

THE VARIOUS KINDS OF MESSIANIC
PROPHECY.

SECOND PAPER.

IN a former paper reference was made to a class of passages in the Old Testament which may be called *real* or directly Messianic passages; that is, in which the Hebrew author has immediately in view that extraordinary Person whom we name the Messiah. These passages mainly concern the anticipated King, of whom the name Messiah is properly used. It was contended, however, that the fact that the Hebrew author had in view this extraordinary King did not imply that his description of Him would be true to history; it was rather to be anticipated that, the Messianic salvation being to Old Testament saints always "ready to be revealed," the Messiah should be described as appearing under a character and in circumstances bearing some resemblance to those of the theocratic kings of the prophet's own day. "It is once for all the case that not only the subjective hopes and expectations of the pious in Israel at all times regard the time of fulfilment and the Messianic completeness as near, but also the objective predictions of the prophets of the Old Testament so delineate and present them. And it is so also in the New Testament, for the apostles ever represent the day of the Lord as near, even close at hand, and as a thing to be experienced in their own and their contemporaries' lives. It is not our part here to justify this on dogmatic grounds. It is enough to affirm the fact, and to adduce it as helping to the understanding of our Psalm. The objection that, if it were so, the prophets and apostles of our Lord Jesus

Christ would 'thereby have made themselves ridiculous,' cannot cause us to deny the plain fact or to exegeze it away."¹ This presentiment of the nearness of the Messianic glory, which Kurtz rightly ascribes to the Old Testament prophets, was, however, rather a feeling residing in the moral sense than any strict conception of time ; though of course such a feeling was entirely incompatible with the belief that the coming of the Messiah could be long delayed. The connection between the present and the future was in the prophet's mind moral ; the future resulted from the present, through the transmission of a single shock of moral energy. Hence not only the nearness but the imminence of the future ; and hence, amidst even a complete reversal of religious conditions, the resemblance of the future to the present in mere external circumstances. It cannot therefore be relevantly objected to such a Psalm as the Second that it is not directly Messianic, because it paints the Messiah as a warrior breaking the nations with a rod of iron. The Psalm may be directly Messianic, though it speaks of this King as if He were a king in the relations of David, at a time when the early monarchy had to fight for its existence ; and, in point of fact, the warlike terms in which the King is spoken of form no obstacle to a most Christian writer applying them to Christ. The author of the Apocalypse speaks of the Man - Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron.

But, besides these real or direct Messianic prophecies, there are certain other passages in the Old Testament in which the author does not seem to

¹ Kurtz, "Theology of the Psalms," p. 43. The objection referred to is urged by Hengstenberg.

be consciously speaking of anything future, but of things and persons existing in his own day ; while the New Testament applies the passages to the Messiah, and affirms that they were spoken of Him. These are generally called typically Messianic passages. There is no objection to the word typical, if the sense in which it is used be understood and always the same. But there is perhaps no term that so readily lends itself to cover hazy ideas. For this reason it is better to avoid the use of it. The term theocratic might be employed instead of it, in order to imply that such passages are spoken of some thing or person connected with the Hebrew Constitution, viewed as a kingdom of God. The most important of these passages form a class to be named *ideally* theocratic ; certain others might be called *ordinary* theocratic.

If we were to form a general conception of salvation, we should define it to be the union of God and man. This is salvation, and the means to this is the way of salvation. Now, if man's condition be considered, something really divine must lay hold of him to deliver him ; and the effect of this will be to cause him to enter into and sustain certain relations to God. For example ; man being ignorant of God's will, there must be some divine energy of revelation or prophecy ; man being far from God, there must be some energy of atonement or priesthood. And, on the other hand, the consequence of this influence from above on man will be that he will enter into certain relations with God ; he will become " saint," " servant of the Lord," and the like. There will be a whole circle of offices to be filled, and of *rôles* to be played or characters sustained. These will be essential among the salvation

people. And without question Israel, as chosen in Abraham and redeemed from Egypt, was the subject of all these divine influences, and sustained all these characters. Moses prayed, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets!" Jehovah said to the people, defining their relations to Himself and to the world, "Ye shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." In Isaiah xl.-lxvi. Israel appears with all these determinations upon it. But the nation as a whole was unable for these high functions. It was too feeble to be king or ruler among the nations. It was too ignorant to be prophet to the peoples. It was too sinful to be priest of mankind. But that endowment of Israel which was prophetic, that determination of the people towards prophecy, condensed itself, and appeared in the prophetic order. And the same took place with respect to the priestly and other determinations: they were all fulfilled in classes of the people.

Now it is evident that all these offices were filled and these characters sustained in the Hebrew state, or kingdom of God. But it is also evident that they never were perfectly filled or fully sustained. The office was, after all, still nearly empty, and the character was merely sketched. But it not seldom happened that writers spoke of the offices and characters, not as they were actually filled and sustained in any case, or even throughout the history, but according to the *idea* of them; giving expression in Psalm lxxii., for example, to the hope that Solomon the theocratic king would be perfectly righteous, and his dominion universal—the *idea* of the theocratic state or kingdom of God being righteousness and universality. Thus a whole series of passages are found in which the per-

sons and things which then were are described, but not as they actually were at any time, but according to the *idea* belonging to them. And these ideal descriptions, which are, of course, true descriptions of the theocratic things, king, kingdom, just man or saint, servant of God, and the like, if they were truly realized, are in the New Testament transferred to Him who did perfectly realize in Himself the King of the kingdom of God, the just One, the Servant of the Lord, and the like. They are applicable to Him, and only to Him truly; and they were meant to be applied to Him by that higher Wisdom which was all the while raising these perfect thoughts of things only perfect in Him, and thus suggesting Him and preparing the way for Him.

Now it cannot be considered unnatural that prophets should so conceive things in Israel and so speak of them. If a prophet once realized the idea of a kingdom of God, and a king for God, being his representative, as he said, *I have set my king on my holy hill of Zion*, and as it is said of Solomon that *he sat down on God's throne in Jerusalem*, it naturally followed that he should conceive God's king as being just, as He Himself is just, and of his kingdom as ruling over all, as God's kingdom is. Neither can it be considered unnatural that what is thus said should be applied to Christ, who filled the same office, and who alone filled it according to this ideal delineation, seeing there lay in the very *ideality* of the delineation a prophecy of Him and demand for his appearance, although the writer may not consciously have referred to Him.

This *ideal* theocratic is the most common of all the prophecies of the Messianic in the Old Testament,

especially of the poetical prophecies ; and it is in many cases difficult to distinguish it from the *real* Messianic, nor is it often of great consequence to make the distinction. In uttering such prophecies the Old Testament writer rose to the *idea in the kingdom of God* of the thing or person or office or character of which he was speaking, and spoke according to that idea. Writers on typology and expositors sometimes describe this by saying that "the writer is lifted above himself, and speaks in terms which, although they may perhaps admit of being applied to himself, are much more easily and naturally applicable to our Lord."¹ What is this "lifting above himself" but being enabled to rise to the true idea of the office which he fills or the part which he sustains, and speaking according to this idea? Sometimes, with less accuracy, it is said that "in the character in which he speaks he so exactly prefigured Christ that the whole is applicable to Christ as truly as to himself ; and in some parts he is moved by the Holy Ghost to utter words which, though true of himself, were much more perfectly fulfilled in Christ."² To "prefigure" Christ must be to stand in some relations, or to play some part, in the kingdom of God similar to relations in which Christ stands, or to parts which He plays, in that kingdom ; and if words spoken by any Old Testament personage of himself be more perfectly fulfilled in Christ, he must have idealized himself or his situation. Or it is said that, "being a prophet, and therefore a type of Christ, he is led to use unconsciously words which, in their highest and truest sense, are applicable only to Christ."³ Every

¹ Binnie, "The Psalms," p. 182.

² *Ibid.* p. 182.

³ Perowne, "The Psalms," p. 54.

prophet was a type of Christ the Prophet; that is, was in his own day and in his own place in the kingdom of God an imperfect revealer of the Father, and therefore a shadow and suggestion of Him who hath fully "declared him;" and if he said something of himself in his prophetic character, or of what was incidental to his experience as a prophet, which in its highest sense was applicable only to Christ, this must have arisen from his speaking of his office according to its idea, though he himself had never reached to the perfect realizing of it. As to the term "unconsciously," in the extract just cited, unless it means that, though using terms which transcended the reality of his own case, but were literally true of the Messiah, the prophet nevertheless had himself, and not the Messiah, in his mind, I cannot conceive what it means. Sometimes, again, it is said, "With the immediate reference to David and Solomon there must be admitted a further and principal and conscious reference to Christ." ¹ The word "reference" may cause ambiguity here, although "conscious reference" must surely mean a reference in the mind of the Hebrew author. If so, we have presented to us a very remarkable psychological condition. The prophet, while referring in his own mind first to David, at the same time refers further and principally to the Messiah! Sometimes it is said that the author wrote in the light of the end, or that he spoke of himself, or of the King and kingdom, in the light of Christianity. What is this but saying that, though speaking of Old Testament things, he spoke of them according to the true conceptions of them, which conceptions have found verification only in Christianity. It is

¹ Binnie, "The Psalms," p. 173.

certainly probable that the Hebrew writer, while idealizing Old Testament things, had sometimes present to his mind also the feeling that only in the end would these ideals be realized. Sometimes, conversely, it is said that he spoke of the Messiah under the figure, or saw Him "through the veil," of some type. All these modes of speaking can be resolved into one or other of these two: either the writers spoke consciously of the coming King and his relations, though they may have spoken of them in a form corresponding to the existing theocratic king and his relations in their own days; or they spoke of the king of their own day, though they may have spoken of him according to the true conception of the theocratic King, and thus in a way only realized in the Messiah. The former way of speaking, viz., of the Messiah directly, but with the conception of Him and the things about him more or less as the King and kingdom were in the prophet's own day, is sometimes described as "borrowing imagery" from the Jewish dispensation or from the reign of David and Solomon.¹ Such an expression is apt to mislead one into the idea that the writers were not serious in their descriptions, but used language of the future which they knew to be false. There is no doubt that the prophets, especially those appearing towards the end of the Hebrew commonwealth, do occasionally manifest the consciousness that, besides the perfect righteousness and universality of the kingdom of God to come, it may differ from the present in some respects, even in form. But, in general, the future is but the perfection of the present; and where the prophets "borrow imagery,"

¹ Binnie, "The Psalms," p. 188.

that is, where they express the future in the forms of their own present, it is to be assumed that, apart from the poetry of their delineations, they mean literally what they say. How far what they say shall be fulfilled literally is another question, and one to be sedulously kept apart; for the prophets will never come to their rights, nor be recognized as the men of power and individuality which they were, unless we carefully distinguish between prophecy—that is, what the prophets in their day and circumstances themselves meant—and fulfilment, that is, the shape in which the principles of the kingdom of God which they enunciated will, amidst the enormous changes that have passed over the form of that kingdom and of the world, find their final realization.

Besides this great mass of prophecies which, being ideally theocratic, are properly Messianic, there may be some others which might be called *ordinarily* theocratic, and which yet find application in the New Testament to the Messiah and his kingdom. It is quite natural that some things or persons in the Old Testament economy may have realized the true idea in the kingdom of God which they expressed, and therefore could be described in language which equally well fitted the things of the New Testament.

There is a very interesting class of passages from the Old Testament which are applied to Christ in the New, in which the application is to be explained on the ideal principle with certain necessary modifications. These passages are generally of considerable length, and sometimes one expression is transferred to Christ, while, alongside of it, there are others manifestly not

at all applicable to Him. The Fortieth Psalm is an example of this class of passages. In the Epistle to the Hebrews several verses of this Psalm, according to the Septuagint version, are introduced as spoken by Christ: "Wherefore when he cometh into the world he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me," &c.; while in the following verses the speaker confesses and bewails his sins: "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up: they are more than the hairs of mine head."

Several unsatisfactory explanations of such passages have been given. Some have taken them as throughout directly Messianic, and the confession of sin is considered to be made by the Messiah, who is our representative, in our room. This method of interpretation is as old as Augustine. "He made our offences his offences, that He might make his righteousness our righteousness. Why should not He who took upon Him the likeness of the sinner's flesh, take upon Him also the likeness of the sinner's voice?"¹ Most persons now-a-days will repudiate Augustine's interpretation, even though they may feel unable to answer his question. The method of explanation is certainly false. No example occurs in the New Testament of our Lord making use of such passages or adopting their thoughts as His own.

This and similar passages will not seem difficult of explanation if we remember that the persons uttering them had other sides of character besides those that were of significance in the kingdom of God; and while

¹ Quoted by Binnie, "The Psalms," p. 193.

most things which they say are said of themselves in relations essential in the kingdom of God, some things are said regarding what is merely personal to themselves. The things spoken by such persons in the kingdom of God as it once was, which are applicable to Christ, are things spoken by them as saints. But in the imperfect kingdom of God of old every saint was also a sinner, and many things are said by him in that capacity also. These will not be applicable to the Holy One and the Just. And though, in the Old Testament passage, the good and evil may blend and form a very real picture, only the ideal good of the picture can be transferred to the Messiah.

There are many details which a complete statement on this subject ought to embrace, but a general classification of Messianic passages might be drawn up from what has been said.

First, there are real or directly Messianic passages, in giving expression to which the writer really had that future King or something in his kingdom, or that future Person, distinct from others of the class to which he belonged, in his own mind. In this case (1) the description given by the writer may correspond almost exactly with the Messiah's history as it has occurred, and with his character and the conditions under which He has appeared; or (2) the description may have many elements in it of that condition of things existing in the writer's own time, which, as he always felt the coming of the Messiah to be near, he transferred or prolonged to the Messiah's time.

Second, there are indirectly Messianic passages (usually called typically Messianic), in giving expres-

sion to which the writer had not the future King or Person Himself in his mind, but some king of the theocracy or kingdom of God of his own time, or some person who, in this preparatory kingdom of God, corresponded in his place or character to the Messiah in the perfect kingdom. But in these passages (1) this actual king, or this person contemporary with the author (who is often the author himself), may not be spoken of as he actually was in that kingdom of God as then existing, but according to the true *idea* of his character and position. Such descriptions are often prayers; as, for example, Psalm lxxii. These passages will often be found to correspond almost exactly to the king, saint, &c., in the perfect form of the kingdom of God, or Christianity. Or (2) what is said may not exceed the possibilities of the theocratic person, or thing, or relation, and consequently be applicable both to Old and New. And 3) there are passages where only a part of the description can be transferred to the New Testament person corresponding to the person spoken of in the Old—the reason being that though the Old Testament person corresponded in general to the person in the New, there were other elements in his character, real enough as belonging to him, but imperfections or irrelevancies in the kingdom of God, and therefore without any features answering to them in the perfect condition of the kingdom.

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