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Hebrew Prophecy and Modern Criticism.

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VII.

'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee.'—ZECH. ix. 9.

IN my last two papers I pointed out some of the more general features of the great Future to which the prophets were continually directing the aspirations of the Jewish people. These prophetic pictures are most of them only so far Messianic that they came to be associated more or less definitely with the expectation of a unique Personality. But there is another much smaller group of prophecies in which such a Being appears as the central figure of the picture. I now wish to point out what the prophets have to say of this Figure, and how the idea of the Messiah shaped itself in the national consciousness.

It might be supposed that all that is necessary is to collect a few familiar passages out of the Psalms and Prophets, which describe what is generally understood to be some one or other characteristic of the future Messiah. But such a method is to the student of historical theology apt to be very misleading. We are in danger of arguing backwards instead of forwards; of assuming, without proof, the existence throughout the course of Jewish history, of a complete and familiar Messianic idea, to which the several passages are but references; whereas, in all probability, they are but evidence of many several germs of thought out of which the idea of the Messiah grew. This will become clearer as we endeavour to trace this growth in outline.

But there may be some who object to the thought of growth in connexion with any matter of revelation, or at the most they would admit

the thought only in this sense—that God gave fuller knowledge of His will, as men became better able, morally and intellectually, to grasp it; in the same way that we teach children gradually, as their improving faculties make them better able to learn. But this analogy, if really admissible, gives us all that we are arguing for. It is true that we impart to children higher knowledge, as they become more capable of digesting it; but, after all, the real advance and progress is in the power which the child acquires, not merely of imbibing ready-made ideas, but of adapting them and of developing them for himself. In all thorough education it is impossible to separate definitely the ideas put into a child's mind by others from those formed or remodelled by the child himself. And if this is true of our imperfect efforts in education, why should it not be true of God's education of the Jewish people? We may feel certain that the growth of theological ideas among the Jews more than among any other ancient people was under divine guidance, and contained a divine element; but we may be quite incapable of saying how far any one religious idea was the product of human reason or imagination, and how far it was due to the direct agency of God's Holy Spirit—*e.g.* we know that, according to a very ancient tradition, Abraham at one time of his life conceived an intense desire to offer up to God what was best and dearest to him. We may have little difficulty in believing that this desire was a direct inspiration of God. But we may find it very difficult to feel

sure in what exact degree the form which this desire took differed essentially from the child-sacrifices common among many primitive peoples. And what is true of inspired impulses, is still more likely to be true of inspired thoughts. I have already pointed out in an earlier paper¹ that the predictions of ordinary historical events had an undoubted element of purely human expectation and of human imagination, and that they were not always fulfilled in detail as the prophets themselves expected, still less in the form in which their poetical fancy dressed them. But if this be so, it is likely to have been also the case with their predictions of the great national hope. And yet we may find it almost impossible to draw the line between these human elements and the divine truth with which the prophets were inspired.

But at this point the objection may be raised—How then can we be certain that such predictions had a divine element at all? The answers to this objection have been in a measure forestalled in earlier papers.² They seem to lie mainly in the religious and moral tone of the prophets; but partly also in the fact that their predictions of historical events were fulfilled in a degree which cannot be accounted for readily on purely natural grounds. These two arguments will probably appeal with different force to different minds; but the first will only be seen in its full force by those who have kindled their lamp from the prophet's fire. If the Hebrew prophets were not the mere 'soothsayers like the Philistines' of whom Isaiah spoke with such honest contempt,³ they were something infinitely better—the giant-champions of religion, righteousness, and purity, handing down to future ages an ideal of religious and social life towards which the religious world is even now still striving.

But if we cannot with perfect certainty distinguish the divine and human elements, we can at least gather together these great thoughts of the future as they unfolded themselves in successive ages, and then show to what extent and under what limitations they were fulfilled in Christianity. It will be my aim, then, in this and the next two papers, to point out and illustrate some of the great thoughts which culminated in the Messianic hope. For let us bear in mind that this hope came, more

or less definitely, to be the possession of the whole Jewish people. It was in its leading traits, at any rate, no afterthought of Christianity. It forms a prominent element in the great mass of Jewish literature. That this hope belonged to different classes of Jews in the time of Christ is abundantly evident from the New Testament, and it cannot be seriously doubted that Christ based his claims to belief on the ground that He was the long-expected Messiah.

Now the aspect under which the Messianic hope presents itself most frequently is undoubtedly that of an anointed king. The frequent attempts on the part of the people to make Jesus a king, the accusations of treason against Him for rebelling against Cæsar, show how closely connected this idea of kingship was with the thought of the Messiah. If we try to trace this idea to its source, we shall find that it originated in the conception of Theocracy. God Himself was the real King of the Jewish people. The earthly king was merely His deputy.

Possibly we may trace this theocratic idea still further up to a tendency common among ancient Eastern peoples to regard their sovereign as a sort of human deity. The lately discovered Tel-el-Amarna tablets show us to what lengths this notion was sometimes carried. We there see that the common formula, in which the king of Egypt was addressed by the petty kings of Palestine, in the century before the Exodus, was—'To the king my lord, my god, my sun-god, seven times seven do I prostrate myself . . . thy servant, the dust of thy feet.'⁴ That this is not meant as an imaginary act of homage to the gods of Egypt in addition to the king, is clear from the language of the despatches, in which the acts of the Egyptian king are expressly described as the acts of a god. For example, in the despatch of the king of Simyra, an ancient city of Phœnicia, we meet with the following sentence: 'but the god heard the words of the servant of his justice, and the god brought life to his servant, and he inquired into the action of his servant a second time.' In another clause of the same despatch the Egyptian king is called 'the god of heaven and earth.' In another despatch he is called both the Sun-god and the son of the Sun-god. This despatch is short and very characteristic. It

¹ See THE EXPOSITORY TIMES for July 1894.

² *Ibid.* for May and July 1894.

³ Isa. ii. 6.

⁴ This and the following quotations are taken from *Letters from Syria and Palestine*. By A. H. Sayce, M.A. Manchester, 1890.

runs as follows: 'To the king my lord, my gods, my sun-god, the Sun-god who (rises) from the divine heaven is his name! Pitya, of the city of Ashkelon, thy servant, the dust that is beneath thy feet, the groom of thy horses; at the sole of the feet of the king my lord, seven times seven do I fall. Thou art glorious and supreme; and now I guard the place of the king, which (has been entrusted) to me, and all the despatches of the king my lord to me have been obeyed quite fully. But the Calebite has not yet obeyed the command of the king his lord, the son of the Sun-god.' Such language may be regarded as in itself not much more than an extravagant form of court etiquette; but, whatever it may have come to mean, at any rate it points to an original belief that the king himself bore something of a divine character.

Among the Jews this thought was at once more refined and more reverent. The king was under the special protection of God, and acted for God upon earth. This close relationship to God was often expressed by the figure of sonship. We have noticed the occurrence of this thought in one of Tel-el-Amarna despatches, but there it is only an exception. The actual identity of the king with the sun-god is the rule. Not so among the Jews. The promise made to David by Nathan with reference to Solomon, is that God would be his Father, and he God's son,¹ and this thought is emphasised by what is apparently said of a Jewish king in Ps. ii.: 'Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee.' God, as the Lord of all the earth, gives His Son a right to possess even 'the uttermost parts of the earth.' And, if the first clause of the last verse is genuine, they can only appease the anger of God by paying homage to His Son. 'Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish in the way. For His wrath will soon be kindled.' The genuineness of this clause is, however, very uncertain. The chief difficulty is that, while the psalm itself is a specimen of the best classical Hebrew, the first two words are Aramaic. If they are genuine, we shall have to place the date of the psalm very late, whereas both style and contents point to a time, at any rate, before the Exile. The position of the psalm does not in this case help us. Though it occurs in the first book, which was probably the earliest collection of psalms, it probably was not there originally, for, like the first psalm, it has no title. In all probability it was

¹ 2 Sam. vii. 14, 15.

added as an introduction to the first Book, just as the first was added at a far later period to form an introduction to the whole Psalter. On the whole, it is most probable that it belongs to 8-7th centuries, and that the words in question are a later gloss, taking the place, probably, of some illegible words. This would account for the peculiar readings of the versions, *δράξαοθε παιδείας* (lxx.), etc., which cannot have been intended as a paraphrase of the Aramaic words. But if so, the latter can hardly be earlier than the second century.

In the passage of 2 Samuel, already referred to, the thought is more spiritual. What the writer emphasises is the loving care and tenderness of God for His Son. 'If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men. But my mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be made secure for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.' This double thought, the love of God to his kingly son, both in mercy and in correction, is beautifully expanded and commented upon by the Exilic or post-Exilic writer of Ps. lxxxix. The promise made to David is more definitely explained as extending to the royal line in perpetuity. 'His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.' But history had not apparently justified such a promise. The city had been destroyed, the people carried away captive. King and people alike were the scorn of their mighty heathen neighbours. Yet faith would not allow the Psalmist to despair. All this misfortune might be an instance of God's corrective discipline. And so identifying himself with his people, he makes one passionate appeal to God's ancient promise. 'How long, Jahweh, wilt Thou hide Thyself for ever? How long shall Thy wrath burn like fire? O remember how short my time is: For what vanity hast Thou created all the children of men! . . . Jahweh, where are Thy former mercies, which Thou swarest unto David in Thy faithfulness. Remember, Jahweh, the reproach of Thy servants; how I do bear in my bosom the reproach of all the mighty peoples; wherewith thine enemies have reproached, O Lord; wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of Thine anointed.'² In this and other passages of the kind we see a clear distinction between a

² Ps. lxxxix. 20-51. Cf. also Ps. cxxxii. 11, 12; Isa. lv. 3.

glorious vision of a monarch fulfilling the theocratic idea of divine sonship at the head of a righteous and God-loving people, and the actual condition of things in which both prince and nation were suffering for their past sins.

But did the prophets and psalmists foresee a single Person, who would realise this idea, or did they contemplate a succession of such kings as they describe? In all probability it was generally the latter. The apparently individual and personal character of the description was the inevitable result of the form in which the prophetic prediction is generally cast. Their method was to draw pictures of a future scene, rather than to foretell future events. Thus a single king may be actually described, where a succession of kings is really intended. In at least one very remarkable instance we can prove this to have been so. In Jer. xxiii. we have the well-known passage in which the prophet foretells the springing up of a shoot from the fallen trunk of David's house, the righteous King, whose advent Jeremiah expected in close connexion with the Return from the Captivity. 'Behold, the days come, saith Jahweh, that I will raise unto David a righteous shoot, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute judgment and justice in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, "Jahweh is our righteousness."' ¹ If this passage stood alone, we should certainly have supposed that Jeremiah is predicting an individual monarch. But in ch. xxxiii. 14, 15, the prophecy is repeated, and these words are added by way of explanation. 'For thus saith Jahweh, David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel; neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt offerings, and to burn meal offerings, and to do sacrifice continually.' ² From this it would seem evident that Jeremiah himself contemplated a succession of kings and a succession of priests.

But the genuineness of the whole section has been much disputed, partly because of its omission by the LXX. and partly because we see in it a more priestly tone than Jeremiah generally adopts. It is, however, quite possible that the first may have arisen through that attempt of the LXX., or some earlier scribes, to revise the order which we find also in other chapters, namely, 46-51.

¹ Jer. xxiii. 5, 6.

² Jer. xxxiii. 17, 18.

Its similarity to the earlier prophecy may have caused it by some rearrangement of this kind to slip out of the text. As to the second objection, it must be borne in mind that Jeremiah took his start, so to speak, from a religious Reformation inaugurated by the Priests; and he was certainly not wanting in priestly sympathies. At anyrate, two things are perfectly clear: (1) The writer is here avowedly explaining and expanding the prophecy of ch. xxiii. He now declares that the prophecy would be fulfilled (*a*) in connexion with the Return from the Captivity, (*b*) by a restoration of the royal line of David, (*c*) by a rehabilitation of the priesthood also. There is nothing to imply that the High Priest is put on a level with the King, or indeed that a High Priest, in the Levitical sense of the word, is contemplated. (2) There are many points which connect this section with Jeremiah. For example, the promise in vers. 17, 18, with its characteristic phrase, 'shall never want a man,' recalls the similar promise to Jonadab, the son of Rechab, in ch. xxxv. 19. Again, the identification of the Priests and Levites in vers. 18-22 is just what we should expect in Jeremiah's time, when the Levites had not yet been degraded from the priestly rank and mark to perform menial offices.³ Putting these two facts together, we may say that, even if Jeremiah did not write the section, the passage shows what interpretation was put upon Jeremiah's prophecy in ch. xxiii. by one who belonged to his school, and was almost his contemporary. But even if the prophets did not in every case, and possibly did not in any case, predict a single Messianic King, they at least prepared the way for the thought. A perfect Ideal suggested a perfect Being who should fulfil the Ideal. And thus, if not by direct prophetic prediction, we find that the hope of a single Messianic King became deeply rooted in the heart of the Jewish people. In one passage at least⁴ the future King is compared to the Angelic Representative of God, who is said to have led the Israelites in the wilderness. 'In that day will Jahweh defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of Jahweh before them.' I need not remind students of the Pentateuch that 'the angel of Jahweh' is described

³ Cf. Deut. xvii. 9, xxiv. 8, with Ezek. xliv. 10-14.

⁴ Zech. xii. 8.

as no ordinary angel, but as a personal embodiment of the Divine Being Himself.¹ If a large number of commentators are right in saying that what is said of the angel of Jahweh is a feeling after the doctrine of the Incarnation, then we shall be regarding this as one of the most striking predictions of the God-King. It is important, however, to bear in mind that even here the words 'House of David' seem to point to a succession of God-like kings.

But the language of the unique prophecy of Isaiah ix. is bolder still. It cannot be seriously doubted that the words, 'The mighty God, the everlasting Father,' are intended for actual titles of the King. So completely did this King on earth represent Almighty God, that some of the highest titles of God could be given Him. The words 'everlasting Father' have proved to some a very serious theological difficulty. But what reason have we to expect in Isaiah the theological exactness of the Nicene Council? The use of the word 'Father' at all, had Isaiah intended by it to express the relation of God the Father to the eternal Son, would have been indeed a strange anachronism. But what word could more forcibly and tenderly express that almighty love of God, which would be seen in the Person and actions of the Great King? In contemplating the Ideal King, the prophet is inspired with thoughts which in their completeness could only be realised in an Incarnate God.

A far more common conception is that Jahweh would take the place of the earthly king. This is especially frequent in the last period of the Jewish monarchy, when the weak and worldly character of the kings made the prophets at times give up all hopes of the Davidic family. I have already quoted a passage in which Jeremiah foretells the perpetuity of the Davidic kings and of the Levitic priests. This, if in its true place, was written during the siege of Jerusalem. But at an earlier period he speaks in a different tone. In ch. iii. 16-37 he foretells a time when the presence of God as King would supersede not only the kingdom, but apparently the priesthood also. 'And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith Jahweh, they shall say no more. The ark of the covenant of Jahweh, neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither

shall they visit it; neither shall it be made any more. At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of Jahweh; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of Jahweh, to Jerusalem.' We find the same thought in the probably contemporary writer of Zechariah xiv.,² who speaks of a time when the remnant of all nations would be compelled to go up every year to Jerusalem to worship the King, Jahweh of hosts.'³

I have hitherto spoken of the personality of the king. Let us now see what the prophets have to say of his work and character. We find him described frequently as a mighty conqueror subduing his enemies on all hands, and bringing distant countries under his authority. I have already referred to Psalm ii. But, perhaps, the most typical instance is the so-called psalm of Solomon, 'He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the River unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him.'⁴ It may be objected that such psalms are not predictions of a future king, but descriptions of one who was actually reigning at the time. This is probably true in many cases, but it is equally true that the descriptions which they give did not yet apply to the reigning sovereign, but rather to the ideal of sovereignty for which they were hoping and praying, an ideal thrown farther and farther into the future as king after king failed to realise it.

Again, the reign of the king is to be a reign of peace and security under divine protection. Isaiah, in ch. ix., calls the king a prince of peace, and speaks of the soldiers' clothes and boots being burnt for fuel of fire. Similarly in Zech. ix. a prophet predicts a time when God would cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle-bow would be cut off, and the king would speak peace unto the nations. In this last passage the king's character and habits are described as a return to the simplicity of primitive times. 'He is to be meek, and riding upon an ass.'⁵

² Some critics, however, put the prophecies much later.

³ Zech. xiv. 16, 17.

⁴ Ps. lxxii. 8-11.

⁵ Zech. ix. 9, 10; cf. Judg. v. 10, x. 4, xii. 14.

¹ See, e.g., Ex. xxiii. 21.

Above all, the rule of the king is to be distinguished by perfect equity and perfect kindness. In the seventy-second psalm we have a beautiful description of the king's government. 'For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor that hath no helper. He shall have pity on the poor and needy, and the souls of the needy he shall save. He shall redeem their soul from oppression and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight.' So gentle and beneficent are his words and actions that they are like the 'rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water

the earth.' And from them would spring up a fruitful crop of righteousness and peace.¹

A king divine in power, divine in glory, divine in love and justice, mighty to conquer and mighty to save. Such was the vision of the prophets and psalmists, a vision seen but dimly *even by them* through the earthly halo in which their imagination clothed it. Can we altogether wonder if the Jewish people failed to recognise the object of prophetic vision in the lowly greatness of the Carpenter of Nazareth?

¹ Ps. lxxii. 6, 7, 12, 13.

Sermonettes on the Golden Texts.

BY THE REV. R. C. FORD, M.A., GRIMSBY.

Religious Excitement.

'Hosanna: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.'—MARK xi. 9.

THIS is the utterance of people who were carried away by their enthusiasm. Jerusalem was at this time full of pilgrims. Only the ardent ones go on pilgrimage. The colder ones remained at home to attend to their business. The exciting cause was the raising of Lazarus. 'For this cause the people also met Him, for that they heard that He had done this miracle.' The words with which they salute Jesus are those of the pilgrim psalm, which would often be on their lips while in Jerusalem. When our emotions are strong, we still fall back on psalms and hymns as the fittest expression of our feelings.

I. ALL ARE SUBJECT TO RELIGIOUS EXCITEMENT.—The most earnest were first affected. As they swept along all classes were drawn into the current. Nothing attracts like enthusiasm. It was the enthusiasm and abandonment of the first disciples which won the world. A religious revival leaves few people untouched,—only Pharisees and Sadducees and their modern representatives. A successful and honoured evangelist says that he delights to labour in a district where there has been no revival. Here he can be sure of moving men.

II. SUCH EXCITEMENT REVEALS THE INNER NATURE.—It was a spontaneous movement. None but Christ calculated on it. Chords were struck in the hearts of many which seldom were moved.

'Hosanna' means 'Save, I beseech Thee.' They welcomed Christ as One come 'in the name' that is, with the authority and power, of God, in order to save them from the tyranny of their enemies. The welcome given was prompted by the secret hopes which it revealed. He who had raised the dead could free them from tyranny. When we have Christ's power displayed in the life of some good man, we are ready to cry, 'Hosanna.' We long for him to come as King to overthrow the evil power which enthalls us.

III. AND IS A PROPHECY OF THE FUTURE.—It was but a momentary gleam of devotion, but it was a truer utterance than the 'Crucify Him' of a few days later. Unless we carefully treasure the memory and results of exalted inspiration, we are in danger of losing faith in our own religious experience. Yet what we desire in our inmost hearts to be, that we potentially are. Our aspirations and prayers are prophecies of our future. We have now but moments of holiness and hours of sin; and though a long period may be required, if we retain our sincerity of desire, the moments will grow to hours, and the hours shrink to moments, until Christ is all, and sin has disappeared.

Christ, the Awakener.

'Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.'—I COR. xv. 20.

THE dead are often spoken of as sleepers. 'Some are fallen asleep.' The fact of death is so terrible