



A KING FOR ISRAEL

A hundred years ago the word Israel, in the minds of those who thought about it, stood for the name of an ancient people who lived alongside the Assyrians and the Babylonians and who like them have passed into history. Remembered mostly from school days because they were said to have passed through the Red Sea miraculously; to have been fed in the wilderness with bread from heaven; to have discovered a shepherd lad named David who slew a giant twice his size; to have set up a kingdom with some of the best laws the world has ever known and to have been ruled once by a king who was supposed to be the wisest man in the world. Then eventually, like the Babylonians and the Assyrians, they were conquered, captured and dispersed and became a nation lost in the past. So a hundred years ago Israel stood for something historical and of particular interest to those who like looking into and digging up the past.

Today, the word Israel has a very different significance. It stands for and describes a sovereign nation, recognised by almost every other nation —gladly by many and reluctantly by some; a nation at the heart of international affairs and in the centre of world events; a nation of over three million, gathered from all over the world and welded into one community. The ancient name is suddenly on the front pages of the newspapers; the people of Israel-loved, hated, feared and respected —are in the modern world just as they were in the ancient world. Suddenly this old word Israel is on everybody's lips.

Where did the word come from in the first place?

Whether you like it or not, in order to answer that query it will be necessary to go to the Bible, for there alone the story of Israel is found. It tells of Jacob, the grandson of the first Hebrew man, Abraham. Jacob left home for the first time when he was over 40 years of age. He departed in a hurry because he was at loggerheads with his brother Esau over the family inheritance. He had impersonated the elder twin and from his blind father had secured the blessing which by inheritance should have come to Esau. So in order to escape his wronged brother's wrath he left home in haste, to go to his relatives in Paran and find a place of refuge until the trouble at home had died down. The Bible says that during the course of that journey to Paran, Jacob received a message from God in a dream. The message was in fact a comprehensive and far reaching promise - God said to him:

'I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shall spread abroad to the West, and to the East, and to the North, and to the South: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of!' (Genesis 28:13-15) Evidently Jacob was deeply moved by his experience in the dream and sensed the nearness of God, for fearfully he called the place Bethel - 'the house of God'.

Jacob came to Paran and made his home with his uncle, Laban, and eventually married and settled down. The promise made by God to him at Bethel began to come true. Everything he did prospered-he became rich and his family increased- but as is so often the case, with the riches there came also difficulties. He had to face jealousy, envy and guile, and he became weary of the friction and the intrigue. After 20 years God spoke to Jacob again and said, 'I am the God of Bethel ... get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred!' So Jacob, probably with relief, turned his face homewards towards Beersheba. But here was one snag in the otherwise happy prospect. Going home meant going through the land of Seir and that meant having to face something he had dreaded for 20 years —meeting his wronged brother Esau. Because Jacob was an astute, clever man, he made preparations to appease the anger of his brother; nothing was left undone which could ward off the danger and so he went forward hoping for the best.

Here is an interesting thing: Jacob, rich, successful, confident, by today's standards a tycoon, was desperately afraid of his brother. A man of complete assurance, was in this one respect a man of anxiety. In this spirit he began the journey and during the course of that journey a strange and mysterious thing occurred. The Bible says that when Jacob stood alone at night near Jabbok no doubt thinking about the problems that lay ahead of him, an angel of God met him and wrestled with him. The record is in Genesis chapter 32. If there is a temptation to reject the narrative because it is in the

Bible, then it should be understood that it will be necessary to reject the only explanation of how the word Israel came into existence. The record says that Jacob and the messenger from God wrestled all through the night. As dawn was breaking when Jacob was at the end of his tether, he spoke to the messenger and said: 'I will not let you go, unless you bless me!' We know now, from the testimony of the Hebrew prophet Hosea, that the words were spoken with a voice full of sobbing and choked with tears (Hosea 12:4). In response to Jacob's plea the man of God said:

'What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And the man of God said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.' (Genesis 32:27-28).

Here is where the name Israel began. It was destined to become the name of a nation then unborn.

The changing of the name was part of the blessing for which Jacob had pleaded. The old name Jacob told of what he had been; the new name was to be a description of what he could become. Jacob means 'supplanter' and it fitted the man who had supplanted his brother Esau in the matter of the family birthright. Israel means 'prevailing with God' but it goes deeper than that, for men cannot prevail over God in the usual meaning of the word. The only way in which men can in any sense prevail or gain strength with God is when they submit to God. A man comes to success on this level of activity when he is beaten. Jacob was crippled in the course of the wrestling and he was never the same again, for he was a limping man ever after. But in the crippling he was somehow healed. In being made weaker he was strengthened. Jacob prevailed in the outward physical sense, but inwardly in the spiritual sense he was mastered—and therefore blessed—because when a man is mastered by God he is a better and nobler man. So it was with Jacob. He was to go softly all his days. Physically and inwardly he would be a gentler, humbler man—not overnight, but gradually, step by faltering step. So, on the understanding that Israel told of what Jacob would become, Israel means *God mastered*—for that he was.

The definition can be tested in another way. The ordinary translation gives the meaning 'He shall rule with God'-but according to S. R. Driver in a Hebrew and English Lexicon (Oxford Clarendon) the sentence would be perfectly correct Hebrew the other way round; that is with God as the subject ruling over Jacob. Indeed Driver's own translation is 'God persisteth!' It has to be remembered that when seeking to understand Bible words it is not just a matter of taking the meaning of this dictionary or that but also of bearing in mind the ideas, usages and feelings of the scriptural text and context. By this measurement one of the important meanings of Israel is *God Governed*.

The real issue to note is that the new name Israel was to forecast the destiny of those who were to be Jacob's children. Just as Jacob as an individual became God governed

and, being so, prevailed with men, so the people of Israel were to become God governed and prevail over all nations. Jacob was the forefather of a great company of people through whom all the nations of the earth are to be blessed. Just as Jacob met Esau and instead of fear and distress there was peace and concord, so at last through the descendants of Israel true peace will come to the world. To be true to the name of Israel is to be under the government of God.

GOD IS KING

The next step is to ponder what that really means.

The Bible claims to be the Word of God to men. It is the writing of His will for the benefit of humanity. When it is read with an honest mind and an open heart it is evident that its central theme is the government of God. It is God's purpose that one day the rule of heaven shall be established on earth. In the Bible that rule of God is never described in terms of a republic, but always in terms of kingship. The Lord of Israel *is* King—he is not a President. The Old Testament is full of the idea of God as King. The Hebrew psalms are particularly revealing in this respect.

‘The Lord is King for ever and ever: the nations are perished out of his land’.
(Psalm 10:16).

‘Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob!’ (Psalm 44:4).

‘For the Lord is our defence; and the Holy One of Israel is our King!’ (Psalm 89:18).

When the fortress of Jerusalem was taken by David it became the place of his throne, the city of King David. He was then the anointed representative of the Divine government, the visible evidence of God's kingship in the midst of Israel. All this is in harmony with the new name which was given to Jacob by God at Jabbok, the high purpose of God with the children of Jacob, that they should be God governed, a nation with a Divine King through whom at last all nations would be blessed. Today in the midst of a world where earthly government is revealed as weak, corrupt and incompetent, as monarchs are dethroned and exiled, the ancient destiny of Israel is recognised by the sudden new appearance of the old name among the nations of the earth. Here, in Israel, is an expression to the world of God's kingship, and of His purpose to accomplish in that land the great promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

THE TRIUMPH OF ISRAEL

The prophets of Israel in the Old Testament look forward prophetically and hopefully to the day when the government of God will be established permanently in Israel and

over all the earth. They tell of the time to come when a King shall reign in Jerusalem and the law of God shall go forth from Zion. This king is to reign with divine wisdom and by the exercise of godly judgment. According to Isaiah he is to be in the royal line of David, administering the government with unerring righteousness;

‘And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked’.’ (Isaiah 11:1-4). The same good news of God’s government through the divinely appointed ruler is discovered in the words of Jeremiah:

‘Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS’.’ (Jeremiah 23:5-6).

Quite plainly this refers to the coming of the Hebrew Messiah, the one who will cause Judah to be saved and Israel to dwell safely. Psalm 72 celebrates the exaltation of Israel’s King and the blessing of all nations and tells of the oppressed being delivered and the oppressors being destroyed, the hungry being fed and the weary being succoured—all because at last the government of God is triumphant in Israel and in the world, through the reigning of God’s king, resulting in God’s glory filling the earth.

Quite evidently this foretelling of the triumph of Israel in their Messiah has not happened so far; but notice how wonderfully it harmonises with the promises to Jacob, the supplanter who was destined to become a prince under the government of God. The testimonies could be multiplied many times and the visions which the old Hebrew prophets describe are breathtaking for those who look for salvation in Israel. One such vision is in Isaiah 2:

‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not

lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more' (Isaiah 2:2-4).

This blessed condition which the prophet describes, when the nations once fear-filled and war-mad, will be at last at peace never to war again will be brought into existence by the strong government of Israel's Messiah, God's anointed and appointed King. When this comes to pass then the long waiting of the centuries will be ended; then the hopes and expectations of the people of God will be realised. The sole and absolute monarch of the earth will lead the nations to that co-operation with God and with each other which will bring about peace on earth and an Israel at rest. This prophet gives cause for rejoicing to all those who long for peace and for the bringing into the world of right values and pure motives. But it gives cause for fear to all those who are bent on harming and hurting the people of God and who wantonly destroy the earth. Evidently the Messiah will be at war with those who seek to enslave and crush the burdened people of the world. He will be at war with those who cause people to be hungry, weary and downtrodden. He will rule with that blessed wisdom of God which cares truly and purely for the lifting of all burdens and the ending of all sorrow and the establishment of assurance and joy where once there was fear and misery. This Messiah is not merely a dictator, ruthless and despotic. He is going to change the world and the world's peoples by the essential things of the spirit. He will appeal to men's minds and hearts. He will not only be a king wielding blessed authority, but a priest leading and changing and teaching men how to live rightly and joyfully.

THE GLORY OF THE MESSIAH

Those who believe the Hebrew prophets have no doubt where the Hebrew Messiah will come from. He is, first of all, to be of the seed (offspring) of Abraham. When God called Abraham out of Chaldea to be the father of a great multitude certain promises were given to him which changed his name and his life. God promised Abraham everlasting possession of the land which was then called Canaan and is now known as Israel. He was to have a seed who would possess the gate of his enemies and through whom all nations would be blessed. Although the seed referred to a great multitude of people, it had a special reference to one, for the promise said: 'Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies' (Genesis 22:17). This is an oriental expression which means that the seed would be triumphant over his enemies, and consequently become ruler of the world and the means of universal blessing. Just as Jacob's name was changed so as to forecast the coming of God's government, so Abram's had been also. First of all he was named *Abram*— which means *exalted father*. After he was called by God, he was renamed Abraham, which means *Father of a Multitude*. The childless man was to become father of many nations and the forerunner of the Messianic seed—the King of the Hebrews. Abraham never possessed the land of promise, and Abraham's seed has not yet possessed the gate of his enemies. God's king is not yet set upon his holy hill of Zion. But one day, and perhaps soon, these things will come to pass, because the promise is sure. In addition to being the seed of Abraham, Israel's Messiah is to be of the royal house of David and of the regal tribe

of Judah. God made this promise to King David emphatically.

‘And it shall come to pass, when thy days be expired that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will raise up thy seed after thee. which shall be of thy sons: and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build me an house, and I will stablish his throne *for ever*. I will be his father, and he shall be my son: and I will not take my mercy away from him, as I took it from him that was before thee: But I will settle him in mine house and in my kingdom *for ever*: and his throne shall be established for evermore. According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David’.’ (1 Chronicles 17:11-15).

Mark the absolute nature of this promise. It was not something related to the next few years or a couple of decades; it had to do with the throne of David endlessly; it was a promise without end. There are those, of course, who say that the promise was fulfilled in the coming of Solomon to the throne of Israel; but it has to be remembered that years after Solomon’s reign the inspired prophets of Israel were speaking of the covenant with David as though it was still future and unfulfilled. One good example of this is in Isaiah chapter 9:

‘For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this’.’ (Isaiah 9:6-7).

This son was certainly not Solomon, though the throne referred to was certainly David’s. Notice one thing: God’s government is to be on his shoulder and he, the government bearer, is to be on the throne of Israel.

So the prophets and singers and seers of Israel have told and foretold the glory of the Messiah and have measured with solemn and reverent sentences his high destiny. His coming is to be the Day of the Lord; the polestar of Israel’s longing; the realisation of Israel’s hope and expectation. Because God has willed to enthrone him, nothing can dethrone him. He is to be exalted before his people and in the sight of all nations. His exaltation, promised so surely by God, is the assurance to men that all the blessed advantages which will be in his right hand will be outpoured upon broken and bruised humanity. So the Government of God, once promised through the wrestling man at Jabbok, will come to pass in the world, for ever.

THE MISSION OF THE MESSIAH

The nature of the Messiah’s mission is clear and unmistakable, according to the

messages delivered to Israel by the prophets. When he comes he will deliver the people of God from their enemies, establish them firmly and safely in their own land and bring them peace and prosperity for all time. Quite plainly this has not happened yet—but just as plainly it needs to happen. Israel needs her Messiah. Israel the republic needs to become Israel the kingdom. Israel, the nation, exists but its position is precarious. It is surrounded by enemies bent upon its destruction. It has awakened against itself the enmity of some very powerful forces—forces which would not hesitate to move against Israel if the moment was right for victory. There are people crying peace today who would not hold back from plunging the world into war if they thought they could win decisively. The Middle East is like a time-bomb with a frighteningly sensitive detonator. Vietnam, Korea, Africa are places of dispute and danger, like festering sores upon the conscience of the world, but the real centre of power and confrontation is the Middle East. There, three great continents converge; there the energy of the modern industrial world is concentrated; there is buried the wealth which can make or break strong nations. The two great power blocs face each other across the mountains and valleys of Israel. Seven hundred and fifty miles of frontier and peril is poised at every point of the compass. In the land of promise there may well be confidence and self assurance, but it is no defence against the combined forces of hatred and enmity which wait and watch for the downfall of the chosen race.

Here is something to ponder. The Messiah is to come to the nation of Israel at a time when they are in great jeopardy. This has not been possible until now. If the Messiah had come in 1875 there would have been no nation and no national jeopardy. Only during the past 30 years has the right situation developed. Israel have been gathered to their own land to meet their King. They have been assembled in order to be saved. The prophet Isaiah echoes the agony of their need and the joy of their deliverance:

‘And God will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation’.’ (Isaiah 25:7-9).

Catch the pathos in those words yet to be spoken: ‘This is our God, we have waited for him ...’ Yes indeed, waited through the long years of exile and execration; waited in the face of cursing and malediction; waited under anathema and reproach, hounded, tortured, deprived. Men thought they did God service by their relentless persecution of the Jews. O how they have waited! But now the hour of the Hebrew redeemer is at hand. In harmony with the graphic prophecy of his spirit-filled prophets, God has gathered His people from the four corners of the earth into one nation, into the land of Abraham, where Isaac was a pilgrim, where Jacob became Israel. Never in the whole realm of Biblical prophecy is there a more marvellous example of God fulfilling His

declared and documented purpose. Jeremiah tells it with words which make the heart sing with new hope:

‘Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock. For the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he. Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the LORD, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all. (Jeremiah 31:10-12).

THE VALUE OF PROPHECY

There are those who are openly sceptical of Bible prophecy. They complain that it is sometimes so general and vague that it cannot help but come true sooner or later. When it is precise and is precisely fulfilled they say it must have been written after the events to which it claims to relate. It is almost impossible to establish any kind of conviction in the face of this kind of prejudice. But occasionally the fulfilment is so startling that it cannot be denied by the open minded and must impress even the sceptical. Consider this example. In the year 1848 a Bible student named John Thomas, a Christadelphian, wrote a book called *Elpis Israel* (The Hope of Israel) in which he sought to interpret the Hebrew prophets insofar as they testify to the development and destiny of Israel as a nation. From his understanding of these prophecies he foresaw and predicted certain important world events, including:

1. —The dwindling and disappearance of the Turkish empire and the drying up of Turkish power.
2. —The establishment of the nation of Israel in Palestine, to be accomplished under the protection and with the help of Great Britain.
3. —The formation of two great world power blocs, one supporting and the other opposing Israel.
4. —That one of these power blocs would descend upon the nation of Israel after her restoration, with the intention of spoiling and destroying it and that the confederacy of nations engaged upon this aggression would be led by Russia.

John Thomas’s understanding of events proved wonderfully accurate, and the wonder is intensified by the fact that at the time he made his forecast everything appeared to be against it. Recall the position of the nations in 1848. The United States of America had hardly entered into European politics at all. It was still developing the Middle West and externally was pursuing an isolationist policy. It was a western power but

not a world power and in 1848 was fighting a war in Mexico. Russia was a reactionary nation but, relative to its size, a weak one, ruled over by a decadent imperial family and in many respects ill governed. Turkey, although named the 'sick man of Europe', was still in control in the Middle East and dominated Asia Minor. Egypt was a satellite of Turkey. Turkey occupied Palestine and there was but a handful of Jews in the Holy Land. They were despised and persecuted. Because the Turkish power was in some respects in decline, the policy of Great Britain under Lord Palmerston was to support and bolster Turkey, the arch enemy of Israel for so long. Great Britain followed this policy as a defence against the power of European empires, which Lord Palmerston feared. There was no nation of Israel and the Jews were scattered over the world. In these seemingly unlikely circumstances John Thomas, enlarging his understanding of such sections of the Bible as Ezekiel chapters 37 to 39, Daniel chapter 11 and Zechariah chapter 14, was able to indicate precisely the situation which has emerged in the Middle East in the last 30 years.

Since the prophets have proved so dependable thus far, would it not be sensible to mark and pay heed to their forecast of things which are soon to burst forth upon the world? John Thomas believed that according to Israel's prophets, at the time when the newly restored nation appears to dwell safely it will be invaded by the alliance of the anti-Israel forces and the result will be a death struggle between the nations in the place where human civilisation began. The holy city of Jerusalem will be besieged and the defenders driven back. In the onslaught the city will be taken, the associated forces of godlessness will move to the final stroke for victory over the broken armies of Israel. In the moment when all appears to be lost, when all hope is abandoned and resistance is ended, the greatest event of all time will happen: the Messiah will appear and will save his people from their enemies. The forces bent upon the destruction of the chosen people will themselves be defeated. His enemies shall lick the dust. Israel will cry: 'This is our God, we have waited for him and he will save us ...!' His salvation will involve the repudiation of many things in Israel which are unholy and unworthy of his kingship. He will purge the people and cleanse the land. He will make them recognise their failure and admit their shame. This is the word of Ezekiel in chapter 39 after the dramatic saving of the people of God. Thus said the Lord God:

'Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD: Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name; after that they have borne their shame, and all their trespasses whereby they have trespassed against me, when they dwelt safely in their land, and none made them afraid. When I have brought them again from the people, and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations; then shall they know that I am the LORD their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen, but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there. Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD'.' (Ezekiel 39:25-29).

IDENTIFYING THE KING

One vital question has now to be faced. Who is the King and where does he come from?

No apology is needed for this question. For he is Jesus, the Man of Nazareth, the son of Mary, the man of the seamless robe. No honest Israelite ought to brush the proposal aside lightly. Over 1,900 years ago a distinguished Israelite had to face this proposition and he formulated a test by which to reach a decision. He was a rabbi, and a doctor of the Jewish Law. He gave his considered advice to the senate and council of Israel upon the best way of meeting the challenge of the Hebrew followers of Jesus of Nazareth. The rabbi's name was Gamaliel and this was his advice:

‘And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men (the followers of Jesus), and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go!’ (Acts 5:38-40).

Evidently those who were members of the council —the wise men of Israel —thought that this test was sensible. They had seen other men rise up in Israel claiming to be the Messiah, causing a stir and gathering support; but upon the death of the leader and the scattering of the followers, the campaign was regarded as imposture and the claim was consequently disproved. Any aspiring Messiah who passed into obscurity was proved a pretender. Such was the argument of Gamaliel, if this Man of Nazareth is a pretender and his cause is purely human, it will come to nought, but if it be divine then nothing will quench it. The formula was sane and sensible and those Jewish senators realised it.

The test was applied to all the other claimants to the Messiahship; why should it not be applied to the Nazarene? Taking Gamaliel's measurement, has the work of this man come to nought? If Judas of Galilee and Theudas must be rejected because their causes just died out, what can be said of Jesus of Nazareth?

It has been said that the record of Jesus' life and his work is a fabrication; that the New Testament narratives are fiction; that after all he was only imagined by some zealous chronicler. Measured simply by the testimony of human scholarship, his reality is vouched for by such writers as Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, Juvenal and Pliny. What character of ancient history can attract as much support from secular historians? If he was imagined then, the man who imagined him must have been a marvellous person. Thousands of Jews, including priests and rabbis were converted to the new faith in the early Christian era; it is said that the new religion turned the world upside down; it is beyond dispute that countless lives have been changed by this

man's teaching; the world was never the same again after his appearance in Galilee; his life has left its mark indelibly upon humanity.

If, after all, the whole thing is a fraud and the testimony is a fiction, then some hard questions have to be faced. First of all it means that the greatest force which the world has ever known for changing darkness into light and for the ennoblement of human character on all levels has been generated by a continual proclamation of things which are false; that by a systematic repetition of a lie so much of what men feel to be true in their deepest heart has flourished and prospered; that the righteousness which is displayed and incarnated in the life of this man was based on a conception which was wholly invented or foolishly mistaken; that so much purity, faith and courage has come out of so much faithfulness and misrepresentation. Nobody in their right mind can say his work has come to naught, but can its effect honestly be attributed to deceit and a cruel campaign of falsehood? If his followers were grossly deceived, would not their naivety sooner or later have been exposed? If they were simply artless, would not stronger minds have analysed their weak perception?

If on the other hand they were deliberately artful, and initiated and extended the deception themselves, why on earth should they do it and what benefit did they get from it? It brought them only persecution, hardship and a martyr's death in many cases. If they had been honoured by the rulers and acclaimed by the people, it might justify the continuance of the fraud, but the more they published it the more they awakened against themselves the anger and hatred of bad men and brutal government. Human nature being what it is, men tend to give up a knowingly invented story if it leads them into pain and poverty, but in this case they did not give up. Facing the hardship they clung tenaciously to the story.

THE RING OF TRUTH

Then if it is all false and fabricated there is the problem of how the actual deception was master minded and contrived, bearing in mind the remarkable way in which the New Testament narrative so well fulfils the Old Testament pattern. Take the matter of prophecy about the Messiah, revealed in the Hebrew scriptures and portrayed in the narrative of Jesus. There are about 100 references of a prophetic kind to the coming of the Messiah, outlined in the Old Testament, ranging from 1,000 to 500 years before the Christian era. There is here no question of the prophecy being written after the fulfilment. That fulfilment is remarkable and to have contrived it would have been a mammoth task for a genius, but an impossible task for such men as were followers of the Nazarene. The Galilean fishermen were not that astute and it is they and their companions which tell the fulfilling story. Take some examples:

He was born exactly at the time Daniel the prophet had foretold in the now famous 70 weeks prophecy, near the end of the 490 years described in verse 25 of Daniel chapter 9. The value of terminal dates depends almost exclusively on the accuracy of

commencing dates when *a* known period of time is involved. In this case there is unanimity about the starting date of the 70 weeks or 490 years period: it was when the commandment went forth to rebuild Jerusalem. Artaxerxes was king at Shushan; Ezra was Jewish priest, and the command was given according to chronologists in 456-457 BC. Making allowance for the age of Jesus when he died —33 years —the exact period to his death was 490 years, which is precisely what Daniel predicted. This is how the people of Israel understood the prophecy and therefore those with discerning minds knew that historically the period had come when the Messiah should appear. Doubtless that is why so many pretenders arose just at that time. Among those pretenders was one who was true.

He was born at the place foretold by Micah —again in accordance with the understanding of informed Israelites, at Bethlehem:

‘But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting’ (Micah 5:2).

This testifies he was to be of the tribe of Judah; and Jesus was, in fact, of that tribe.

He was to be virgin born. The reference is in Isaiah chapter 7 verse 14. Controversy has raged around the translation of the Hebrew word *almah* (virgin). Rejectors of the Bethlehem child assert that it means young woman and no more. That it certainly refers to a young woman there is no doubt, but in addition there is this: in all the six cases where it is used in the Old Testament it is not only used of young women but at the same time of the fact that they are young *and unmarried*. But there is something else to mark. According to the prophet Isaiah in the passage in question, the event was to be a sign to the people of Israel:

‘Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel’ (Isaiah 7:14).

It would have been no sign for a young woman to bear a child in the normal way; that would have been so usual as to be insignificant. But if a virgin conceived, it would have been utterly unique and unquestionably identifiable as a sign from heaven. Furthermore the name of the child revealed in the same verse is highly significant: Immanuel, ‘God with us’. This is central to the whole matter. It was not that Jesus did not have a father, but that his Father was God. This the angel Gabriel said and this Jesus eventually claimed.

The nature of the sufferings and death, told so graphically by the New Testament writers, agree precisely with the foreshadowing of Isaiah in his 53rd chapter. It will be contended no doubt that this chapter in Isaiah is not Messianic and has some other interpretation, but such a view would be in opposition to some notable and revered

rabbis in Israel, say 1,900 years ago. It does appear that the tendency to regard Isaiah chapter 53 as non-messianic has come about since there was a need to counter the claims of Jesus of Nazareth. Before that was necessary, the clearly Messianic nature of the chapter was never doubted.

Jonathan ben Uzziel, a rabbi who lived just before the time of Jesus, commented upon the 52nd and 53rd chapters of Isaiah and applied them without question to the Messiah to come. So did Solomon ben Isaac. Later on a rabbi named Jarki, in about the 12th century wrote on Isaiah 53 and applied the words directly to the Messiah: 'He was wounded for our transgressions and he seeks mercy for them, when they sin, as it is written, 'And by his stripes we are healed; and he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors'.' Then there is the evidence of rabbi Moses Alschech (15th century) in his references to Isaiah chapter 53. He writes: 'Our rabbis with one mouth have reverently received by tradition that King Messiah is here spoken of'.' According to Isaiah the Messiah was to be despised, acquainted with grief and sorrow, afflicted, wounded and beaten, led like a lamb to the slaughter and be meek and unrebelling before his captors as is a lamb before the shearers. He was to be executed with criminals and buried in a rich man's grave. According to the Psalmist of Israel he was to be betrayed by a friend (Psalm 41:9), sold for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:13), have his garments parted and shared by casting lots (Psalm 22:18), and to cry out in thirst in his last dying moments (Psalm 69:21). According to the witnesses of the New Testament this foreshadowing all came to pass at last. As the prophets told it, so it came to pass.

Are we to suppose it was all contrived? Are we to believe that through collusion between dozens of scattered witnesses the story was all invented? The writers are part of the narrative and they insert into the account their own feelings and their own failings. Men who were inventing a story would have portrayed themselves better. The very honesty of the account bears testimony to its truth. There is about it a ring of openness and sincerity which cannot lightly be set aside. The central figure of the drama is so profound a character as to be worthy of the high destiny of being the King of Israel. He moved the hearts of some of Israel's men and women as they had never been moved before.

MESSIAH-THE PROPHET

That the Messiah is to be King and Priest is certain, measured by the evidence of the Old Testament. But a third ministry is indicated for Israel's King-Priest—he is to be a prophet. The proof is in the word of God through Moses to Israel:

'The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken ... and I will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him'.' (Deuteronomy 18:15,18).

Israelites living at the time the Messiah was expected took these verses and applied them directly to the one who was destined to lead the people to freedom and liberty. Moses temporarily led the people, but Messiah would do so fully and finally. But quite apart from any interpretation of these verses, can it be conceived that the one who by God is appointed King and Priest would be denied the status of a prophet. He is in the absolute sense God's messenger. He, more than any other, is called to unravel the secret things of God's purpose, to promote the spiritual progress of God's people, and to lay the measurement of heaven upon earthly things. The very nature of Messiah's calling demands he be a prophet.

Part of a prophet's ministry is to forthtell the future; he pronounces the purpose of God in advance. How can you be sure the prophet is true? The test is clearly indicated in the same chapter where God announced the coming of the Messiah-Prophet.

‘When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken, but the prophet has spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him’ (Deuteronomy 18:22).

Conversely, if the prophet's words come to pass it proves he is genuine. It gives authority to his word and his status. Let this measurement be applied to the one man who claimed to be King, Priest and Prophet —the Man of Galilee. He sat once on Mount Olivet within sight of the Temple and pronounced the purpose of God in advance. The record is in Matthew's gospel chapter 24 and Jesus was speaking of the impending destruction of the Temple his disciples had just admired. In response to that they asked him a question (verse 3):

‘Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? (Matthew 24:3).

The words ‘these things’ refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, about which they had just been speaking. Two questions were contained in the one sentence: 1 —When is Jerusalem to be destroyed? 2 —What shall be the sign of thy coming and the end of the world —or age? The important principle to observe is that in making his reply Jesus is answering both questions at once and the reply is such as to interweave the events of 70 AD with the events at his second coming. In other words we are here introduced to a principle well known to Bible students, the principle of duality, where things once spoken are twice true; firstly in a local and restricted sense, and then finally in a universal and complete sense. With this in mind mark the reply of Jesus:

‘And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened’ (Matthew 24:22).

Jesus is saying that unless something happens to halt the process of the tribulation,

everybody would be destroyed. In fact this proved to be true of the beleaguered city of Jerusalem in 70 AD. There was a mysterious halting of the siege, which is now a matter of history, and some of the inhabitants of the city did escape to the hills. The point to notice is that what was true in the local restricted sense about the city of Jerusalem is intended to have a universal application about the second coming of Christ; that is to say, unless something happened to halt the process again, then all humanity would be destroyed. Once true of Jerusalem; true again of the whole world. What Jesus the prophet told forth about God's purpose in advance has come true in our generation. Men have in their hands the power to destroy the whole human race. The Atomic Age has come. The clock cannot be put back. It is not something to dispute about; it is tragically true. Here we have one unique event which cannot be confused with anything else or any other time. The power to destroy the human race—that is unless something happens to change the situation.

There is another record of this prophecy, in Luke's gospel chapter 21. Jesus is speaking about the same things and the same signs as in the 24th chapter of Matthew, the forthcoming destruction of Jerusalem. Speaking of the people of Israel, in verse 24 he says:

‘And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled’.

This came true—it is now a matter of history. Jerusalem was occupied by the Gentiles. But mark that according to Jesus, it was not to be so indefinitely. He said it was to go on ‘until the times of Gentiles be fulfilled.’ There is a divine limitation placed upon the down treading of Jerusalem. One day the Gentile domination of the city was to be ended. For the first time since Jesus spoke those words the city of Jerusalem is in the hands of Israel. We have seen it come true. This is another unique event. It has never happened before. So here is something to marvel at. Jesus gave us a sign of his second coming two unique events to happen together: developing distress of a kind and on a scale that if something did not halt it there would be a possibility of the human race being destroyed. And at the same time the restoration of the nation of Israel and the freeing of the city of Jerusalem from Gentile domination. These two events have come to pass, at the same time, like two hands of the clock meeting, at the hour of destiny. The point to ponder now is this: measured by the test of Deuteronomy chapter 18, has not his prophetic word come true? And does it not reveal that Jesus is a true prophet? Can so true a prophet be a false Messiah? Are not his credentials established and does he not speak the word of God?

Orthodox Christianity has largely misunderstood and misrepresented the real purpose of God with humanity. It has been dominated by the Greek and pagan doctrine of the immortality of the soul. The kingdom is in heaven or in the hearts of men according to this view of God's plan. The future is mystical, and mysterious, disembodied and

diffuse. The vision is shadowy, a ghostly array of saints and demons somewhere in space, in bliss or in torment. This may be the hope of orthodox Christianity but it is not the Hope of Israel. Because Christendom has never understood the Hope of Israel, it has, to its shame, opposed and persecuted Israel without a cause. It has sought to exterminate the very people whom God is set on saving. To understand the truth about the real purpose of God is to know that right at the centre is the nation once chosen and now being restored-surnamed at Peniel in Jacob and destined at last to be God governed. The kingdom is real and substantial. The city of Jerusalem is its metropolis. The holy land of Israel is the nucleus and there will be concentrated the government. The government will be centred on the King of Israel, returned and triumphant.

THE MESSIAH IS ALIVE

In the final analysis the return of the King is assured by the fact that he rose from the dead. This is the cornerstone of the Hope of Israel. If the Messiah is dead, then the hope is a delusion. Saul of Tarsus, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the tribe of Benjamin, once said this to the Greeks at Athens:

‘God has appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead’ (Acts 17:31).

The man ordained and resurrected is the Messiah: Jesus the anointed. If his resurrection is a fabrication, how came it about that so many Jews believed in a crucified Messiah? It ought to be inconceivable to the Jewish mind: a Messiah rejected by the Church and executed by the State, hanged upon a tree in such a way as to be under the curse of the Jewish law. If the whole thing was contrived, then nobody could have imagined so great a contradiction. If it was a scheme to deceive the Jewish people, why introduce so many impediments to belief? Somehow the one who appeared to be cursed of God was accepted as the anointed King by so many Jews 3,000 confessed their faith in one day. It is a great problem that calls for an explanation. The explanation of Peter the Hebrew fisherman is that the crucified one rose from the dead: ‘God hath made him both Lord and Christ’ is what he said to people who would gladly have exposed the Apostles as frauds and deceivers if that is what they were. The tomb was empty and the followers of the raised man, once craven, were now transformed. Their conviction worked wonders. If they had been hysterical dreamers it would soon have come to nought, as Gamaliel foresaw. It did not. Instead there grew in all the land of Israel an abiding witness that this Man of Nazareth was alive. The witnesses were not few; they were many. Tens, then hundreds. At first they were incredulous, for it was against their inclination to accept such a contradiction. At last they had no doubt and soon turned the world upside down. So reason was satisfied and faith was assured. Peter’s words are direct and uncompromising:

‘Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ’ (Acts 2:36).

Either that is true and he is the King of Israel, or else he was the most tragic failure that ever moved among men.

THE APPEAL

Never was there a more significant time than now in the history of Israel and the history of the world. Without knowing it, humanity awaits the greatest event of all time. Everything points to the fact that it will be soon. We stand today between the two advents. He came before to commence and initiate— he comes again to complete and fulfil. Our relationship to the first advent creates our relationship to the second advent. To trust in one is to be ready for the other. The One who comes before us claiming to be the Messiah, the man who bore the old hero name in Israel: Joshua (Jesus) of Nazareth—surely *he* has all the qualities which make him fit to be a King of Israel. He speaks with the authority of the final voice; he is not a despot, not a weakling. He is one equipped with the wisdom of God to bring judgment and justice to Israel and all the burdened multitudes of the world. The law that once fell from his lips is recognised even by his enemies as the law which at last will transform the world when he reigns as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. All the principles of divine government are discovered in his teaching. When he spoke of mercy, men knew that God cared for them supremely; when he spoke of judgment, the unrepentant blanched with fear. All authority is now in his hand. All power is at his disposal.

Nineteen centuries have passed and his word still reveals our inmost needs. When the angel spoke to his mother about the child she was to bear, the message from heaven was this: ‘Thou shalt call his name Joshua (Jesus) for he it is that shall save his people from their sins’ Joshua the high priest was never able to deal with the sins of the people. This Joshua, the man of the ages, is the sin bearer. Through faith in him sins are purged and sinners are justified and cleansed. The destiny of the nation of Israel is true of individual Israelites: they are called upon to become God governed and God mastered.

Nineteen centuries ago the men of Israel said to the heralds of the King: ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’

The reply came swift and certain: ‘Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ ...’ (Acts 2:38).

The appeal is therefore, that in this last hour, as the world moves to its last agony, such as love the truth in Israel will bring their lives into harmony with the eternal and abiding things which the Hebrew prophets foresaw and proclaimed. May they shed their prejudice and cast away their doubt, bend their will to the Messiah’s word and

kiss his sceptre. So they may be ready for the great day when with flaming advent glory he bursts upon the world and they may be found worthy to bear for ever the great name which once was surnamed from heaven upon Jacob —the holy name of Israel. In the developing glory of that great purpose they will come to know the deepest meaning of Shalom.

DENNIS GILLETT

If you would like to know more about the people who share the Hope of Israel, write for a free copy of the book 'Great News for the World' to:

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