

Brief and imperfect as are these remarks, they will, we trust, shew to our readers something of the importance of the immense labour which has been bestowed upon the collation of manuscripts, and some of the most elementary principles of criticism. They may help to furnish a passing illustration of more than one great historical tendency, and they may leave in our minds a feeling of thankfulness that the faithful study of the text has not given us a single cause for regret, while it has indefinitely deepened our conviction of the general integrity with which the Church has preserved through so many ages the precious deposit of her sacred writings.

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ON THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH.

A JEWISH EXPOSITION.

WE find in the New Testament that our Lord more than once¹ warned his disciples that they should refrain from troubling themselves about or trying to penetrate into the knowledge of those "times and seasons which the Father hath put in his own power." The tendency to make such investigations was very common among the Jews, who were anxiously looking forward to the restoration of the temporal kingdom to Israel. We can see this from the tone of Gamaliel's remarks² when the apostles were brought before the Jewish council. The people were ready to run after a Judas or a Theudas, if he only proclaimed in loud enough tones that he "was some great one." But we can also see from the concluding portion of that speech that in the minds of the learned and thoughtful among

¹ See Mark xiii. 32; Acts i. 7.

² Ibid. v. 34-39.

the Jews there had grown up a feeling that such speculations and the movements to which they gave rise were best let alone.

In the light of the words of Gamaliel, the following passage from the Talmud¹ is full of meaning. The Verse under discussion and on which the comments are based is Habakkuk ii. 3. On this Rabbi Nathan remarks: "This verse penetrates and goes down to the very depths" [by which he means that it is here intimated how unsearchable are God's counsels concerning the coming of the Messiah, and that in consequence attempts to penetrate such mysteries are not to be entered on]. "*For,*" it says, "*the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak* [or, as the Rabbi takes it, it is blowing, panting, hastening toward the end²] *and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry.*" "This means," says the Rabbi, "Do not calculate and set down any fixed time for Messiah's appearance, as our Rabbis did who explained Daniel vii. 25, *Until a time and times and the dividing of time.*" On this Rashi, on the authority of Rabbi Shemuel ben David, gives the explanation that of old a calculation was based on this passage in the following way. *A time* was interpreted to be the duration of the Egyptian captivity, *i.e.*, 400 years, therefore the smallest plural "times" must mean 800 years, and the dividing of time must be half 400, and thus a total was arrived at of 1400 years for the time which was to elapse before Messiah appeared. "Nor," continues the Rabbi, "should we calculate on this matter as Rabbi Samlai did, who was

¹ T. B. *Sanhedrin*, 97 b.

² Gesenius renders, *anhelat, festinat ad finem.*

explaining Psalm lxxx. 5, *Thou feedest them with the bread of tears, and givest them tears to drink in great measure.*" Here again Rashi, on the same authority, explains that Rabbi Samlai took *shalish*, which in our Bibles is translated *in great measure*, in its literal sense, and rendered it *a third part*, and on that rendering he framed a calculation thus. The two periods to which "the drinking of tears" could most properly refer were the Egyptian and the Babylonian captivities. If they were called a third part, then, reasoned he, the time which must elapse before Messiah comes must be three times as long as they were. Now the people were in Egypt 400 years and in Babylon 70 years, and therefore the period meant is to be 1410 years. "Nor" (again we have Rabbi Nathan speaking) "should we conclude about Messiah's coming as Rabbi Akiba¹ did, who explained Haggai ii. 6, *Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth.*" Here Rashi gives his own note, and tells us that Rabbi Akiba laid great stress on the words, *Yet once, it is a "little" while*, which he took to signify that God would give Israel a "*little*" portion of glory, and this he referred to the time of the grandeur of Herod's temple. When that brief glory had passed away he believed that Messiah would soon come, and heaven and earth be shaken, and the Roman Empire be overthrown. "But," explains Rabbi Nathan, "he ought not to have expounded thus, for the facts of history refuted such exposition, seeing that the

¹ Rabbi Akiba joined the party of Bar-kokheba (Barcochebas), to whom he gave that title, *son of a star*, in allusion to the prophecy of Balaam, which was interpreted to refer to the Messiah, and had no doubt been widely circulated in the East, and become known to the Magi who came to Bethlehem. Akiba was taken prisoner at Bethar in the revolt of the Jews (A.D. 135), and is said to have been put to death by most cruel tortures.

first kingdom was 70 years (*i. e.*, the *independent* rule of the Asmonean princes¹), and the second kingdom (that of Herod) was 52 years, and the kingdom of Kozeba² was two years and a half." He means that there had been times of glory before that one on which Akiba arbitrarily fixed as the date at which Messiah should appear. Then the Gemara³ asks: "What mean the words, *It [or he] 'bloweth' towards the end, and doth not lie?*" Rabbi Shemuel, son of Nachmani, in the name of Rabbi Jonathan said, It means: May his spirit be blown away (and perish) whoever over-anxiously calculates about the end. For [in consequence of such calculations] people have said when the [so-calculated] end came and he [Messiah] did not appear, that he would never come at all. Yet *wait anxiously for him*, for it says, *If he tarry, wait anxiously for him*. But perhaps you may say, We are anxiously waiting, but He [God] is not anxious. To answer this Holy Writ says,⁴ *Therefore the Eternal doth anxiously wait to be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted,⁵ that he may have mercy upon you*. But then (you may reply), seeing that we are anxiously waiting and He is anxiously waiting, what holds back [the coming of the

¹ The whole period of the Maccabean rule was 103 years, but the Jews reckon only the more independent portion as a real kingdom.

² To express their sense of Bar-kokheba's false pretensions, the Jews thus modified his name, and so connected it with the verb *kazab*, "to lie," and stamped him as an arch deceiver.

³ *I. e.*, the critical investigation of the sense of the Mishna. ⁴ Isa. xxx. 18.

⁵ This exaltation the Jews explain as God lifting Himself higher than the mere quality of justice (by which He was first known to men, and which would have demanded punishment for all sin), and becoming a God that delighteth in mercy. To understand this it must be remembered that God's name *Elohim* (which is applied also to earthly judges in Scripture) is interpreted to signify his character of justice, but that the Tetragrammaton (IHVH), by which name God revealed Himself to Israel through Moses (Exod. vi. 3), expressed his higher quality of mercy, which He can exercise towards all men by virtue of his eternity.