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AND TO THY SEED, WHICH IS CHRIST

MODERN Old Testament scholarship has been too apt to ignore the labours of the 'pre-critical' period; much in the old exposition is of lasting value. It cannot be denied, however, that the older exposition, with a few outstanding exceptions, showed certain obvious weaknesses which vitiated much of its work. Perhaps the worst of these was its obstinate refusal to accept the Old Testament picture of Israel as it really was.

This may well be because the Church, unreformed and reformed alike, was seldom prepared to recognize how desperately ill and corrupt it was, when seen in the light of the New Testament. It was quite natural therefore to regard the denunciations of the prophets as illuminating the marginal and occasional in Israel's history, instead of recognizing that they show the people sick unto death. As a result the importance of the doctrine of the remnant was seldom adequately recognized. Strikingly enough that erratic genius, J. N. Darby, one of the founders of the Brethren movement, probably came closer than most to a grasp of this, but he obscured it by an exaggerated dispensational teaching.

Neither the legalistic Rabbinic Jew nor the modern anti-legalistic humanist has been very happy about the relationship of the Prophets, i.e. the *Nevi'im*, Joshua to Kings and Isaiah to Malachi, to the Torah. For the former the Prophets are little more than a commentary on the Torah, necessitated only by the people's failure to keep it. For the latter the more important figures among the prophets have normally been regarded as the enemies of the cultus and of all formal law. In fact the former by refusing to recognize the progressive nature of revelation, and the latter by yielding only lip-service to the reality of revelation, failed to see that Torah and Prophets mark two stages in revelation.

Though it never obscures the responsibility of the individual, the dominating conception of the Torah is the divine election of Israel. While Paul, from the standpoint of later revelation, can show from the Torah itself that 'they are not all Israel, which are of Israel' (Rom. ix. 6; cf. also Rom. ii. 28f.), it is very questionable whether one could come to this understanding purely on the basis of the Torah. That is why the orthodox Jew has never been able to free himself from a purely ethnic answer, when answering the question, 'Who is a Jew?', for to him the Torah is the sum of revelation.

When we turn to the Prophets, in the sense given earlier, we find a story predominantly of failure and of God's choosing in its midst. The selfsame scholarship that has so clearly shown that the Former Prophets are not history in the common meaning given to that word today has all too often failed to recognize the all-pervading sense of failure. This is mainly so because this element normally forms the back-cloth, so to speak, and only occasionally occupies the centre of the stage. To recognize the consistency of the back-cloth throughout the Former Prophets is, however, except for those who hold the theory of the Deuteronomistic history linked with Noth and his school, virtually to accept the inspirational element that so many would keep far from their interpretation of the Old Testament.

The first stage in this sifting is commemorated in Ps. lxxviii (cf. especially verses 67-71), which in spite of the opinion of Oesterley is surely pre-exilic and one of the earlier of the Asaph psalms. This was continued in the disruption of the kingdom. However much this was a judgment on the Davidic dynasty, it was also a judgment on the Northern tribes, as the post-exilic chronicler recognized so clearly. The same truth is, however, expressed equally clearly and more succinctly by Hosea, when he says, 'Afterward shall the children of Israel . . . seek . . . David their king' (iii. 5), which is equivalent to saying that the whole history of the North from the time of Jeroboam I had been a groping down a blind alley.

There is, however, more to be said about Ho. iii. 5. The English reader may be pardoned, if he understands 'Afterward shall the children of Israel return' as referring to a return from exile, though the parallel in xiv. 1 should save him from this. Whatever the etymological origin of the Hebrew root *shub* — neither BDB nor Koehler are much help here — it is clear that in usage *turning* and not *returning* is the main thought. BDB is quite correct in suggesting 'to repent' as the appropriate translation in Ho. iii. 5 and similar passages. The sifting process is not one based on an unintelligible divine decree, but on human sin, and it can be reversed, at least up to a given

terminus, 'by repentance.

Our first introduction to the concept of the remnant, i.e. of those to be saved out of a general judgment, is found in 1 Kings xix. 18, a verse where the AV mistranslation is more than normally serious. Though the technical terms for remnant, *she'ar* or *she'erit*, are not used, we have the root in the verb, *wehish'arti*, 'yet will I leave'. It is to be noted that the grounds on which the remnant is to be chosen have to do entirely with its behaviour towards God. It seems entirely unjustified to read a lower meaning into remnant, when we meet it in Isaiah.

The story calls for closer attention. Elijah's return to Horeb-Sinai and his accusation against Israel (xix. 10, 14), an accusation which is accepted by God as being essentially accurate, can only mean that the prophet returns to the place of the covenant to inform Yahweh that, so far as the ten tribes were concerned, His election had been an error. God puts against the failure of the people a remnant, but He does not deny the failure. The remnant conception is not concerned primarily with God's choosing within a wider body, but with its complete failure.

While we need hardly hesitate to accept the contention that Amos could hardly have spoken ix. 9-15 in Bethel, there is a growing tendency among scholars to recognize that S. R. Driver was wise in refusing to accept the arguments for a post-exilic date. Amos was no innovator, when he announced the discrimination of God as He sat in judgment. Though the coming destruction of Israel was certain and inevitable, yet not even the fate of the wicked would be accidental — 'But no pebble shall fall upon the earth' (Am. ix. 9, RSV).

In the light of the above it seems very difficult to understand how Jocz can say in *A Theology of Election* (p. 110), '*she'ar yashuv* — "a remainder will return" — means return to the land, but not necessarily to God.' Skinner (Cam.B. *ad loc.*) is correct when he says, "'Remnant-shall-turn," i.e. "turn to Jehovah", not "return from exile".' It might have been better still had he rendered it 'A remnant shall repent'. This should be clear enough from Is. x. 20-23. It is hardly likely to be mere coincidence that when Isaiah speaks of the escaping remnant in a purely national sense in i. 9 — it is clear there is no thought of the spiritual remnant of the future here — he uses the word *sarid*.

There is a certain ambivalence in Isaiah's thought. It is clear that he foresees the destruction of Judah as a state and of the royal dynasty (Is. vi. 13, RV, x. 33-xi. 1), the remnant left being of the smallest and humblest, for while in a semi-tropical land like Palestine there is nothing unusual for the stump (Is. vi. 13, xi. 1, RSV) of a felled tree to put out new shoots, they will not grow to the stature of the original tree. Yet when he proceeds to add in vi. 13, 'Its stump is a holy seed' — the definite article in the standard English versions is misleading — he clearly places no limits on the possibility of growth, which in Is. xi. 1-9 is then bound up with the 'shoot out of the stump of Jesse'. It is worth noting how in the time of Ezra those that had returned from captivity identified themselves with the holy seed of Is. vi. 13 (Ezr. ix. 2).

A similar ambivalence is seen in Isaiah's references to his own time. When we add the loss of territory and the effects of battle and pestilence to the 200,150 captives Sennacherib claims to have taken, we may well reckon on three-quarters of the population of Judah having been lost. It was indeed a very small remnant (Is. i. 9) that was left. In addition much of Isaiah's language would suggest that the invasions and repulse of the Assyrians were in fact the Day of Yahweh. But however eschatological his language may seem, it is clear that he knew the repulse of Sennacherib was not the end and that the Messianic period lay yet far ahead. The most explicit statement of this is in Is. xxxii. 13-15, where the rendering of *ophel* and *bachan* by 'forts and towers' (AV) or 'the hill and the watch-tower' (RV) obscure from the casual reader that it is the complete destruction of Jerusalem that is foretold. Once we have the clue it is easy enough to see that much else in Isaiah is a looking forward to future judgment as seen in the grim light of the present.

What happened to Elijah's remnant we do not know. Did it link up with Judah under Hezekiah, or did it keep the light of true religion burning in Samaria as suggested by Welch, though hardly in the way suggested by him? All we can say is that it disappears, apparently without effect. The

remnant of Hezekiah's day so responded to Manasseh's apostasy that there was neither remedy nor hope. A very popular modern view sees Isaiah setting up an inner circle of disciples (Is. viii. 16-18), which continues and expands his teaching and tradition until it reaches its climax in 'Deutero-Isaiah' during the exile. It is most striking, however, that this group leaves not a trace in the gloom of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and it seems very hard to believe that it really existed.

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel are in full agreement that the corruption of Judah was absolute. While the exiles with Jehoiachin were the hope of the future, it is made clear that their choice was the result of God's mercy. Before they could become the people of the future, God would have to work a transforming miracle in them (Je. xxxi. 31-34; Ezk. xxxvi. 24-27). Already in the post-exilic histories and prophets we are warned that though the returning exiles might not be guilty of the same sins as their ancestors, their self-recognition as the holy seed did not save them from falling far short of God's will.

The history of the Inter-Testamental Period shows us the development of three tendencies. One group, best represented by the Hellenists of the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, walked the road that led to assimilation to their neighbours and apostasy. The bulk of the people had entirely lost the concept of the remnant. For the majority, descent from Abraham was all that mattered (cf. Mt. iii. 9). The Pharisaic minority looked forward to the ultimate victory of the Torah. For a balanced understanding of the Pharisees it is necessary to grasp that while for them the gift of the Torah was an act of pure grace on God's part, the keeping of it was something within the power and responsibility of man. As a result the concept of the remnant, a small group of faithful men in the midst of complete apostasy and judgment, played no part in their thinking.

It is not until we turn to a group like the Qumran Covenanters that we find the remnant conception still active. It is probable that there were other groups holding similar views to those at Qumran, but it is only of the latter that we know enough to speak with certainty. There seems not to have been much difference between them and the Pharisees where the Torah was concerned. Where they differed seems to have been in their estimate of the possibility of winning the people for its keeping. It was not so much their pessimism in this matter that marked out the Qumran Covenanters, but their conviction that they possessed esoteric knowledge taught them by the Teacher of Righteousness. That their teacher was a man of outstanding spirituality may be seen from their anticipations of the New Testament in the understanding of the prophetic books. But in their own way they were as much building on human merit as were the Pharisees.

When the waves of God's judgment broke over the Second Commonwealth in AD 70 and 135, both the nationalists and the Qumran Covenanters were seen to have suffered shipwreck. Though it might have seemed that the Pharisee had been fully and finally vindicated, for within a century his ideals had triumphed, for those with spiritual insight, however, it should have been obvious that they were heading down a one-way street, which would prove to be a cul-de-sac.

The identity of the Servant of Yahweh in Isaiah xl-lv is one of the most fascinating of Old Testament problems, not in the sense of the New Testament fulfilment, but as the question of the relationship of the central figure of the Servant Songs to the prophecy as a whole. There are still those who maintain that he is Israel, with or without some qualifying adjective, but it is fair to say that Old Testament scholarship as a whole regards it as an outmoded view. It simply does not satisfy the facts. The theory that he is some historical individual has had a good run, especially on the Continent, but the very plethora of candidates, all of whom fell short in some important detail, has seriously discredited it. Though there are many shades of interpretation, there is a growing agreement that he is a representative individual, not Israel, but summing up and fulfilling what Israel has failed to be.

This is precisely the position as we see it in the New Testament. In all His activity and teaching there are direct links between Jesus and the Old Testament, but He is not the representative of any group within Jewry. His contemporaries may be hostile or friendly, but they are all puzzled. There is no evidence of any special affinity between Him and those whom He chose to be His disciples. Peter's recognition of Him as the Messiah is immediately

explained as the outcome of God's gracious act. He is the fulfiller of the Old Testament and in His light all others, as individuals or groups, are shown in their failure and bankruptcy.

Our Lord's choice of the title 'Son of man' has caused and will continue to cause much controversy. There is growing unanimity, however, that it cannot be separated from the vision in Dn. vii, even though it may not be fully explainable in terms of this vision. In the light of Dn. vii. 17, where the four beasts are interpreted as four kings, it seems impossible to interpret the one like unto a Son of man merely as the saints of the most High, as has been the predominant modern interpretation until recently. Both in the case of the beasts and the one like unto a Son of man the kingdom is personified in and represented by its king. But, and here is an essential point, the saints of the most High are never expressly identified with Israel. It is no answer to say that no other identification is possible. In this apocalyptic vision in which every term has its meaning this silence cannot be just shrugged off. True enough they are Israel, but not Israel by virtue of physical descent, but because of what their king has made them. In calling Himself the Son of man our Lord is looking beyond Himself to His people, but they are not a people which He has merely collected from within Israel but a people which He has created for Himself.

This is not the place to discuss how far or whether we may legitimately apply the title Israel to the Church, though I believe that however near the New Testament approaches such a usage, it always finally avoids it. In the final vision of the Church the old and the new seem to be united (Rev. xxi. 12-14), but how that union comes seems not to be revealed. In Romans Paul, after having displayed our Lord as the only Saviour, because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, turns to the problem of Israel. After pointing out that God was always choosing within the people that bore that name, he suggests the ever widening scope of His work in their midst. At the present time it is 'a remnant according to the election of grace' (Rom. xi. 5), but this remnant is in itself a guarantee that the day is coming when 'all Israel shall be saved' (Rom. xi. 26).

Until the day of consummation it is unlikely that we shall be able to say with certainty exactly what we are to understand by 'all Israel', except that we can affirm with safety that it does not refer merely to the accident of physical descent. But that it refers to the people of the Old Covenant who have entered into the fulness of the New seems certain. To extend its meaning in the framework of Romans ix-xi to Gentile believers is to create an exegetical nightmare. God's election of a people does not create automatic privilege in physical descent, but His constant sifting of the people, its narrowing down to a remnant, a remnant of one at the last, is a guarantee that His electing grace will also in the fulness of time reach its purpose in the people as a whole.

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