

## “They that Fear the Lord.”

BY THE REV. PROFESSOR A. B. DAVIDSON, D.D., LL.D., EDINBURGH.

The expression “they that fear (feared) God” (*φοβούμενοι*, or *σεβόμενοι τὸν θεόν*) is applied in the New Testament and elsewhere to Gentiles who have attached themselves to the worship and customs of the Jews in a manner more or less close; it is an interesting question whether this nomenclature (*יְרֵאִי יְהוָה*) be distinctively applied to Gentiles already in the Old Testament. For New Testament usage, compare Acts x. 2, 22, xiii. 16, 26, 43, 50, xvi. 14, xvii. 4, 17, xviii. 7.

In the Old Testament the “stranger” (Heb. *ger*, Gr. “proselyte”) was simply a foreigner sojourning in Israel, and not at all what is usually understood by “proselyte.” Such a sojourner, however, had to conform in some ways to the customs, religious and moral, of Israel, as the condition of his residence. He must not practise idolatry, nor profane the name of Jehovah (Lev. xx. 2, xxiv. 16); must sanctify the Sabbath (Ex. xx. 10), and abstain from fornication (including union within the prohibited degrees, Lev. xviii. 26), and from eating blood (Lev. xvii. 10, 15). It may be questioned if in the earliest times the conditions were so strict as those now formulated in the Law, as a difference of practice perhaps appears in Deut. xiv. 21 compared with Lev. xvii. 15.

In the later periods of Israel's history both the Heb. *ger* and the Gr. “proselyte” acquired a stricter sense, being used to designate the foreigner who by circumcision and other rites had become a member of the community of Israel, coming thus under obligation to keep the whole law (Gal. v. 3), and in the main enjoying all the privileges of those who had Abraham for their father. These proselytes, in the strict sense, were also named “proselytes of righteousness,” and for the *ger* in the old sense the name *ger toshab* (*גֵּר תוֹשָׁב*), a residential *ger*, was employed. The phrase “proselyte of the gate” appears also to have been used in this last sense, though the expression is said to be quite modern, being found neither in the Mishna nor Talmud. It is probable that this change in meaning of the terms “ger” and “proselyte” corresponds to a change of practice or of fact. In Palestine most of the sojourners would enter the community and become incor-

porated in Israel (Neh. x. 28, however, does not refer to Gentiles, but to Israelites, cf. ix. 2; Ezra vi. 21). The Maccabean princes had recourse to compulsion to bring this about; John Hyrcanus (c. 129 B.C.) obliged the Edomites to enter the community of Israel by circumcision, and other rulers who followed him adopted measures of the same kind (Josephus, *Ant.* xiii. 15. 4, *Bell. Jud.* ii. 17. 10). Of course during the supremacy of the Seleucids there would be many Greeks in Palestine, officials and others, who made no pretext of conformity to Judaism, and so under the Romans, though there may have been occasional exceptions, such as the centurions mentioned in Luke vii. and Acts x., and probably the devout soldier named in the last passage. There is no likelihood that such officers had undergone circumcision, they belonged to the class common in the Diaspora known as “they that feared God.”

For it was in the cities of the empire, in all or most of which there were multitudes of Jews, that this class of Gentile adherents were to be found. Such men had not entered the community of Israel through the rites of circumcision and baptism; they probably for the most part went no further than to acknowledge one God, keep the moral law, recognise the obligation of the Sabbath and the duty or privilege of worship in the synagogue, though perhaps some of the ritual ordinances might be undertaken by them, as abstinence from swine's flesh. It appears that considerable freedom was allowed to such adherents, and therefore there might be considerable difference of practice among them. The Jews in the dispersion appear to have insisted only on essentials, and in this they followed the Prophets, who, in speaking of the strangers joining themselves to Israel, stand entirely above the Law, or even, as in the case of eunuchs, contradict it, naming only two conditions, the recognition of the God of Israel as God alone, and the keeping of the Sabbath (Isa. lvi. 1-6). The first of these conditions was the point essential (along with the moral life implied in it), and it is from it that the nomenclature “they that feared God” is derived. At the same time, though undergoing no rite of

circumcision (to which the Epistle to the Hebrews does not allude) these Gentile believers outside of Palestine appear to have been recognised as true converts, for in Acts xiii. 43 they are called "proselytes" in the modern sense.

The question arises, Is the phrase "they that fear God" a designation of Gentile converts already in the Old Testament? The question is usually answered in the affirmative in regard, at least, to two or three passages, Ps. cxv. 9, cxviii. 2-4, cxxxv. 19, 20, to which some add other places, e.g. Ps. xxii. 23.

The question is not without difficulty. Some preliminary points may be mentioned. (1) The phrase is "they that fear God"; in the Old Testament it is usually "fear the Lord" (Jehovah), of course with exceptions, some occasional and some general, e.g. in books two and three of the Psalms, where "God" is used for "the Lord" (Ps. lv. 20, lxvi. 16); the Book of Job, the scene of which is outside Palestine (i. 1); and Ecclesiastes, which does not use Jehovah (v. 7, xii. 13). The usage in the so-called Psalms of Solomon corresponds to that in the Bible, "fear the Lord." (2) In the Old Testament "they that fear the Lord" usually means simply the God-fearing in Israel, or perhaps sometimes Israel as a whole assumed to be God-fearing, e.g. Ps. xxxiii. 18, "The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy." Ps. xxxiv. 9, "Fear the Lord ye his saints, there is no want to them that fear Him;" ver. 7, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him;" and in numberless places, e.g. Ps. xxv. 12, 14, ciii. 11, 13, 17; Mal. iii. 16, etc. The usage is the same in the Psalter of Solomon (c. 70-40 B.C.), where "they that fear the Lord" stands in parallelism with "the righteous" (iii. 14-16), "the holy" (xii. 4, 8), and in opposition to "sinners" (xiii. 10, 11, xv. 14, 15); cf. iv. 26, v. 21. "They that fear the Lord" is parallel to "they that love Him," and to "His servants" (x. 4, iv. 26, 29), and "they that fear the Lord shall rise again to life eternal" (iii. 16); just as the "fear of God," or, "of the Lord," shall be universal under the rule of the Messiah (xviii. 8, 10). (3) So far as concordances indicate, the phrase "they that fear the Lord" in the sense of Gentile converts does not occur in the Apocrypha. But Josephus (*Ant.* xiv. 7. 2), referred to by Schürer, uses the expression "they that fear God," just as in the New Testament,

of Gentile proselytes in the Diaspora ("Europe and Asia").

The general usage of the Old Testament is against this New Testament sense. Doubt, however, may arise when "they that fear the Lord" stands in parallelism with other expressions such as "seed" or "house of Israel." Ps. xxii. 22 *seq.* is a remarkable passage:—

22. I will declare Thy name unto my brethren :  
in the midst of the congregation will I  
praise Thee.
23. Ye that fear the Lord, praise Him ; all ye  
the seed of Jacob, glorify Him ; and stand  
in awe of Him, all ye the seed of Israel.
25. Of Thee cometh my praise in the great  
congregation : I will pay my vows before  
them that fear Him.
26. The meek shall eat and be satisfied : they  
shall praise the Lord that seek after Him.

In ver. 23, "Ye that fear the Lord" are either the same as "seed of Jacob" and "Israel," the latter being described under this conception of God-fearing, or they that fear the Lord are a more special class mentioned first, and then the idea is widened to all the seed of Israel. The last is perhaps truer, as is suggested by "the meek," ver. 26; and in ver. 26, they that fear the Lord is taken up in "they that seek Him." But vers. 22, 25 show that they that fear the Lord are the Psalmist's "brethren" and the great congregation. That there might be Gentile converts in the great congregation is nothing, the point is that the phrase "ye that fear the Lord," or "they that fear Him," is certainly here not used of Gentile converts distinctively and as a technical title. Reference to the Gentile world begins only at ver. 27. The connexion between these concluding verses and the preceding appears to be this: the Psalmist's mind, as he contemplates his own history, is so filled with the conception of what Jehovah is, that he cannot but look into the future and forecast with certainty that the nations also will yet universally acknowledge this great God and only Saviour.

This passage leads over to the other three, virtually two, for Ps. cxxxv. 15 *seq.* is a repetition of Ps. cxv. The interpretation of the last-named Psalm will rule that of the other two. The poem is a hymn of praise to Jehovah, God of Israel: not unto us, O Lord, but unto Thy name give glory.

Hence there runs an antithesis through the passage, first, between Jehovah and the gods of the nations (vers. 3-7), implying an antithesis between the nations and Israel (vers. 1-3); and secondly, between the destinies of those who trust in Jehovah or the gods. Of the gods, mere unspiritual matter, it is said, "they that make them shall be like unto them, every one that trusteth in them" (ver. 8); and this leads to an appeal to Israel in all its parts to trust in Jehovah, who alone saves (ver. 9 *seq.*):—

9. O Israel, trust thou in the Lord, etc.
10. O house of Aaron, trust ye in the Lord, etc.
11. Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord, etc.
12. The Lord hath been mindful of us: He will bless: He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron.
13. He will bless them that fear the Lord, both the small and the great.

This threefold division is difficult. We might regard "Israel" as an ideal unity (the verb is *sing.*), and consider ver. 10 as referring to the clergy, and ver. 11 to the people, under the conception of fearers of the Lord. Or ver. 9 might refer to the people as laity, ver. 10 to the sacred ministers (in Ps. cxxxv. Levi is added), and ver. 11 to both inclusive as fearers of Jehovah. At any rate, "they that fear the Lord" is not some small section like

Gentile proselytes, but some large body, as seems evident from the comprehensive words applied to them, "both the small and the great," *i.e.* in all their extent (Jer. xvi. 6, xxxi. 34). These words might suggest that the Psalmist's mind had risen to the widest generalisation, and that he included all who in every place feared the Lord, *i.e.* acknowledged Jehovah. But the intensely national and even local spirit of these Psalms is against this idea, for the poet proceeds: "The Lord add to you and to your children" (cf. "out of Zion," Ps. cxxxv. 21). Upon the whole, as Calvin long ago perceived, "ye that fear the Lord" are probably to be taken as the specifically God-fearing in Israel—*non loquitur de alienigenis, ut falso quidam putant* (cf. "the righteous," Ps. cxviii. 15, 20). It is in the manner of the Psalmists to pass in this way from the national to the spiritual Israel. In Ps. xxxiii., which greatly corresponds to Ps. cxv., "they that fear Him" is so used (ver. 18); and in Ps. lxvi., greatly corresponding to cxviii., the usage is the same (ver. 16). The prayer also in cxv. 14 corresponds to the promises made to "him that feareth the Lord"—certainly the Israelite—in Ps. cxii. 1 *seq.* and cxviii. 1 *seq.* Ps. cxv. 9-13 is very similar to xxii. 22-26, and any reference to a Gentile element in the Palestinian community is altogether without probability.

## The "Failure" of the Revised Version.

### I.

By the Rev. Principal G. C. M. DOUGLAS,  
D.D., Glasgow.<sup>1</sup>

To the many things which you have published anent the alleged failure of the Revised Version, may I add something, including the Old Testament, to which little reference has been made in comparison of the New; though both these parts of the one work are noticed in the admirable statement of the Bishop of Durham in the recent Convocation of the Province of York, which you have printed. Many people, by the way, forget, or do not know, that this Province refused the invitation given by the Convocation of the Province of Canterbury to take part in the work of revision;

<sup>1</sup> Principal Douglas, it will be recollected, was a member of the Old Testament Company of Revision.—ED.

so that a certain coldness or disfavour in the Province of York is not surprising.

1. I feel deeply indebted to the New Testament Revisers for what they have done habitually in three directions, though many of your correspondents find fault with them. They have shown the English reader where the definite article is present or absent, a matter in which it has been said that Latin usage may have led King James' Revisers wrong. They have also endeavoured to show the niceties of the tenses in the Greek verb. And they have done the like with the prepositions. It is complained, indeed, that they have been too precise, and have assumed too much that the apostles wrote good Greek. The opposite assumption has led to endless mistakes, obscurities, etc. I think I can appeal to any reader of Paul's epistles for the benefits arising from attention to