

*THE VARIOUS KINDS OF MESSIANIC  
PROPHECY.*

FIRST PAPER.

IN the following papers I mean to make some observations on a single point in connection with Messianic prophecy, on which the language employed by writers on prophecy, when treating of it, has always appeared to me obscure. The question is often asked in regard to passages in the Old Testament, such, for example, as the second Psalm, the seventh or forty-second Chapter of Isaiah, To whom is the reference here? And then, in all likelihood, in answering the question a distinction is drawn between a primary and a secondary reference, between an immediate and a deeper application; and it is said that with the immediate reference to David or other Old Testament personage there must be admitted a further and principal reference to Christ.

Now when we hear the question put, To whom is the reference in this passage? there immediately occurs to our minds another question, Reference by whom? If a reference implies one to whom reference is made, it equally implies some person or mind that makes the reference. The question, To whom is the reference made? when stated fully, must be either, To whom is reference made here by the Spirit of Revelation? or, To whom is reference made here by the

Israelitish author of the passage? But these questions, though both legitimate enough, are perfectly distinct, and may admit of distinct answers. The questions are both legitimate. For it is assumed here that there was a Spirit of Revelation active in Old Testament times in unfolding truth, and that the Hebrew mind must have had relations with God of another kind than the Gentile nations had, in order to produce the Old Testament Scriptures. But this Spirit of Revelation must have had more knowledge than the human writer, and wider views, and have comprehended not only the whole scope of any particular truth, but, what was a much profounder thing, the whole scope of the general scheme of which any particular truth was but a fragment. An eye which sees the whole field must estimate any object upon it differently from one which sees that particular object or its immediate surroundings only. No possible understanding can be come to of Revelation unless some such assumptions as the following be made: first, that Revelation from its earliest beginnings in the Old Testament to its latest statements in the New is one coherent system of thought; second, that this system gradually grew, and that in the long history of the Hebrew people we can trace it in good part from its germs to its full efflorescence; and, third, that the system did not advance in a mechanical way by the Spirit of Revelation injecting into the mind of some writer now an opinion and then a fact out of all connection with the writer's experience or his country's life, but that the truth progressed in an organic way, and arose through the forms and occasions of a personal and national life, which both religiously and intellectually was of the

profoudest character. But if these axioms be true, we may say quite fairly that the meaning or reference in the mind of the Spirit of Revelation was different from that of the Hebrew writer. To the one the whole was in view, the end was seen in the beginning, and the line, longer or shorter, of intermediate development through which the beginning should rise into the perfect end, was visible in all its extent: while the view of the other was necessarily limited, and though he always spoke or wrote intelligently, and with an earnestness never surpassed by any teacher or moralist in other lands, yet his conceptions of the truth he was teaching must have been coloured by the relations amidst which he stood, and by the nature of his own mind; and his comprehension of the relation of any truth to the whole must have been less or greater according to circumstances, many of which it might be difficult to estimate.

The distinction here drawn will be no less, perhaps to some even more, apparent, if what I have called the Spirit of Revelation be not supposed to be a conscious mind at all, but be regarded as a mere personification to which the name revelation-spirit might be better applied, and which would be identical with the *idea* of the system in its perfect state, which we call revelation. This idea is Christianity. And it is evident that it is from the point of view of this *idea* that the New Testament writers generally speak, and that they throw back the perfection of this idea upon the imperfect and only germinating condition of the system in the Old Testament. Of course, they regard the Spirit of Revelation as a person, but they regard Him as having in view the perfect form of a truth in the New Testament even

when giving imperfect indications of it in the Old ; and, therefore, they find in the most rudimentary statement in the Old the expression of the fully developed truth of the New Dispensation. The question, therefore, What was the meaning of the Spirit of Revelation in any particular place ? becomes very much, What is the truth taught in that place in its perfect or highest form ? and to answer this question we must have recourse to the ultimate form of the system of Revelation in the New Testament. The whole was always had in view in giving any part. The part was but an instalment carrying with it a promise of the whole, and an intention both ultimately to give, and meantime to suggest, the whole. And on account of the progressive and germinant character of the Revelation, there lay in every fragment or germ of a truth a prophecy, for there was in it a determination towards that form which was its perfection or fulfilment. And in using the Old Testament now, especially for purposes of edification, this ought to be remembered ; and we should feel that we fail to do justice to the Old Testament if, when expounding any truth taught in it, we do not bring into connection with the passage explained the highest form of the truth as revealed in the New Testament. For to omit this would be to fall short of giving a full account of the Old Testament, as much as one would fall short of giving a true account of a child who furnished an inventory of his organs and stature and relations to the things about him, but omitted to state that there was a principle of growth in him, and that he manifested a *tendency* to become a man.

It may be asked, seeing the Revelation was progressive, and given mediately through the forms and oc-

casions of a personal and national life, must we not consider the fragments and germs of truth in their various shapes, and with the varied colours which different ages lent them, to be what the Spirit of Revelation designed to be revealed at these particular times, and therefore his meaning? Undoubtedly; for the disposition of events out of which the truth arose and which threw it into shape and lent it its colour, was never accidental, but some part of that history of Israel which we regard as due to God's special providence; and the mind of the prophet was always under the guidance and teaching of God in considering and estimating it. But as the events and circumstances referred to were those that surrounded the author, and helped to determine his mind, and as his mind and tongue were the mould on which at last the truth was formed, the meaning of the Spirit of Revelation, thus considered, does not differ from the meaning of the Hebrew author. It is this meaning of the Hebrew author which, in any critical and scientific study of the Old Testament as a progressive unfolding of truth, we are most interested in; and it is in regard to this Hebrew author that I mean to put the question, To whom in the passages of the Old Testament usually called Messianic is reference made? Whom has the Hebrew author in his mind in these various passages? It may be supposed that the Hebrew author has not always the same Subject in his mind, and that consequently there are various kinds of Messianic prophecies in Scripture.

First, then, there are *real* Messianic prophecies or statements in the Old Testament; that is, statements made by the Hebrew writers with direct and conscious reference to the Messiah, or to something in his kingdom.

The term Messiah means "anointed." As applied to a certain future King, for whom at a particular stage in the history of Israel people and prophets began to look, it is perhaps taken from the second Psalm: "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his Anointed." The Psalm may, or may not, have immediate reference to this King in the mind of its author; certainly it came before the time of our Lord to be generally expounded of the expected King; and the name "Son of God," also applied to Him, is perhaps taken from the same Psalm. Hence Peter, in answer to the query, "Whom say ye that I am?" replied, "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God;" and Jesus accepted the designation, adding that not flesh and blood, but his Father, had revealed this truth to his disciple. The name is supposed by many to be given to this expected King already in Daniel ix. 25: "From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks." It was certainly quite current of Him in the age of Christ, for the woman of Samaria said to Jesus, "I know that Messias cometh, and when he is come, he will tell us all things;" and Jesus again claims to be this expected Messiah: "I that speak unto thee am he." But by whatever name called, it is beyond controversy that the prophets did anticipate the advent of a King who, though of the line of David, was to be possessed of extraordinary endowments. "It is a fact indisputable and undisputed that for a long time before the birth at Bethlehem the Jews were looking out for a prince who was to arise to them from David's house. They were 'waiting for the consolation

of Israel.' . . . The expectation of a redeemer and prince had been growing in the hearts of the people ever since the captivity, and may even be traced back through the preceding centuries as far as the accession of Rehoboam, the fatal era when the hopes of perpetual unity and dominion which had been cherished during the brilliant reigns of David and Solomon were so lamentably frustrated by the final disruption of the kingdom. From that time till the cessation of prophecy a long succession of predictions announced the advent of a Son of David, of the increase of whose government and peace there should be no end." <sup>1</sup>

In confirmation of the opinion advanced in the above extract, the passage referred to at the end of it needs only to be read: "To us a child is born, to us a son is given: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isa. ix. 6). That the expectation of a special king of the line of David, under whom the kingdom should attain its perfection, existed among the prophets, is "undisputed." The only point in dispute is the time and circumstances when the expectation arose. It is certainly not probable that the expectation of any special king existed anterior to the rise of the kingdom. For by the law of progressive revelation the external events of history, though they cannot be considered as the measure of prophetic truth (as if prophecy were merely the consciousness of history), may always be regarded as what gave occasion to its being spoken; and the varying Messianic element in the Old Testament is but the ideal and glorified reflection of the varying history and institutions of the people. The

<sup>1</sup> Binnie, "The Psalms," p. 158.

anticipation of a perfect king could not arise before there were imperfect kings. But it is certain, on the other hand, that we find the anticipation in full blossom in the time of Isaiah and his contemporary Micah, and even if possible in a manner more pronounced in the elder Zechariah: "Rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion, behold thy king cometh unto thee," &c. (Zech. ix. 9). In the above extract the anticipation is traced as high up as the time of Rehoboam, and no further. This date is probably an inference from the fact that the disruption of the kingdom took place under that king. But there is no evidence in the Old Testament itself which would lead us higher up than Zechariah and Isaiah, except evidence which would carry us as high as David himself. Between the splendid circle of Messianic Psalms, including the second and the hundred and tenth, supposed to belong to the era of David, and founded at least on Nathan's oracle to him in 2 Samuel Chapter vii., and the prophecies just referred to in the writers of the Assyrian age, there are no references made to a personal Messiah. The great prophets of the north, Elijah and Elisha, have no such doctrine to declare. Neither, so far as we know, has Jonah. Nor yet is any such specific doctrine found in Joel, a prophet of the south, probably of a high antiquity. And even coming lower down, to Amos and Hosea, the one a prophet whose calling was exercised in the north, and the other a native of that kingdom, we do not find in their prophecies, though falling within the borders of the Assyrian age, any such specific predictions as occur in Isaiah. They both indeed predict the restoration of the House of David to universal authority over the tribes of Israel, the one more generally and the other



distinctly: "In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and will build it as in the days of old" (Amos ix. 11); "Afterward shall the children of Israel return and seek Jehovah their God and David their king" (Hos. iii. 5). But though Hosea distinctly predicts the reunion of all the tribes again under the House of David, it is doubtful whether we are entitled to extract from his language any particular views regarding the condition of the Davidic House at the time referred to. The prophet is strong in his reprobation of the schism of the north; he couples departure from the House of David and returning to it with departing from Jehovah and returning to Him, regarding the things as almost identical, and the divided condition of the kingdom is in his view incompatible with the idea of it. And when he speaks of returning to David their king, he has in his mind the vacillating conduct of the northern tribes in the actual history of David, as well as their secession from his house in the person of his grandson; and we cannot be sure that he means more by the language than that they shall reverse their act of rebellion and undo their past history. In the mouth of Jeremiah and Ezekiel the expression, "seek David their king," may have a meaning more particular, because ere their day the great predictions of Isaiah and Micah had intervened; and they may employ the older phraseology to cover both the old and more general as well as the new and more precise truth.

It is not, however, so much to the date of the origin of a precise Messianic hope that I desire to call attention here, as to the fact of its existence at some stage or other of the history of Israel. The question of date is

a very complicated one, for many reasons. Two things in particular tend to complicate it. First, the Messianic hope is a very varied hope. It does not run in one stream, but in many; and these streams, rising in regions very unlike, are of very different hues and have quite distinct characters: and though they all move towards the same point at last, this could not have been foreseen at the beginning, and was scarcely believed even when witnessed. The Messianic is the perfection and ideal of the common, whether the common be "man," or "priest," or "saint," or "king," or, in short, whatever it may be. How soon, therefore, and in what circumstances, the religious mind found it necessary and was enabled to break up the complex class, and disengage from it one individual in whom the ideal character should first be realized, in order that it might be communicated to the whole, is a thing not easy to determine. We may say, however, with some certainty, that much that was spoken by Old Testament writers in the general, or of themselves as members of a class, came to be understood by readers and interpreters of the Old Testament, particularly in the generations preceding the birth of Christ, of an Individual. These interpreters rightly perceived that such things could never be realized in a class in the present age of the world; and, with their minds filled from other sources with the hope of a perfect Individual, they transferred the description to Him. This fact enables us to put the proper value on Messianic interpretations current in the age of our Lord. These interpretations will be found to be invariably reasonable. They apply to the right Person the thoughts and ideas of the Old Testament passages. They are

true only of Him. But this does not imply that the Old Testament author wrote these passages with an individual, or at least with the Messiah, in his mind. He may have spoken of a common individual, or of a class, in an ideal manner. The Old Testament is poetry. It is a collection of religious ideals. But the ideal, in religion at least, is the truest reality. Such ideals could not have arisen in men's minds without close communion with the mind of God; but the way in which such thoughts and pictures first came into existence was as ideal descriptions of persons and classes of whom they were not true, and not as literal descriptions of an Individual of whom they were true. But I am anticipating here what should rather be said under the second kind of Messianic prophecies—those spoken not directly of the Messiah Himself.

Second: another thing which complicates the question of date is the uncertainty in which criticism has landed us regarding the age of some of the most brilliant Messianic passages of the Old Testament. We cannot be sure at what precise time these passages have assumed the form in which we possess them. Some of them seem to be literary redactions, belonging to the best age of Hebrew literature, of traditions greatly more ancient. But it is inevitable that a writer should clothe the thoughts of antiquity in the sacred symbols and allusions of his own time. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says of Abraham that "he looked for the city that hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Chap. xi. 10). He refers to the New Jerusalem, glorified counterpart and ideal of the Holy City upon earth—a picture drawn by history and association that never could have presented

itself to Abraham. Yet to this writer, with history and prophecy behind him, the New Jerusalem gathered into one all his hopes and longings, which were also the hopes and longings of Abraham; and he translates the patriarch's aspirations into the holy symbolism so expressive to himself. Other Scripture writers do the same; and thus, as if intentionally, they baffle criticism. The blessing of Jacob (Gen. xlix.) may belong to this class of passages, as well as the prophecies of Balaam. It is scarcely probable that the former came from the dying patriarch in the shape in which we have it. It is very distinctly Messianic,<sup>1</sup> and it may be difficult to say how much of the Messianic colour may be due to a later time; and how far, like the Apostle to the Hebrews, the redactor of the ancient though veritable and well-preserved tradition may have thrown into definite symbols of his own day the more vague presentiments and hopes of the father of the tribes. Thus, though on the authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews, we might ascribe to Abraham an expectation and desire of a settled nearness to God and fellowship with Him for ever, we could not infer that the precise figure into which this faith is cast is older than that Epistle itself; and in like manner we may have to draw distinctions between the general thoughts and the precise form of Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament that may greatly interfere with our conclusions regarding the time when particular shades of the Messianic hope first appeared.

Even when we come down to such compositions as the Messianic Psalms, which undoubtedly speak of the

<sup>1</sup> That interpretation which translates Verse 10, "Till he (or they) come to Shiloh," seems to me opposed to all the probabilities raised by similar passages, and indeed to be so empty as to be even foolish.

theocratic king, it is not easy to decide whether their authors refer to some of the early monarchs of the Davidic House, whom they idealize and invest with all the attributes of a perfect king of the theocracy or kingdom of God, or whether the idea of the theocratic king had already been decomposed, and there had stood out, in opposition to the ordinary kings, that one king certainly referred to by prophets of a later age. Delitzsch, in commenting on Psalm lxxii., which he ascribes to Solomon, and considers to have been sung by that monarch of himself, says: "In the time of David and of Solomon the hope of believers, which was attached to the kingship of David, had not yet fully broken with the present. At that time, with few exceptions, nothing was known of any other Messiah than the Anointed One of God, who was David or Solomon himself. When, however, the kingship in these glorious impersonations had proved itself unable to bring to full realization the idea of the Messiah, or of the Anointed One of God, and when the line of kings that followed thoroughly disappointed the hope which clung to the kingship of the present—a hope which here and there, as in the reign of Hezekiah, blazed up for a moment and then totally died out, and men were driven from the present to look onward into the future—then, and not until then, did any decided rupture take place between the Messianic hope and the present. The image of the Messiah is now painted on the pure ethereal sky of the future (though of the immediate future) in colours which were furnished by older unfulfilled prophecies, and by the contradiction between the existing kingship and its idea; it becomes more and more, so to speak, an image super-earthly,

super-human, belonging to the future, the invisible refuge and invisible goal of a faith despairing of the present, and thereby rendered relatively more spiritual and heavenly (*cf.* the Messianic image painted in colours borrowed from our Psalm in Isa. xi. ; Mic. v. 3, 6 ; Zech. ix. 9, *et seq.*)." <sup>1</sup> With this view most modern writers agree ; *e.g.*, Canon Perowne in his greatly appreciated Commentary, and Kurtz in his valuable essay, "Zur Theologie der Psalmen." Delitzsch, it is to be presumed, secures by the expression "with few exceptions" leave to pass a different verdict regarding Psalm cx., which he considers to be "prophetic-Messianic, *i.e.*, in it the future Messiah stands objectively before the mind of David." He believes this psalm to be the only psalm of such a kind, although the poem known as David's last words (2 Sam. xxiii.) belongs to the same category. According to this view, David had already been enabled to resolve the idea of the theocratic kingship into its elements and disengage the extraordinary king ; but what a rare spiritual insight enabled him to perceive, it required centuries of theocratic misgovernment and the hard teaching of misfortune to impress even upon the higher minds of the people at large. It is certainly hard to see, on the one hand, how a different construction can be put on Psalm cx. ; and, on the other hand, if the teaching of this Psalm had become the possession of any considerable portion of the people, it would surely have revealed itself somewhere during the three centuries that intervened between David and Isaiah.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii. p. 299 (Clark).

<sup>2</sup> This subject is very fully discussed in an article by Professor Forbes, of the University of Aberdeen, in the "British and Foreign Evangelical Review," Oct.

There are, then, *real* Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, that is, statements made with conscious reference in the Hebrew author's own mind to the Messiah. Examples have already been adduced, such as the prophecies in Isaiah ix. and Zechariah ix. ; and there are many others, some passages referring to the Person, and very many to the condition of things in his time. But now, while this is undisputed, it is quite possible that these prophets or Hebrew writers, though speaking consciously of the Messiah, may not always have described Him and his reign precisely as history has shewn them to be. It is quite certain, if Christ was the promised Messiah, as He claimed to be, that they have not done this. Neither was it to be expected that they should. For there was already in their own day such a king and kingdom of God upon the earth ; it had a certain form, and existed in relations which varied considerably in different prophetic ages ; and it is no more than may be considered probable that the writer, even when thinking of the future king and kingdom, and while knowing perhaps that the king to come would be unlike the king then ruling, and his kingdom different in form from that then existing, should not have been enabled to describe that king and his kingdom altogether truly as they have appeared. It is only natural that he should describe the king as if he were to come in the relations in which the prophet himself then lived. Thus Micah, after predicting the advent of the king out of Bethlehem Ephrathah, adds, " And this man shall be peace when the Assyrian shall come into our land ; they shall

1876, on the " Servant of the Lord." I have the more pleasure in referring to Dr. Forbes's paper because it is a very vigorous attack upon some views put forth by me.

waste the land of Assyria with the sword : thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian when he cometh into our land" (Mic. v. 5). The Messiah is certainly referred to by the prophet, but the conditions in which he appears are those of the prophet's own time. The form of all prophecy, even the directly Messianic, varied according to the historical conditions of the people when it was uttered. That element of it received prominence at any particular time which was then of chief significance in the life of the people. The Messianic age brought to perfection all the blessings and reversed all the evils existing at the respective periods in which prophets predicted it. The "day of the Lord," or "last day," as we name it, a subject so frequently in the minds of the prophets, and closely connected with the Messianic hope, being the final issue of things, is not conceived in the same way by any two prophets ; in each it is the moral issue of things as they existed in his day.

Now if it be natural that the prophets should describe the Messiah and the things of his kingdom in this way, it is surely, on the other hand, equally natural that the New Testament should disregard such deviations in form from the reality of history, and fix on the truth that lay beneath them. Prophecy is not history written beforehand, but it has a historical fulfilment. It is truth of the perfect kingdom of God expressed in the forms of life and thinking of Old Testament times. But to deny the permanence of the truth on account of the transitoriness of the form, or to affirm the permanence of the form because of the unchangeableness of the truth—either proceeding is about equal to the other in perversity. It was natural that, looking for-



ward very far, the atmosphere through which prophets looked should in some measure distort the object seen. This could no doubt have been prevented, but only at the cost of making the mode of revelation quite different from what it is, and banishing the experiences of life and the activities of the human mind from all share in its production. And a fair criticism will not refuse to admit that an Old Testament writer may have had in his mind the Messiah, even in cases where his description does not quite agree with the Messiah's history as it has actually occurred. All that such discrepancies prove is that the writer, though referring in his own mind to that distinct coming King, was not enabled in all respects to conceive Him as He came, but conceived Him rather as coming in relations resembling those of his own time. A. B. DAVIDSON.

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### RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTIFICATION.

*Δίκαιος, Δικαιοσύνη, and Δικαιοῦν.*

THE old Hesiodic myth did not greatly err when it made Dikè the daughter of Zeus and Themis: Zeus, the embodiment of deity, Themis—a divine being, too, the daughter of heaven and earth—the personification of eternal unchanging law, embracing the whole order of nature, the apotheosis of the *fitness of things*. Dikè, less abstract in its conception, more human and personal in its relations, was in a narrower and intenser sense *the principle of universal right*. Thus Dikè and Themis were not one and the same: Dikè was *right*, but Themis was *right* and *might* too; she was the “nature of things” with power. By Themis kings