, although the indications are that he did adhere to this scheme. His caution was caused in part through an unwillingness to have his views associated with those of the Fifth Monarchy men and other radical millenarian views. It is a pity that he was influenced so strongly by the contemporary urge to read prophetic and apocalyptic Scripture in the light of political events. Thus, he serves as a warning to present-day millenarians who seek to relate their teaching to contemporary world events—a fascinating, though not always profitable, occupation. From Jeremiah Burroughes we may still learn a helpful caution today.

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¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 114.