

become guilty of all" (James 2: 10). If the law were not the expression of a Divine unity, disobedience thereto could not fitly be so spoken of. The writings of the law are thus correlated with the majestic circle of God's perfections, each several part of the writings contributing to the final harmony.

This correlation of the law and the Prophets with God's good and perfect will for man shows how intensely practical for life is the unity of Holy Scripture; and in particular, how essential it is to preserve a true reverence for each several Scripture if we are to stand complete in all the will of God. The full sum of Christian perfection, and of Christian usefulness, is expressly stated to be contingent upon the inspiration and due function in Christian experience, of "every Scripture."

"Every Scripture is inspired of God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for discipline which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (II Tim. 3: 16, mar.).

There is a real correspondence between the wholeness of Christian character and the wholeness of Scripture. Perfect cloth is not wrought upon an imperfect loom.

Legislation, however, may be perfect technically, yet defective in administration. But it belongs to the perfection of the law that its very least commandment will be fulfilled in the coming kingdom of God. Of this very fact the Lord here pledges in terms the most explicit the success of His mission into the world, and the inviolability of His spoken word, thus binding His personal integrity with that of securing, to the last particular, God's rule, as this is foreshadowed in the Old Testament Scriptures.

If the Author of creation and the Source of Scripture are indeed one, the sanction for the prophetic revelation committed to writing by Moses and the prophets rests on an authority not less secure than that which maintains the structure of the material universe. So it is written, "Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished." The Scriptures cannot be broken: they will retain their integrity throughout all generations until finally supreme over the events of time. Thus their prophetic utterances, based on Divine law, have unity and purpose. From the chaos of the years emerges a Divinely created cosmos, reducing to order the rude elements of man's long story. This fact is implicit within the promised fulfilment of the prophetic Word concerning God's kingdom among men.

The moral issues of prophecy appear very clearly in that book

of the New Testament which gathers up the sum of all Biblical prophecy, namely, the Revelation. The blessing promised in the Apocalypse is for those who read and *keep*, and for those who hear and *keep*, the sayings of the book—a blessing twice pronounced, once at the beginning, and once near the end of the book (Rev. 1: 3; 22: 7). Moreover, after saying, "Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand" (and thus affirming the relevance of prophecy to the march of human history), the angel goes on to declare as the culminating issue of the prophetic message, "He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still: and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him do righteousness still: and he that is holy, let him be made holy still" (Rev. 22: 11). Could any more effectual way be found of expressing the ethical ends of prophecy?

It has already been noted that the book of the Revelation gathers up the sum of all Biblical prophecy. Its pages are crowded with well-known metaphors and familiar prophetic images from the Old Testament, and its visions abound in verbal allusions to like visions given to the earlier prophets. Thus this book more than any other, perhaps, gives the reader an impression of the cosmic and all-embracing sweep of prophecy as the co-ordinating factor of the times and seasons that make up the sum of human history. It is therefore important to note that in such a book the ethical values of Divine prophecy hold such a high place, and form an important element in giving unity to the whole. This is what is here meant by the note of law in Old Testament prophecy.

## VIII

### THE NOTE OF PREDICTION IN OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

THE WORD PROPHET, IN ITS PRIMARY SENSE, SIGNIFIED ONE who was the mouthpiece of a god, the oracle or its interpretation being termed *prophecy*. A familiar instance of this usage is found in the relation of Aaron to Moses. "He shall be unto thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be unto him instead of God" (with this difference, however, that Aaron was merely spokesman for Moses, not the direct vehicle of Moses' own speech). Aaron thus became Moses' prophet and stood in some such relation to him as did subsequently the prophets in Israel to God. Taking it thus, prophecy is the voice of Deity speaking

through the mouth of a man, so that those who define prophecy as forth-telling rather than fore-telling have much to justify their point of view. But to define prophecy simply as forth-telling so as to exclude the element of prediction is to give a wholly inadequate and in certain respects a misleading account of the matter, the more so since it is often done to eliminate what is ironically termed "anticipated history." But since with God the future is as the present, prophecy moves freely in the time-sequence, and so has come to mean (from our standpoint) that which foretells the future or brings to light some Divine mystery. This being so, reluctance to admit a predictive element in prophecy is strangely prejudiced. It must be said, however, that a view of prophecy confining its main interest to the fulfilment of isolated predictions misses much of its grandeur as the revelation of a comprehensive scheme of things within the mind of God. The note of prediction is indeed an important element in prophecy, but it rises out of the antecedent truth that He from whom prophecy comes is what He is—the great I AM of heaven and earth, omniscient over the ultimate horizons of time and space. That prophecy is the word of God precedes its value as prediction of the future.

The view, however, that Biblical prophecy is mere religious propaganda ("the events of the author's time set within a spurious frame of ancient history," as one critic puts it) wholly fails to explain how prediction and event came to be associated subsequently in the minds of Christian men. The theory of pious fraud or pious impersonation, undetected until the age of literary criticism, puts too great a strain upon credulity. Account must be taken of the fact that the prophets themselves were aware that the things of which they wrote belonged to a later age, and though in many instances the writers had only a dim perception of the actual historical events of which they spoke, they certainly knew that what they wrote concerned a generation yet to come. Such at least is the plain language of I Peter 1: 12.

"To whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto you, did they minister these things, which now have been announced unto you through them that preached the gospel unto you."

Scattered throughout the writings of the prophets are plain intimations that the things written would come to pass "in the latter days." Even if, according to Hebrew usage, such time-phrases be taken as referring to the indefinite future it shows that a period of time subsequent to that in which the prophet spoke was intended. Cf. Daniel 2: 28. Such phrases are too numerous to be ignored, and are a marked feature of Old Testament

prophecy. The prophet Daniel was instructed to "shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end" (Dan. 12: 4), and the Lord's last word to him was, "Go thou thy way till the end be; for thou shalt rest, and shalt stand in thy lot, at the end of the days" (Dan. 12: 13). If this be not indubitable proof that Daniel's writings were intended to be taken as predictive, words have no meaning. Daniel's lot is still vacant, but it will one day be redeemed, as also will his prophecies.

It cannot be too strongly stressed that it is in retrospect from a later age that prophecy reaches its full meaning and thereby is confirmed as having been in truth the Word of God. But even before fulfilment came prophecy was regarded as a disclosure of things to come. If prophecy had no predictive value in Jewish estimation why should the chief priests and scribes (the professional interpreters of Old Testament Scripture) have quoted Micah 5: 2 as referring to something which to them was even still an unaccomplished event, but one certain of ultimate fulfilment? (Matt. 2: 5-6). It is not as though they had read the event into the prophecy, but that while as yet (as far as *they* knew) nothing had happened, the prophecy was considered as predicting an event yet to be. So that both the prophets themselves, and the Jewish people as a whole, held the prophetic Scriptures to be a Divine revelation of things to come. If any question arises it can only be whether this belief was justified or not: the New Testament supplies the answer.

Although the disciples of the Lord Jesus shared the hopes of their Jewish brethren it was not until after the resurrection that they came fully to identify the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament with the Lord Jesus. Their view of prophecy as predictive of a coming Messiah was not therefore conditioned in the first instance by the correspondence which they afterward came to see between prediction and event. So that in this respect their belief in the predictive nature of prophecy did not depend upon realized fulfilment but sprang from the expectation of "things hoped for," in other words, from religious faith. It was not pious imagination reading back into Scripture elements that for them did not exist there already. They did not invent evidence from history in order to substantiate earlier prophecy. From study of prophecy and from inherited Jewish convictions they already looked for "One who was to come," and their new-found belief was that in Jesus of Nazareth this One *had* come, as the following Scriptures show:

"Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (John 1: 45).

Once the resurrection was an accomplished fact and they had been enlightened by the Holy Spirit, they entered as it were a new world of thought and experience, in which the writings of the prophets became in large measure an open book. Due consideration, however, shows that this new insight came from teaching given them by the Lord Jesus both before and after His resurrection, teaching which at first they had been slow of heart to understand but which in the end became the mainstay of their confession. Much attention has been given to the post-resurrection teaching of the Lord on this matter, as if it were a new development in His teaching, an idea due largely to the place it has in St. Luke's Gospel, chapter 24, where we read such words as these:

"Behoved it not the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory?"

"And beginning from Moses and from all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

". . . And they said one to another, Was not our heart burning within us, while he spake to us in the way, while he opened to us the scriptures (Luke 24: 26, 27, 32).

"And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, how that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me.

"Then opened he their mind, that they might understand the Scriptures;

"And said unto them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day" (Luke 24: 44-46).

Yet in so speaking to them *after* His resurrection He was but continuing under new and illuminating conditions that same teaching which He had already been giving them *before* His resurrection. He specifically says, "These are the things which I spake *while I was yet with you*, thus drawing their attention to teachings which at the time they had been too blind to understand.

Doubtless this refers to the three recorded occasions when He intimated in a peculiarly solemn way the imminence of His sufferings and death. The Lutheran version of the Bible notes these in sequence as the first, second, and third intimation of His sufferings, thus giving them a formal sanctity. Each of the Synoptic Gospels records all three, so that we have a full picture of these several occasions. Taken together, they form an impressive episode in the Lord's ministry. The first was at Caesarea Philippi immediately after Peter's confession that Jesus

was the Christ, and therefore was peculiarly appropriate to the occasion (Matt. 16: 21; Mark 8: 31; Luke 9: 22). Its substance was fourfold, namely:

That He must go up to Jerusalem,

And suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes,

And be killed,

And be raised again the third day.

The other two speak in similar terms, but Luke's account of the last occasion adds significantly these words:

"All things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished" (Luke 18: 31).

The second intimation was given during a journey in Galilee (Matt. 17: 22; Mark 9: 30; Luke 9: 43), and following as it does the transfiguration and healing of the demoniac may reflect the Lord's conversation on the mount with Moses and Elias concerning the decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem (Luke 9: 31; Mark 9: 12). The third occasion was on that last processional journey up to Jerusalem (Matt. 20: 17; Mark 10: 32; Luke 18: 31). They were on the road, the Lord walking in front wearing an aspect of Divinity that overawed His few immediate disciples, who in turn were followed by the multitude. He called to Him the twelve, and once more began to tell them what things were to befall Him at Jerusalem, but again they perceived not the things that were said. The words matched the occasion, but the apostles' hearts were dull of hearing. The immediate reference in Luke 24: 44 must have brought these several occasions vividly to the recollection of the disciples in that upper room. Thus the whole context of the Lord's mission into the world, the very work which the Father had given him to do, is found in a fulfilment of the things written in the Law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms; in other words, in things spoken beforehand by the prophets.

These formal intimations but give in set speech the Lord's habitual attitude to the Old Testament Scriptures even from the very beginning of His public ministry. In the synagogue at Nazareth, after reading with marked significance the appointed portion from Isaiah's prophecy (so that every eye in his audience was fixed upon Him), He added in commentary, "Today hath this Scripture been fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4: 21). Throughout His mission upon earth, and especially toward the end of it, the prophetic sayings were constantly on His lips with immediate reference to what was then taking place. Speaking to His disciples of the world's hostility, He said, "This cometh to pass, that the word may be fulfilled that is written in their law, They

hated me without a cause" (John 15: 25). Without minimizing Judas's responsibility, He explains the betrayal as something foreseen in Scripture, saying to the disciples, "I speak not of you all: . . . but that the scripture might be fulfilled, He that eateth my bread lifted up his heel against me" (John 13: 18), and again in prayer, "Not one of them perished, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled" (John 17: 12). On the way to Gethsemane also, foreseeing that He would be associated in death with malefactors, He intimated this to the disciples as something foretold in prophecy, saying, "I say unto you, that this which is written must be fulfilled in me, And he was reckoned with transgressors" (Luke 22: 37). Later, at His arrest, when Peter had drawn his sword and struck off the servant's ear, the Lord said to him, "Put up again thy sword into his place . . . Thinkest thou that I cannot now beseech my Father, and he shall even now send me more than twelve legions of angels?" and added in solemn remonstrance, "How then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" (Matt. 26: 52-54).

In death his last thoughts were for the fulfilment of the prophetic Word. He not only discerned God's will in things that transpired, as written aforetime, but He Himself so acted that not one prediction concerning Him should fall to the ground. His perfect prescience, on the way to the cross, of all things that should befall Him (John 18: 4) was matched in His last hour by an equal realization that all things were now accomplished—all things save one—and with scrupulous care that that one remaining word should not fail, He took action to effect its fulfilment. We read:

"After this Jesus, knowing that all things are now finished, that the scripture might be accomplished, saith, I thirst" (John 19: 28).

For it had been written, "In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (Psa. 69: 21). This done, He cried with a loud voice, "It is finished," bowed His head, and gave up the ghost.

O perfect life of love!  
All, all is finished now,  
All that He left His throne above  
To do for us below.

No work is left undone  
Of all the Father willed;  
His toils and sorrows, one by one  
The Scripture have fulfilled.

In all this we can see how large a place in the thoughts of the Lord was held by the prophetic Scriptures in their strict sense as prediction of things to come. Need we wonder that they should

likewise have become a salient feature in the Gospel witness borne by the apostles and by their successors in the primitive Church!

If it be asked why prophecy and history should have been linked in this way it may be suggested that in no other fashion could they have become so mutually corroborative. The subsequent fulfilment in history of prophecy gives the latter peculiar authority as having been spoken from God. That events in history should have been so minutely foretold centuries before they transpired invests them with more than ordinary significance. Coincidence of prediction and event points to a Divine ordering.

The Lord Jesus adopted this same method of speech and fulfilment in confirming the faith of His disciples. "These things have I spoken unto you," He said, "that, when their hour is come, ye may remember them, how that I told you" (John 16: 4). At first, as we have already seen, the disciples were slow to recall the Lord's teaching, but the conditions under which it would become effective in their minds are described in the following passages:

"When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he spake this; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said" (John 2: 22).

"These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him" (John 12: 16).

"The Comforter . . . he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you" (John 14: 26).

"Remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee,

"Saying that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.

"And they remembered his words" (Luke 24: 6-8).

"And I remembered the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 11: 16).

This illumination by the Holy Spirit made real and actual in the minds of the apostles words spoken prophetically either in Old Testament Scripture or by the Lord Himself, and thus powerfully confirmed that events of which they had been eyewitnesses, and which conformed to these predictive oracles, had indeed been pre-ordained of God.

A complete list of these "recollections of Scripture" would show how important this process was in the pattern of apostolic

thinking, and there must also be numerous unrecorded instances. Take but a few of those we have, as, for example, John's observations on the fulfilment of the Lord's own predictions:

"That the word might be fulfilled which he spake, Of those whom thou hast given me I have lost not one" (John 18: 9).

"But this he said, signifying by what manner of death he should die" (John 12: 33).

We have also the comments of Matthew, frequent throughout his Gospel, when he says in these or similar words, "Now all this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying . . ." (Matt. 1: 22). John also, and Mark, advert to the place that prophecy has in accounting for the things that took place with regard to Christ.

The distribution of the Lord's garments among His executioners is seen as a significant action, interpretative of prophecy.

"They said therefore one to another, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did" (John 19: 24).

And of the piercing of the Lord's side by the spear of the Roman soldier, John comments:

"These things came to pass, that the scripture might be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken.

"And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced" (John 19: 36-37).

These are not chance remarks adorning the narrative, but the expression of an abiding and profound conviction, which entered into their whole religious thought and feeling and gave colour to their confession of faith.

The apostles, in their public preaching too, set forth the message in the context of Old Testament prophecy. Indeed, if their extant sermons be carefully read they will be seen to consist of little else than the exposition of particular prophecies spoken aforetime to the fathers but now fulfilled in Christ. Space does not allow a full enumeration of examples from these and from Paul's addresses, or of noting frequent allusions in the epistolary writings of the New Testament. Peter's early preaching, and certain notable sayings from his epistles, may be taken as characteristic of the whole. They will certainly show that the note of prediction in Old Testament prophecy was a key-position in the apostolic defence of the Gospel.

Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost and those immediately thereafter reflect the feeling of the early church in this matter.

That it should have been given so prominent a place in their public testimony before adverse witnesses (who, moreover, were themselves skilled in the letter of Scripture) but points the argument.

"This is that which hath been spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall be in the last days, saith God, I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh" (Acts 2: 16-17).

"David saith concerning him, I beheld the Lord always before my face . . . because thou wilt not leave my soul in hades, neither wilt thou give thy Holy One to see corruption . . . he foreseeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ" (Acts 2: 25-27, 31).

"David ascended not into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right" (Acts 2: 34).

"For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off" (Acts 2: 39; vide Isa. 57: 19; Eph. 2: 17).

"But the things, which God foreshewed by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled" (Acts 3: 18).

". . . all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been since the world began.

"Moses indeed said, A prophet shall the Lord God raise up unto you from among your brethren, like unto me" (Acts 3: 21-22).

"Yea and all the prophets from Samuel and them that followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days" (Acts 3: 24).

"He is the stone which was set at nought of you the builders, which was made the head of the corner" (Acts 4: 11, quoting Psa. 118: 22; cf. Matt. 21: 42).

"Who by the Holy Ghost, by the mouth of thy servant David thy servant, didst say, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?" (Acts 4: 25).

Reference so habitually sustained cannot be accounted for on any other ground than that, in the mind of the apostles, prediction and event were intentionally related one to the other. Thus and thus it was written; thus and thus it took place. The co-ordinating link is the common witness of the Holy Spirit in both, first testifying beforehand what was to be, and later through the apostles confirming the report of its fulfilment. In a sustained utterance, full of overtones of thought and meaning, Peter writes concerning "the prophets . . . who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what time, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto,

when it testified *beforehand* the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them . . . unto you did they minister these things, which *now* have been announced unto you through them that preached the gospel unto you by the Holy Ghost sent forth from heaven" (I Pet. 1: 10-12). This passage is a focus-point, but throughout both his epistles Peter's primary desire in writing is that his readers "should remember the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets" (II Pet. 3: 1-2).

The rank and file, too, of early preachers found the argument from prophecy a powerful weapon in their spiritual armoury. When Philip the evangelist met the treasurer of Candace, queen of Ethiopia, and found him engaged in reading the prophet Isaiah, he immediately began from this Scripture and preached unto him Jesus (Acts 8: 35). Isaiah, chapter 53, has a long history of Christian interpretation from apostolic times onward, and certainly the note of prediction has been the hinge upon which that interpretation has turned, opening the door of salvation to thousands.

To the early disciples the advent of Christ was the beginning of an era of time when old things had passed away in fulfilment and all things had become new. This new age was felt to be continued after the ascension and enthronement of the Lord Jesus, in that His session at the right hand of God and the consequent descent of the Holy Spirit were held to have created a new fellowship between God's people. The Messianic age spoken of by the prophets had been inaugurated. Yet just as the enthronement of Christ as foretold in Psa. 110, "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool," presupposes that enemies remained unsubdued though potentially defeated, so the victory of the early church over the world was one of faith rather than of something actually seen as yet by natural eyes. Cf. Heb. 2: 8-9. But Christ's session at the right hand of God and His coming in the clouds of heaven were, possibly because of His own words as recorded in Matt. 26: 64, thought of as moments in one Divine event. Consequently, the coming of the Lord in glory held a very immediate place in the thoughts of the early church, and rightly so. To them it was the inevitable corollary of the Ascension, and had been confirmed as such by angelic testimony. "This Jesus, which was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven" (Acts 1: 11).

The long-promised new age was now in being, and though it still awaited its full outward manifestation, the blessings belonging to it were now the possession of all believers. Salvation was an accomplished fact. The power of sin had been broken. Death had been overcome. The good news, as foretold by the

prophets in the Holy Scriptures (Rom. 1: 1-2), was now being preached throughout the whole world. It was by the scriptures of these same prophets that, according to St. Paul, the mystery kept secret since the world began was now being made manifest (Rom. 16: 25-26).

In seeking to interpret this new order the apostles, including St. Paul, made constant reference to the predictions of Old Testament prophecy, so that, while admittedly the New Testament revelation concerning the Church has features which are unique and are not discoverable in the Old Testament, it is against the plain sense of Scripture to say that, because the Church is spoken of as a "mystery," it cannot have been referred to in any way in Old Testament prophecy, though it must be conceded that, as with Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ, they could not have been understood as such until they were realized in fulfilment. In *that* sense truth concerning the church was hid from generations and ages, but it must also be remembered that it is by these same Old Testament Scriptures that Peter and Paul and James sought to interpret matters strictly relative to church order and fellowship. In considering these things we do well to recollect that *positive* affirmations on any matter are usually justified, but that *negative* ones are not infrequently the result of inductive reasoning and do not give sufficient attention to *all* the evidence.

Consider, therefore, what the New Testament has to tell us on this point. Whatever other levels of meaning Joel 2: 28-32 may have (and this is an open question among theologians) Peter unequivocally relates Joel's prophecy with what took place on the day of Pentecost, and says, "This is that." But there are other quotations in the Acts, and elsewhere, which have undoubted relevance to the new order, in which the Church has so central a place, particularly regarding the status of Gentile believers in that fellowship into which it introduced both Jew and Gentile. Moreover, when we find the apostle Paul using the same prophecy in precisely the same context of events, and in that very chapter in which he unfolds the unique constitution of the Church, namely Ephesians 2, we cannot but feel that here is something with an important bearing on the nature and fellowship of the Church. The passage in Isaiah reads:

"Peace, peace, to him that is far off and to him that is near, saith the Lord" (Isa. 57: 19).

In passing it may be noted that verse 21 of the same chapter, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked," points back to this same verse. A parallel prophecy in Zechariah, following immediately upon the familiar Messianic announcement begin-

ning, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy king cometh unto thee," declares, "He shall speak peace unto the nations: and his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth" (Zech. 9: 10).

In the prophecy itself the preaching of peace is first addressed to those that are "far off," as of something wonderful and unique. But when Peter adapts the verse in his great appeal to Israel at Pentecost, it is the latter part of it that he stresses, saying, "For to you is the promise, and to your children" (glancing also in the direction of Joel's prophecy), but is careful to add, "And to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto him" (Acts 2: 39). Again, when preaching to Cornelius and his household, Peter reverts to this favourite text in allusive manner, and after speaking about "the word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching good tidings of peace by Jesus Christ," he boldly declares, "He is Lord of all" (Acts 10: 36). The climax of his thought is reached when he concludes, "To him bear all the prophets witness, that through his name everyone (far off or near) that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins." What compelling conviction is in that word "everyone."

The recurrent terms "far off" and "nigh" in Ephesians 2 point to a similar preoccupation in the mind of Paul with this Old Testament prophecy. He says to us in broad summary, "Gentile believers, once far off, are now made nigh. Christ is our peace. He came and preached peace (as was written aforetime in Isaiah) to you which were far off, and to them that were nigh." Yet in his handling of the text there is a subtle difference from that of Peter. Peter, though uniting both in common fellowship, preserves the distinction between those "far off" and those "nigh." Paul abolishes all distinctions and speaks of both becoming "one new man."

This is Paul's contribution to the New Testament doctrine of the Church, made known to him by revelation (Eph. 3: 3). That those promises which in a peculiar way had been the exclusive possession of the Jew and which hitherto could only be enjoyed by Gentiles through their becoming proselytes, were now possessed by both in equal right (or should one rather say, "in equal grace"?). In Old Testament times the Gentile was not excluded from blessing, but was at a disadvantage in his status: now Jew and Gentile share alike on an equal footing. Believing Gentiles are "fellow citizens with the saints" and "of the household of God" (Eph. 2: 19). In Christ "there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Sythian, bondman,

freeman" (Col. 3: 11). This is the "mystery" of which Paul speaks in Eph. 3: 4-5, which lay hid in God from former ages—as the next verse clearly shows: "the mystery . . . that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel." The fact of the Church had been made known before Paul (Matt. 16: 18), and indeed was in existence and known as such before Paul's conversion: for did he not in his former days "persecute the church" (I Cor. 15: 19)? But that the Gentiles should have the place in it that they did was reserved to Paul's ministry and apostleship: he was made "the apostle of the Gentiles." Now while this was a special revelation made to him of something hitherto kept secret, it is notable that, once having been made known, Paul should have found support for it in the Old Testament, and, as we have seen, set it forth in the very words of Old Testament prophecy. This fact, however, by no means invalidates the unique position and calling of the Church, but sets it in a right relation to God's whole purpose in Christ. Nor does it render invalid the fulfilment of Old Testament promises concerning blessing for the earth as part of God's creation.

It may also be noted that when Paul addressed the elders of the church at Ephesus and spoke of "the church of God which he purchased" (Acts 20: 28), he is quoting the language of Psa. 74: 2, which reads, "Thy congregation (*synagogue*: Septuagint) which thou hast purchased," thus equating in some sense the Christian congregation with that of the ancient synagogue. This citation, incidentally, may account why the words "by his own blood" (the context here of which has long puzzled commentators) should have been added (with the analogy of the Paschal lamb in view) by the richness of Paul's allusive mind, and thus led to a certain looseness of grammatic construction: but other explanations are possible.

Peter's mention, too, of the people of God in this new order is significant. They are "an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (I Pet. 2: 9)—terms taken from the privileged position held by the old Israel. In describing their present status he quotes the prophecy of Hosea, "Which in time past were no people, but are now the people of God" (I Peter 2: 10 with Hosea 2: 23), a passage also used by Paul in Rom. 9: 25. Even if Peter looked on his readers as the natural inheritors of the blessings of the chosen people, it is quite incredible that he should think of them as a body of believers outside the Church. So that the free use by the apostles of Old Testament prophecy to describe conditions now found only among true members of Christ shows an attitude of mind—and

manner of thinking—that links the Church with God's earlier workings in Israel.

The sub-apostolic Fathers, too, used fulfilled prophecy to convince unbelievers of the truth of the Gospel, not only in formal defence of the Christians by considered "Apologies" addressed to the Emperor, but also in disputations in the marketplace and in other seats of academic or communal gathering. Justin Martyr's "Dialogue with Trypho," even though cast in a literary convention of the time, provides a picture of what must often have taken place in fact. That Justin himself should have grounded his reasoning on this basis, the fulfilment in Christ of Old Testament prophecy, is not surprising when we listen to the story of his conversion. Meeting with "a certain old man, by no means contemptible in appearance, exhibiting meek and venerable manners" and subsequently debating with him after the Socratic model on the true nature of religious knowledge, Justin was struck with the concluding words of his venerable protagonist. They were these:

"There existed, long before this time, certain men more ancient than all those who are esteemed philosophers, both righteous and beloved of God, who spoke by the Divine Spirit, and foretold events which would take place, and which are now taking place. They are called prophets. These alone both saw and announced the truth to men, neither reverencing nor fearing any man, not influenced by a desire for glory, but speaking those things alone which they saw and which they heard, being filled with the Holy Spirit. Their writings are still extant, and he who has read them is very much helped in his knowledge of the beginning and end of things, and of those matters which the philosopher ought to know, provided he has believed them. For they did not use demonstration in their treatises, seeing that they were witnesses to the truth above all demonstration, and worthy of belief; and those events which have happened, and those which are happening, compel you to assent to the utterances made by them, although, indeed, they were entitled to credit on account of the miracles which they performed, since they both glorified the Creator, the God and Father of all things, and proclaimed His Son, the Christ (sent) by Him."

Left alone, Justin felt his soul kindled as with a flame, and in his "Dialogue with Trypho" he has given us an account of the experience thus:

"Straightway a flame was kindled in my soul: and a love of the prophets, and of those men who are friends of Christ, possessed me; and whilst revolving his words in my mind,

I found this philosophy alone to be safe and profitable. Thus, and for this reason, I am a philosopher. Moreover, I would wish that all, making a resolution similar to my own, do not keep themselves away from the words of the Saviour. For they possess a terrible power in themselves and are sufficient to inspire those who turn aside from the path of rectitude with awe; whilst the sweetest rest is afforded those who make a diligent practice of them. If, then, you have any concern for yourself, and if you are eagerly looking for salvation, if you believe in God, you may—since you are not indifferent to the matter—become acquainted with the Christ of God, and, after being initiated, live a happy life."

In the appeal to prophecy Justin not only instances predictions regarding Christ, but also in a marked degree notices those prophecies which speak of Jewish obduracy against Christ and of the widespread response of the Gentiles to the Gospel. The early persecutions, and the patience of the Christians under them, are seen as fulfilling Scripture and also the predictions made by the Lord Himself when on earth with His disciples (John 16: 4). This, of course, just follows the pattern already traced in apostolic times.

Though some of the arguments used in these polemical writings of the Fathers, and some of the instances given of prophetic fulfilment, may appear strained to modern ears, the general principle supporting them was amply justified. The instinct was sound, even if here and there it was misapplied, and it is certainly more prudent and worthy of enlightened judgment to accept the general position taken and overlook incidental overstatements than to abandon the broad proposition because of occasional defective reasoning. Enthusiasm occasionally outruns discretion, but does not necessarily invalidate the truth contended for. Even Socrates was conscious of this, and upon a certain occasion remarked, "If this is not true, something of the kind is." No one would contend that everything in the Patristic writings is sound Biblical theology, but in their emphasis upon fulfilled prophecy as a proof of the truth of the Gospel they were following a clear precedent from Scripture itself.

The argument from prophecy, once, as we have seen, a main buttress in Christian apologetic, has in our day become to many a dead letter. This, we suspect, springs from the same root that makes men unwilling to accept the supernatural, or, where facts are stubborn, to account for them wholly on naturalistic grounds. But because a particular mode of argument happens to be out of favour at the moment, that is no reason for writing it off as an obsolete defence of Divine truth. We cannot dismiss the

evidential force of prophecy without rejecting the whole tenor of Scripture and the explicit teachings of the Lord Jesus and His commissioned apostles. What was central to them cannot be peripheral to us, much less outside the circumference of our belief.

## IX

### THE MESSIANIC NOTE IN OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

**T**HROUGHOUT THE PROPHETIC WRITINGS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT occur certain passages which arrest attention by reason of their gnomic form or their enigmatic overtones of meaning: these have by common consent been termed "Messianic." They have heightened significance of thought and feeling, and are felt to propound some Divine mystery or paradox. Even making due allowance for poetic hyperbole such passages not infrequently strike the reader as unexpected breakings-in from another and higher level of thought. The language may even be puzzling in its original context, and while applicable in a general way to some contemporary situation appears to require a larger frame for full extension of meaning.

The early Fathers were prone to read such esoteric elements into Scripture as a whole, seeking thus (as they saw it) a spiritual meaning beneath the natural sense and in many instances confounding the plain sense of what was written. But valid Messianic prophecy, even when embedded in the mass of general prophecy, requires neither the surrender of natural meaning, nor distorted interpretation, to give it force. None the less its very language contains a riddle or wonder inseparable from the transcendency of ultimate spiritual truth. The substance of these prophecies, too, deals with modes of being and matters foreign to experiential knowledge, and therefore is incapable of expression in normal speech. It can take form only in paradox.

At first sight, however, some of these Messianic prophecies appear to be quite simple in expression, but closer examination of what they say produces a dilemma only to be resolved in Christ. In Him alone may their opposing elements be reconciled. Moreover, when these cryptic prophecies are fully considered they will be seen to concentrate upon those enduring fundamental truths, grasped only by faith, upon which rests the whole fabric of the Christian Gospel. In other words, they contain the "stumbling-blocks" of which St. Paul speaks (I Cor. 1: 23; 2: 14), the stone

of offence in the path of natural reason in its search after truth, of which St. Peter also treats when he writes concerning them which "stumble at the word, being disobedient" (I Pet. 2: 8).

The native Titanism of the human mind, in its unwillingness to accept the limitations of conceptual knowledge, finds place as much in theological discussion as in the vaunting claims of natural science. That there are matters too high for us seems difficult to accept without question, though most of us are willing to admit on grounds of self-evident fact that there is very much that we do not know. In the plain words of Scripture we may come to confess, "I have uttered that I understand not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. . . . Now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42: 3-6).

The great truths of Divine revelation crystallize but slowly in our minds, so unfamiliar are they to our human notion of things. "My thoughts are not your thoughts . . . saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55: 8-9). It is not surprising, therefore, that when God's crowning word to man was to be spoken some preparatory instruction should have been necessary if it was not to pass over man's head unconsidered and unrecognized. The writer was once accosted by an agnostic with this question, "If God is, as you say, love, why did He not send Christ into the world immediately Adam fell, and so save the race from its long history of suffering and death?" The question was unusual, and called for an unusual answer, which was, "If I were to hand you a book written in Chinese, could you read it?"

In the very necessity of things the grammar of redemption had to be taught to man before he was fitted to receive the full revelation of God's love in Christ. First the alphabet, then word-formation, followed in turn by elementary grammar and syntax, and finally the written word. No stage may be safely disregarded, and if we now can read and absorb without consciously thinking of the grammatical relation of word to word, or of the formal values of sign or symbol, it is only because at some earlier stage in our education we absorbed their meaning and relevance. In some such way the Old Testament stands in relation to God's self-revelation in Christ. The full impact upon human sensibility of the coming of Christ, if it had not been preceded by preparatory intimations, would have been as baffling as putting a book written in Chinese into the hands of an Eskimo.

The earlier Messianic prophecies are often mysterious in form,