

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

THROUGHOUT 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,

and it is only in the light of later and progressive revelations that their bearing can be understood: yet they form the substratum of later revelations. The Messianic note in prophecy rises from less to more, from the enigmatic to the more manifest, though each is appropriate to the stage at which it is given. Considered thus we can readily see the validity of referring many obscure Old Testament passages to Christ, even though they were uttered at first in response to some quite natural contemporary situation. The Servant songs of Isaiah, for example, the context of which is so warm a matter of debate, are surely to be interpreted in this way. However truly these songs may be applied in a relative sense to Israel, or to the prophet himself, that they are veritable prophecies concerning Christ is a truer and more adequate interpretation of them. Not only does it correspond to a deep instinct of Christian belief, but it has the warrant of the New Testament, in which they are freely applied to the Lord Jesus Christ, both by Himself and by His disciples. Their real value, therefore, was that of preparing the people for One Who was to come, even the Christ.

The broad analogy of Biblical usage sanctions our finding many unsuspected references to Christ in the Old Testament that are not, except in an exceedingly allusive fashion, mentioned in the New. The writings of the early Fathers are full of such references in support of the Christian apologetic, and while today we may look upon many of them with a doubtful eye, they represent a sound instinct. We are upon safer ground if we adhere to those Old Testament prophecies which have a plain New Testament warrant as being in the strictest and most technical sense "Messianic." Five such leading Messianic prophecies may here be considered and the common element in them determined.

"Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7: 14. Quoted Matt. 1: 23).

"But thou, Beth-lehem Ephrathah, which are little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose going forth are from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5: 2. Quoted Matt. 2: 6).

"Thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol; neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption" (Psa. 16: 10. Quoted Acts 2: 31; 13: 35).

"The LORD saith unto my lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (Psa. 110: 1. Quoted Matt. 22: 4; Acts 2: 34).

"The stone which the builders rejected is become the head

of the corner" (Psa. 118: 22. Quoted Matt. 21: 42; Mark 12: 10; Luke 20: 17; Eph. 2: 20; Acts 4: 11; I Pet. 2: 7).

The words of Isa. 7: 14 are considered chiefly as a prediction of the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Important as this interpretation is, it should not be allowed to obscure the equally important and intended contrast between One "born of a woman" (evidently a synonym for frail mortal man. Cf. Job 14: 1; Matt. 11: 11; Gal. 4: 4) and One who is indeed Emmanuel, God with us. Job, in the light of human experience, could ask, "What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of woman, that he should be righteous?" (Job 15: 14). Yet here is One, born of a virgin, of whom it is said that He is God found in fashion as a man, dwelling among men. When first uttered, the prophecy must have seemed mysterious (as indeed it still does to unbelieving ears) and yet have startled "with a wild surmise," a paradox too difficult to understand until Christ came. It therefore bears the mark of Messianic prophecy. That the prophecy had an immediate reference to the future devastation of Judah consequent upon Ahaz's unbelief (the presence of the sign-child in a devastated land being proleptic of the conditions under which the Virgin's Child would be born and grow up) need not blind us to its inherent Messianic allusion. The naming of the child in Isaiah chapter 7 is correlated in St. Matthew's mind with the supernatural naming of Mary's son, and so links the name JESUS with that of Emmanuel. Thus this remarkable prophecy epitomizes in gnomic form an enigma of Divine revelation, a fundamental Gospel truth enshrined also in the words of the Athanasian Creed, "Perfect God, and perfect Man . . . Who although he be God and Man: yet is he not two, but one Christ."

Again, consider the passage from Micah, chapter 5. Superficially, this reads like a simple announcement beforehand, of where Christ was to be born, but underneath the statement lies an astonishing juxtaposition of opposites. Micah, after denouncing the sin of Israel and Judah, and predicting the judgments that would overwhelm Samaria and Judah, goes on to promise eventual restoration. This is to come out of Beth-lehem Ephrathah. But when we turn to the records of the return from the Captivity we find that of the children of Bethlehem only one hundred and twenty-three souls returned (Ezra 2: 21). The population had indeed been depleted, as later it again was when Christ was born and Herod destroyed all the male children under two years old, so that the prophecy of Jeremiah found yet another fulfilment than it had received at the time of the Captivity, "Rachel weeping for her children; she refuseth to be comforted"

(Jer. 31: 15. Quoted Matt. 2: 17-18). For Rachel, too, died near this spot, and in giving birth to Benjamin called his name Benoni, which means, Son of my sorrow. So that there is a succession of mourning and lamentation connected traditionally with this village, making it an emblem of thwarted hopes and diminished greatness.

It was from this place, too, that David rose to be ruler in Israel, and he seems never to have forgotten the lowly circumstances out of which he was raised. Yet of David could it not be said that his "goings forth are from of old, from everlasting." Here again, then, is a Divine mystery, an unexpected coming forth from humble and obscure circumstances of a Governor whose antecedents are without beginning. Not only is there a paradox, as in Isa. 7: 14, of One who is both God and man, but a paradox between the temporal and the eternal, between natural weakness and supernatural goings-forth. Where other than in Christ is this dilemma resolved? The cross of Christ is at one and the same time foolishness and weakness to the natural man but to all who believe, the power of God and the wisdom of God (I Cor. 1: 17-25). The antinomy is preserved in Messianic prophecy.

Yet again, take that other Scripture, Psalm 16: 10, where David, speaking by the Spirit, says, "Thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." A godly Jew, reading this, must have felt an acute problem. In David's mind holiness and incorruption were inseparable. He himself had been anointed king over God's people, and was, in this sense, God's holy one, even as also were the priests. Yet in the event David died and saw corruption, as St. Peter so cogently observes in his address at Pentecost. So that this prophecy could not wholly, or even primarily, have referred to David himself, though as a human type of the Messiah it was fitting that he should utter these words.¹ "But he whom God raised from the dead saw no corruption," continues Peter, and therefore we may say of the Lord Jesus Christ that He is, in the strictest and most real sense, God's Holy One. He has been declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1: 4). The mystery of the passage, which is not diminished by its solution in Christ, lies in the fact that the One so spoken of had suffered death, and therefore it seemed inevitable that His claim to Divine holiness would be rendered invalid by His seeing

¹ Since to David himself "seeing corruption" was practically synonymous with "die," the original reference was doubtless to David's own hope of preservation in life, but that his faith was so worded under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as to contain a fuller meaning (only ascertainable after fulfilment) is clear from Acts 2: 31 and 13: 15.

corruption. The prophecy is therefore genuinely Messianic, and points to a central element in our Christian faith, the death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

No other than He is, in this sense, holy, even as no other than He, because of intrinsic sanctity, has been raised from the dead. *Our* hope of resurrection, as of all the faithful, rests on Him. Incidentally, this rules out the possibility of even Mary, His mother, because of personal holiness, experiencing incorruption. While the principle invoked may be sound, that holiness and incorruption go hand in hand, the application to Mary has no warrant in Holy Scripture. Mary is indeed called "blessed," and this Divine *congratulation* is echoed by later generations, but nowhere is there any hint whatsoever of a consequent "assumption" to heaven. Rather does Scripture speak of "that which is to be born (of thee) shall be called holy"; and Mary herself, concerning God her Saviour, that "holy is His name." Even her blessedness is ranked below that of those who "hear the word of God, and keep it" (Luke 11: 28).

The numerous references in the New Testament to Psa 110: 1 mark its importance as a corner-stone of Messianic prophecy. Jewish as well as Christian belief held it to be so. Disputing with the Pharisees the Lord could confidently appeal to this Scripture as traditionally Messianic. As such it could not be controverted or set aside. Hanging His argument upon the prefatory words of the verse, He fastens at once upon the characteristic enigma within the prophecy. "The LORD said unto my lord." Here "the LORD" is the supreme Ruler of all, Lord of heaven and earth, whose absolute and Divine authority lies behind the declaration about to be made, "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." Now to whom is this declaration made? David plainly says that it is "unto my lord," and thus to One to whom even David yields precedence. David, as head of the royal house, was reckoned a patriarch (Acts 2: 29), and from him was to come the Messiah, who therefore was known as "the Son of David." Yet here David himself speaks of this still future descendant as being "my lord." So Christ put the question to the Pharisees, "If David then called him Lord, how is he his son?" (Matt. 22: 45). Priority and succession are predicted of one and the same person: how could this be? Once again, the seeming contradiction is reconciled in the Lord Jesus, who is both "the root and the offspring of David" (Rev. 22: 16). The Pharisees were quite willing to admit that the Christ would be David's Son, but relapsed into sullen silence when a Scripture which implied that He also was David's Lord was quoted to them. It is part of the Christian Gospel that while Jesus Christ "was made of the

seed of David according to the flesh," He also has been "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead" (Rom. 1: 3-4; cf. II Tim. 2: 8).

As Son of David, He is heir to the throne of Israel, but as David's Lord He could say of Himself, "My kingdom is not of this world." When the people would take Him by force and make Him king (but at the same time refused His higher claims), He rejected their homage, thereby showing that the kingdom which He came to establish was something other than that of an earthly monarch, however valid also His claim to the throne of Israel may have been. In the ascension of the Lord Jesus to the right hand of the Father the ancient prophecy reached its true end, finding its fulfilment, not in an earthly theocracy, but in a super-temporal sphere. From thence He will come visibly, to subdue all things to Himself (I Cor. 15: 15-18 with Heb. 2: 8) and to assume the many crowns that are His right.

To those accustomed from other Scriptures to think of Christ solely as David's Son, this Messianic prophecy concerning David's Lord, exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high, must have seemed an insoluble problem. When He, whom St. Matthew at the beginning of his Gospel calls the Son of David (Matt. 1: 1), applied to Himself the words of this Psalm, saying, "Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power," the high priest of Israel rent his clothes, and cried out, "He hath spoken blasphemy." To faith founded upon the prophetic word, the twofold title presents no obstacle.

Under veiled symbolism the words of Psal. 118: 22-23 predict a striking turn of events,

"The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner.

"This is the LORD's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes."

What more apt form could have been employed to arrest attention, especially when couched, as this is, in the graphic past tense of prophetic vision, as of something "as good as done." All that was needed at the time of delivery to awake search and expectation is here: sufficient also to be accurate description when eventual fulfilment took place. Until then, explicit detail was unnecessary. The prophecy itself is perhaps best understood in line with other Old Testament prophecies employing the same symbolism. Considered together, these form an impressive unity of truth, and illustrate the orderly development of prophetic revelation from age to age.

"(From thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel)"
(Gen. 49: 24).

A cryptic parenthesis suited to the still undeveloped purpose of God at the moment of utterance!

"Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone of sure foundation" (Isa. 28: 16).

"And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel" (Isa. 8: 14).

"For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone are seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 3: 9).

The previous verse says that Joshua the high priest and his fellows were "men of wonder" or "signs," so that this prophecy clearly has a symbolic value.

"He shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace, unto it" (Zech. 4: 7).

Interpreting king Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image and the stone cut out without hands, Daniel said:

"Forasmuch as thou sawest that a stone was cut out of the mountains without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king, what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure" (Dan. 2: 45).

This last Scripture should be considered along with Matt. 21: 42-44, where it is linked with Psalm 118: 22 f. and Isa. 8: 14 f.

Throughout these Scriptures run two concurrent threads: first, that the coming Messiah would be rejected by the rulers of Israel; and, secondly, that in spite of this He would become the foundation and cornerstone of a new and spiritual temple, a community of which Israel was the earthly type. Peter, in his epistle, collates these same Scriptures, and gives them this interpretation. In the early period of the Church, when Jewish antagonism to the new faith was a bitter reality, these prophecies had peculiar force, and their prediction of the triumph of Christ took fresh significance from the rapid spread of Christianity among all sorts and conditions of men. In their witness before a hostile world the early Christians found in these twin beliefs a strong support to their faith. In the writings of the early apologists Scripture after Scripture is quoted to show that this course of events had been long foretold by the Hebrew prophets. Even now it is difficult to read such passages as Isa. 8: 14 without perceiving that this mark of national rejection was an indubitable sign by which the true Messiah could be recognized. The search is narrowed down to One notably rejected by the Jewish people, and we cannot

avoid the inference that no one else is so likely to be that Person as Jesus of Nazareth. Of whom else could such passages as the following be fitly spoken?

“A reproach of men, and despised of the people” (Psa. 22: 6).

“Thus saith the Lord . . . , to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth . . . Kings shall see and arise . . .” (Isa. 49: 7).

“He was despised, . . . and we esteemed him not . . . we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isa. 53: 3-4).

“I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication: and they shall look unto me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son” (Zech. 12: 10).

Even if this be given a contemporary reference, the later language of Revelation 1: 7 shows that it has a fuller reference to Christ. Action prophecies, too, of Messianic types like Joseph and David, rejected by their brethren but exalted by God, point in the same direction.

This dual theme runs throughout all Old Testament prophecy, and gives to such texts as Psa. 118: 22 their arresting form. Echoes of it are found in the antithetic expression so frequently used by Peter when referring to Jesus as the Christ: “Rejected indeed of men, but with God elect” (I Pet. 2: 4); “Whom ye crucified, Whom God raised from the dead” (Acts 4: 10).

It will have been observed that these Messianic prophecies now considered have a contemporary setting in the period when first they were spoken, and that this immediate historical background cannot be ignored in seeking their interpretation: so far from this being so, it almost invariably gives the clue to it. There is thus nothing arbitrary in the way in which these Scriptures are quoted, as if the original historical environment were tacitly set aside or misunderstood. Indeed, a fruitful field of study remains to be opened up by still fuller examination of the historical context in which passages from the Old Testament quoted in the New are found. Valuable work of this kind has already been done in recent studies, but there is still “much land to be possessed.” It is now some time since Westcott, in his commentary *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, noted the historical setting of many of the quotations in chapters 1 and 2 of that Epistle. For example, take these four:

“I will declare thy name unto my brethren,

“In the midst of the congregation will I sing thy praise” (Heb. 2: 12 with Psa. 22: 22).

“Thou didst put all things in subjection under his feet” (Heb. 2: 8 with Gen. 1: 26; Psa. 8: 6).

“I will be to him a Father, And he shall be to me a Son” (Heb. 1: 5 with II Sam. 7: 14).

“Behold, I and the children which God hath given me” (Heb. 2: 13 with Isa. 8: 18).

These allude to significant moments in history or in personal experience which mark the Messianic movement within them, and look forward to their culmination in Christ. Fresh meaning is given to David’s deliverance from persecution, Adam’s installation into his high estate, Solomon under the protection of God, and Isaiah with his sign-children standing in the midst of the nation. “What these indicate,” to quote Westcott, “Christ completely fulfilled.” Prophecy is thus linked with history, and both with God.

Peter’s predilection for quoting Old Testament prophecy, already alluded to, is by no means peculiar to himself. Paul, too, grounds his faith in “all things which are according to the law, and which are written in the prophets” (Acts 24: 14), and sums up his preaching as consisting of “nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should come; how that the Christ must suffer, and how that he first by the resurrection of the dead should proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26: 22-23). Speaking thus before king Agrippa he seizes upon an issue that would commit his hearer to faith in Christ, saying, “King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.” Agrippa well knew to what this was leading, and answered lightly but indulgently, “A little more of this, and you’ll have me a Christian.” To him a suffering Christ was both a stumbling-block and foolishness, and his present power and position made Christ’s triumph something unreal. Paul, on the contrary, with Peter and the other apostles, found in the writings of the prophets both “the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow.”

This intimate association of the word of prophecy with the death of Christ takes on added force when we consider that the cross of Christ derives no virtue from accidents of time or circumstances but is wholly conditioned by what Christ is in His own Person. This remarkable fact has been largely overlooked in theological debate, and therefore requires fuller consideration at this point. It is implicit in the language of Hebrews 1: 3 (A.V.), where the words occur, “when he had by himself purged our sins.” Although the words “by Himself” do not appear in certain of the more ancient manuscripts, and therefore are not found in the Revised Version, their meaning is clearly implicit

in the context. This casts a glance at the way in which His essential Person enters into and gives value to His great work of making reconciliation for sins. "By Himself" therefore means that the sacrifice of Christ draws its virtue from what He is in His own Person, and not from extrinsic circumstances. Bengel remarks, "without the external Levitical instrumentality or covenant." Being Who and What He is—Heir of all things, the brightness of God's glory, the express image of His substance, the Creator and Upholder of the universe—He, through His own instrumentality, made purification of sins.

While the words "by Himself" infer that He *alone* accomplished the work, they more strictly mean that it was through His own agency that all was done. Purification of sins was made "through, or by means of, Himself." There is a parallel use in Hebrews 9: 12 where "obtained (eternal redemption)," in the middle voice, indicates "obtained through Himself or by His own resources." The contrast, of course, is to the ministrations of the Levitical high priest on the great day of atonement (Lev. 16), who entered into the Holiest "by the blood of bulls and of goats," (that is, "with blood not his own" (Heb. 9: 25)), whereas Christ entered into heaven itself "through His own blood" (Heb. 9: 12).

The sacrifice of Christ, though prefigured in those of the old Economy, is explicitly said not to have a legal, that is, a *Levitical* character, but to belong to another order, one entirely its own. The epistle to the Hebrew deals with two distinct orders of sacrifice: the Levitical, offered "by the law" (Heb. 10: 8); and that of Christ, grounded in "the will of God" (Heb. 10: 7 *et seq.*). For this read carefully Hebrews 10: 5-10, the argument of which is based on the words of Psalm 40: 6.

"Burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required.

"Then said I, Lo, I am come; in the roll of the book it is written of (*margin*: prescribed to) me:

"I delight to do thy will, O my God."

Deeds take character from the principles under which they are wrought. The Levitical sacrifices shared all the weakness and inefficiency of the system under which they were offered. "The law made nothing perfect" (Heb. 7: 19). That offered by Christ, because it came directly out of the will of God (disclosed "in the roll of the book"), has eternal and abiding efficacy.

The narrative of the Gospel confirms the non-Levitical character of the death of Christ. He suffered, not within the city walls, much less in "holy places made with hands," but "outside the camp" (Heb. 13: 11). Jerusalem symbolized all that the Levitical system stood for: it was the holy city, the place where

God has set His Name, and was associated with the temple and its priesthood. From that city Christ was led forth to be crucified. There was no place for Him in the sacred precincts. From the Levitical, the ritualistic point of view, the death on the cross was shorn of all holy associations: no priest presided over the sacrifice—except to mock and deride; no sacerdotal rites were observed, prescribed by Levitical rubric; no pomp of temple worship accompanied the death of the Victim. He died a felon's death, and by a mode shameful in Jewish eyes, the death of the cross, as if He were a Gentile malefactor. Nothing could have been more removed from priestly or religious associations. It was as if in His death He would borrow no glory or majesty from processional pomp or ceremonial circumstance but let the stark fact of the cross speak for itself.

Yet though His cross owes nothing to legal instrumentality, there is that (and here indeed is a remarkable circumstance) which invests it with peculiar significance, and singles it out as being no ordinary death. As we consider that cross we are immediately made conscious that things have happened as they did (thus and thus), not fortuitously but according to some hidden Divine purpose, for Scripture after Scripture leaps unbidden to our minds, and we see a detailed correspondence between the word of prophecy and the manner of His death.

He is numbered with the transgressors, they pierce His hands and His feet, they part His garments among them and cast lots for His vesture, in His thirst they give Him vinegar to drink, His side is pierced, He makes intercession for the transgressors, not a bone of Him is broken. His words on the way to and upon the cross re-echo the language of Scripture: "Smite the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered," "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?," "Into Thy hands I commend My spirit." In sacrifices offered under the law, though attended with due ritual, God had found no pleasure, and it was because of this that the spirit of Christ, speaking through David, testified, "Then said I, Lo, I come, to do thy will, O God," interjecting the significant words, "In the roll of the book it is written of me," thus indicating where that will found expression. The fact that it was according to the Scriptures that Christ died for our sins, and that He rose again, is formal proof that His death comes out of the will of God. Behind the fact is the prophecy, and behind the prophecy, GOD. In this remarkable fashion, then, the cross bears its own certification as a Divine work.

Messianic prophecy is not exhausted by these more explicit examples, for throughout the whole of the Old Testament are passages whose reference clearly lies beyond the time then

present, and centre upon a future Saviour-King, whose coming would bear alike the mark of utter humiliation and of Divine triumph. In broad outline they all testify "the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow" (I Pet. 1: 11), thus again accentuating the twofold mystery of His coming. We may note in passing that a literal rendering of Peter's phrase would be "the sufferings *unto* Christ," thereby linking into one harmonious and inclusive whole not only the historical movement leading up to Christ but the prophetic revelation through which that movement was made known to men. In addition there are types and shadows, veiled hints and indications, half-disclosed intimations and significant events that confirm and illustrate the clearer predictions. The cumulative effect of all these is of a broad background of prophecy against which events are taking place. This is something even more convincing to the mind than spectacular fulfilments of single prophecies, however numerous these also may be, and points to an ordered comprehension of things in the mind of Him from whom they proceed.

These "moments" of revelation each contain some enigma of Divine truth, and epitomize in gnomic form supernatural realities that were to find expression in particular historical happenings. When first uttered they must have seemed mysterious, and yet something in them arrested attention and invited inquiry. All revealed truth retains an element of unfathomable mystery as well as of unmistakable disclosure, so that the certainty of faith is mingled with the wonder of worship, and leads to ultimate humility of mind. This is why the rigid dogmatist can never understand why simple believers with a firm hold upon their God sometimes refuse assent to over-simplified formulations of Divine truth, and yet maintain an orthodoxy that stands the shocks of life and is triumphant over death.

Whatever mysteries lie hid in Messianic prophecy are due to the themes that they treat of, which are both supertemporal and supernatural. The Bible speaks of them as "wonders," "miracles," "works of God"—things that can only be expressed through signs or visions or dark sayings. Thus we are led into the knowledge of another and spiritual world where God reigns in higher glory than in this, a world comprehensible only to faith. Christ is the great Sign given to men in order that they may read what otherwise would have been hidden from them for ever. In Him God is manifest in flesh. The incarnate Word is the great expression of the Divine mystery. Of God we read that He is "the King eternal, incorruptible, invisible" (I Tim. 1: 17), that He dwelleth "in light unapproachable; whom no man hath seen, nor can see" (II Tim. 6: 16). Yet we also read that "the only

begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1: 18).

The word of prophecy discloses this intervention of God through Christ into the stream of human history. Christ is therefore named "Wonderful" (Isa. 9: 6), as being the great *sign* or *miracle* of God's redemptive activity among men. The angel of the LORD who appeared to Manoah said unto him, "Wherefore askest thou thus after my name, seeing that it is wonderful?"—that is, *secret* (Judges 13: 18)—and in confirmation "the angel did wondrously," ascending up to heaven in the flame of the sacrifice. This then is the element out of which prophecy comes, and that which gives it its mysterious character. To reduce prophecy to rationalistic terms is to rob it of its prime value. Why should it be thought strange that there are levels of thought and life beyond that perceptible by human reason? Or that there is a meaningful value in prophecy which demands that it be taken seriously by all who find themselves confronted with facts in human experience for which reason can give no adequate explanation? The more so since those who have made the venture of faith assure us with one voice that it gives significance and validity to life, that although many problems still remain unresolved these do not affect the inner certainty given by the Word of God.

X

THE UNITY OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

THE UNITY OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY IS IN ESSENCE rather than form. We have here no elaborate system formulated with artificial skill, but living flashes of truth coming from a central sun. Yet how much more convincing is this than would have been a mere programmatic outline of coming events. Prophecy as a whole is thus a rich and complex texture of human situations wrought into one pattern by a single organic purpose and held together in a living Person. This is not to say that there are not traces of meticulous and accurate detail within this general prophetic view, but that as a whole Scripture does not present it to us in this fashion. The writings of Daniel, it is true, clearly indicate the existence of a Divinely ordered but not fully disclosed chronological plan. And there are discernible sequences of events in the prophetic calendar of Hebrew festivals which no serious student of Scripture can afford to neglect. For they correspond in some remarkable way with the order of events taken by the New Testament history of redemption. The date