



THE BIBLE WAS RIGHT

CONTENTS

1. PROPHECIES AND PROMISES
2. THE BIBLE AND THE JEWS
3. MESSIAH
4. RESURRECTION—RIGHT AGAIN!
5. THE EVIDENCE PILES UP ...
6. THE EVIDENCE TODAY
7. WHERE DO YOU STAND?

Chapter 1

PROPHECIES AND PROMISES

Does it Matter?

Some things do matter. They matter because they can affect our lives and, depending on their size or importance, they can produce happiness or despair and perhaps even determine whether or not we live or die.

For example, becoming bald may be inconvenient or unsightly but it is not a tragedy; on the other hand, to develop cancer brings a major threat to our very existence. Some things do matter.

The Bible as compared with other books is of major importance. It does not much affect our lives whether Shakespeare wrote all the plays which are attributed to him, but it is obviously a cause for serious thought whether Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible existed or not and, if he did, whether what he said is true. Indeed, the claims made by Jesus Christ are so

extraordinary that they are either the words of a false or deluded man, or, if true, are like no other words ever spoken. The evidence for the truth of Christ's words is overwhelming and it is worthwhile, a thousand times worthwhile, rehearsing some of the basic proofs, particularly if you have not considered them before. Please put on your thinking cap and spend a profitable time turning over a few very simple but most powerful facts.

Jesus Existed

The fact that Jesus Christ existed some nineteen hundred to two thousand years ago is not seriously disputed by anyone these days (though it was at one time), not even by those who have no inclination to accept his claims. Jesus has been given a place in history by his friends and foes alike. Even the modern Israelis do not dispute the fact that Jesus once lived in their land. The historical truth of Jesus provides an interesting piece of common ground on which all of us can stand whilst we examine the claims of the Bible to be the word of God.

Don't Underrate the Old Testament

Take the Old Testament, for example, which is composed of thirty-nine books stretching from Genesis to Malachi in our modern versions (the Jewish order is somewhat different). The Bible's own account places the writing of these books within a period from say about 1400-1200 B.C. to 500-400 B.C., from Moses to the last prophet. Be that as it may, we know from entirely independent non-Biblical evidence that all of these thirty-nine books were already in existence when Jesus was born.

They comprised the Jewish Scriptures. (Copies of the thirty-nine books translated into Greek for Jews who spoke that language as their first tongue are known to have existed in the last two centuries B.C.)

Therefore, on this clear evidence whatever we read about Jesus in the Old Testament must have been written before he was born. The Bible calls statements of that kind prophecies. Prophecies are declarations made by men of God as empowered by God's Holy Spirit to give particulars of events before they happen, the prophets themselves not being in a position in any way to produce the fulfilment.

Here are the First Pieces of Evidence

Let us take some simple but very powerful examples. The Old Testament is full of promises of Someone to come. Promises—not simply longings or yearnings or a spirit of optimism. The Someone promised throughout the pages of the Old Testament is shown to be the God-given answer to problems such as sin, pain, death, war, famine, oppression, world disunity, social unrest and the failure of religion. The "Someone" is the way back to the Paradise Garden (and all that it stands for) which our first parents, Adam and Eve, lost right at the

beginning of the Book. The story of the Bible is One Story. Right from its earliest pages the Bible promises the Deliverer. This is how the promises run.

First of all, you will notice when you come to read the prophecies that the One to come is described as He and not she. This is not remarkable, perhaps, but the Scriptures are consistent about it (see Genesis 3:15; 22:17 and 1 Chronicles 17:11).

Another Interesting Fact

Despite what parts of the modern world would describe as “male chauvinism “ in the prominence given to man in these promises, there is another part of the promise which offsets any pure male pride, indeed it highlights the failure of man as man. The one to come is called “the seed of the woman “, “born of a virgin” (Genesis 3:15 and Isaiah 9:7, 14), with God as his Father (1 Chronicles 17:13). This is a remarkable element of the promises which prepares the way for the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ as made known in the New Testament hundreds of years later. See for example Matthew 1:22-23:

“Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”

The Promises of God in a Wicked World

Thus from the dawn of history there was prophecy. Hope was given at the outset of the human story. The Deliverer was promised and the fulfilment of the promise was not conditional upon what man would do; God Himself would do it without doubt. Mankind was given hope in a world in which evil and violence began to play an increasing part. So vile was man’s relationship with his fellow man, and all because of his neglect of God, that after the first sixteen hundred years or so of man’s history God’s judgments intervened and the Flood came. Christ’s comment was, “The flood came and took them all away “. That happened in the days of Noah. But even that extreme measure did not put out the light of God’s promises; indeed in the centuries that followed God took special care to establish His promises and, by a unique step, to preserve and ensure them. He multiplied the promises and gave even fuller meaning to that first promise of the Victorious One to come. It was as though God built a lighthouse on a dark and rocky shore to guide life’s travellers from danger to safety.

A Remarkable Man

Around 2000 B.C. there was a man living in the ancient city of Ur near to the Persian Gulf, where the moon god was worshipped. An old civilization was already established; it was advanced and sophisticated. The man we are asked by the Bible to take note of thought

differently from most of his fellows. He refused to worship idols, even though many of his acquaintances were idolaters. He still believed in God the Creator, the One who made heaven and earth, and he lived a life that matched his faith. It was to him that God renewed the mighty promises and made them even more explicit and wonderful. They were spelt out in growing detail.

The Promises to the Remarkable Man

To begin with, this man Abraham was commanded to leave Ur and travel in faith to a land which God promised first to show him and finally to give him. Abraham went. God led him to the land of Canaan, later called Palestine, the land we know today as Israel, and promised to give it to him— personally—and to his children. Moreover, God said that one of Abraham's descendants would be the key to the promises. He would be victorious and the means of worldwide blessing. All nations would be blessed in Abraham and his Seed. The Seed would be the promised One, the clear fulfilment of the early promise to Eve. You will find this recorded—and it would well repay your personal attention—in Genesis 12:1-5; 13:14-17; 17:8 and Genesis 22:16-18.

Take Note—This is Evidence of the Truth of the Bible

The simple points to take hold of are that these promises were made two thousand years before Jesus was born and at a time when Abraham had no family and no title to Palestine apart from God's promise. We have reached the stage in our examination of the validity of the truth of Scripture where, two thousand years before Christ, God's promises had made it plain that a Man would arise as the Seed of the Woman who would be a descendant of Abraham, the heir to the land of Palestine, and would be the Deliverer of man from the great evils that afflict him.

The promises to Abraham have affected the world almost more than any other event in world history. They marked the beginning of the nation of Israel. Abraham and his wife, Sarah, were the forebears of the Jewish people.

The Jews and the Bible

Moreover the Jews were made custodians of the Scriptures. Every book in the Old Testament had a Jew as its penman though God was the author. The Old Testament deals with the choice, responsibilities and history of the Jews—what God told them, how they responded to it and what the consequences were. In addition, irrespective of the behaviour of the Jewish nation, though related to the fluctuations in their prosperity, the golden thread of God's promises runs unbroken, growing ever stronger through every book of the Old Testament. The Seed, the Deliverer, the Redeemer, the Saviour, the King, the Prophet, the Priest—the Messiah, for all the names relate to the same Coming One—appear repeatedly throughout the

book.

Every godly man and woman waited, longed, yearned for the time of glory and for the Man of Peace. The great rituals of the worship of Israel and the wonder of the hymns and songs of Zion were all linked to and inspired by the prophecies concerning Messiah.

Small Beginnings

Abraham's quiet arrival in Canaan could in no way have been thought of as holding a tremendous future. Not even the birth of his son Isaac could have been regarded as particularly exceptional except to his father and mother who were past hope of being able to beget a child and knew that Isaac's coming was a gracious gift from God. It was with the next generation that things really began to happen.

Chapter 2

THE BIBLE AND THE JEWS

The Twelve Tribes of Israel

Isaac's son Jacob had twelve sons and these became the patriarchs of the famous —and infamous—twelve tribes of Israel. The nation was underway. Even so, Jacob's large family owned hardly any piece of ground in Palestine, little more than the family burial place. What is more their nomadic existence was proving very difficult. A seven year famine had struck a good part of the Middle East and Jacob, under God's guidance, transferred the residence of his family from the land of promise to the land of Egypt.

When Israel was in Egypt's Land

Jacob's family prospered and grew in numbers in Egypt, but, in jealousy and for self-protection, the Egyptians made slaves of the Israelites. The oppression was great and the promises of God were to the human eye at a very low ebb. Well might an Israelite in Egypt ask what had become of the Deliverer, the Seed, the Saviour. But, behind the scenes, God's promises were powerfully active even during the captivity in Egypt. Indeed, that captivity itself had already been foretold in the prophetic word given to Abraham in Genesis 15:13.

The Birth of a Nation

God never breaks His word. Egypt was the breeding ground of the Israelitish nation. Their captivity was the start of nationhood and as the centuries passed by they came to number something around two million people. The promises of God were not asleep. Abraham's numerous seed as foretold by God was now a reality and, despite the cruel swings of

oppression and servitude in the centuries ahead, the Israelites would never pass out of existence. God had spoken. The existence of the Jews is God's evidence that His promises are alive:

“For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” (Malachi 3:6)

“Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.” (Isaiah 46:9-10)

“Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the Lord; beside me there is no saviour. I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God.” (Isaiah 43:10-12)

Chosen Men

When Jacob's family of some seventy persons first moved into Egypt, they had been preceded by a forerunner sent by God to prepare the way. His name was Joseph, the man with the coat of many colours. Centuries later, when the time came for the nation to leave Egypt, God prepared a new leader for the new task. The Egyptian bondage was hard and the Israelites were crying out for help. God heard them. The seemingly sleeping promises stirred in their bed. In a small floating cradle among the papyrus reeds on the edge of the Nile, Pharaoh's daughter discovered a Jewish child put there by its mother in an act of faith. The baby was Moses, the most well-known Jew of all time, except for Jesus Christ.

Moses the Leader

Destined by God to make known His laws and to be leader in bringing the Jews out of slavery, Moses became well-versed in things Egyptian when he lived in the court as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Even so, he preserved his essential Israelitishness, his belief in the one God and in the truth of God's promises. When God's call came to him he humbly shouldered the unbelievable responsibility and, without the use of force, at the peak of the impact of the ten plagues of warning from God to the Egyptians, Moses led the nation out of Egypt by moonlight to leave the nursery of their nationhood and to go to the school of discipline in the wilderness.

The Beginnings of the Biblical Record

The first five books of the Bible are from the pen of Moses at the behest of God. They record from God's standpoint the history of the world from the Creation and make known the promises and the persons most closely involved with them. These books tell of the growth of Israel and the laws of God as delivered to them. These first books of the Bible show that everywhere faithful men of God placed their trust, their personal trust, in the certainty of the promises. "God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers ", was Jacob's assurance shortly before he died. "God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob", was Joseph's farewell from his death bed.

Israel a Free Nation

The escape from Egypt was monumental evidence of God's goodwill. Their destination was the land of Canaan and with this signpost they said farewell to slavery and made their miraculous way across the Red Sea, through the years of wandering in the wilderness and, finally, after the death of their beloved Moses, they came into Canaan under the God-given leadership of Joshua.

But Israel were stubbornly self-willed and repeatedly idolatrous; they forgot the goodness of God and they neglected His promises. The faithful were few and the gods of the heathen repeatedly dominated the worship and way of life of the nation. This posed a great problem. How was the word of God to be preserved in these circumstances? And how were the promises to be fulfilled? How could the Bible be right when its appointed custodians were disobedient and everything seemed to be going wrong?

A Fascinating Problem

This is a fascinating problem and, strangely, provides even greater evidence that the Bible is true — even greater evidence than if the course of fulfilment had been smooth. In the first place God caused His word to be written down by faithful men commencing with Moses and afterwards by a succession of seers and prophets, men of worship and prayer, who were inspired by God's Holy Spirit to write as they did. The records were committed to the care of the priests and, despite the terrible periods of godlessness and deep degeneracy both in priest and people, the books have survived.

Their survival is nothing short of miraculous. Thus we have the thirty-nine volume Old Testament. The books have an outstanding quality which makes them unique among the world's writings. They bear upon their pages the stamp of their truth. Unlike any other records of national history anywhere else in the world, these books faithfully record the history of the nation in all its detail, good and bad, praiseworthy and abominable, with a

powerful detached commentary which rides above people, priests and princes and observes them all from the divine point of view. No nation on earth has been so scathingly and consistently denounced by its historians as Israel has by its prophets and recorders. Patriotism is set aside for a far greater and more significant loyalty—how does Israel stand with God?

Don't Forget the Books in the Book

There is another factor, one which can so easily escape the reader's attention. Although the pages of the Old Testament read as though they were the chapters of one book, they are in fact a collection of books given by God over a period of more than a thousand years. Their unity is therefore all the more remarkable. They all tell the same story and are all equally consistent in how they record the history of Israel. All say what God thought of the nation and what He purposed to do with them. God was at work whether Israel served Him or whether they were disobedient.

This is the key to the Bible. It is the key to the secret of the promises which the word of God contained. God's promises shine through the books of the Old Testament even when Israel are at their very worst.

Two Powerful Threads of Evidence

There are two strong threads of assurance which every faithful reader quickly observes for himself from the Bible. The first of these is the ever increasing detail concerning the Deliverer, the Saviour, the Seed. The second is curiously different but equally powerful. Because the Jews were made the custodians of the word of God with all the privileges which attach to their unique status, they were told by God that national unfaithfulness, un-repented of, would bring serious consequences. God would remove for a time His special protection of them as a kingdom and their enemies (who in the Middle East have always been plentiful) would over-run them and even carry them away captive. Transportation of the vanquished was a common feature of war in ancient times.

On the other hand, Israel were equally assured that faithfulness would bring extraordinary blessings, prosperity and peace at home and an absence of famine and pestilence. The choice was Israel's: the consequences were of God.

The Chosen Race

These facts about the Jews are remarkable and deserve our close attention, not least because they can easily be misunderstood. Everybody has heard the expression, "The chosen race", as applied to the Jews and expressions such as "God's people", or as the Bible puts it, "God witnesses". All this is true but it does not mean that God will prosper the Jews right or wrong or that they are specially reserved for salvation, despite their idolatry. This is a common

misunderstanding which can create doubts about God's justice, righteousness and impartiality in matters of right and wrong. The true position is very simple. Because He has revealed His purpose to the Jews, God has said that He will hold them responsible for their response to it whether this be good or bad. If good, then He will bless them; if bad, they will be punished. One factor only will be unusual, whether they are good or bad, whether they live in their own land or are scattered abroad among the nations, they will never be exterminated. Because God exists, so will they. This accounts for the remarkable, unique and persistent survival of the Jews. Like the Bible, they cannot be destroyed, come what may. That is evidence. It is the undeniable truth of this fact which makes the promises all the more trustworthy:

“My covenant will I not break, Nor alter the thing that has gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness That I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, And his throne as the sun before me.” (Psalm 89:34-36)

“For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure and will not leave thee altogether unpunished.” (Jeremiah 30:11)

Chapter 3

MESSIAH

The Coming of Jesus

There is, however, a further and equally arresting feature concerning the Jews and the promises of God. “Messiah” was their hope and in that hope was enshrined all the best of their desires. Messiah was to be the Saviour in the fullest sense; everything that God had promised was to find its fulfilment in him. He would be born in Bethlehem of the tribe of Judah; he would be born son of God; he would bring healing to the sick, relief to the poor; and, righteousness, mercy and truth would be the qualities of his character. He would deliver Israel, be king in Jerusalem, his name would be known the world over and he would be the supreme world governor. These were the great truths which the promises repeated with emphasis and beauty throughout the pages of Scripture. It is impossible to read the books of the Old Testament without constantly discovering these marvellous and delightful assurances. Just look at the following Scriptures:

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be on 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)

“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. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.” (Micah 5:2, 4)

“And there shall come forth a root 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. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.” (Isaiah 11:1-5)

“Yea, all kings shall fall “down before him: all nations shall serve him. For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy.” (Psalm 72:11-13)

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.” (Isaiah 35:5-6)

“And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to 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 ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” (Isaiah 2:3-4)

These were the cherished longings of Israel, entwined with all their history; they found never-failing place in the words of the prophets even when they were pronouncing forthcoming punishments. The Jews never lost this hope but they forgot or failed to understand another part of the promises, the part which puts the stamp of truth on everything else.

The Cross before the Crown

Written with equal plainness throughout the Old Testament was another message about Messiah: Messiah would be not only the King of the world but would also be King over Sin. But the order would be reversed; first King of righteousness and then King of the world. In simple terms, the Cross would come before the Crown.

You may recall that the earliest promise in the Bible spoke of the strife between the seed of the woman (Christ) and the seed of the serpent (sin) (Genesis 3:15). The victory of Christ over sin would make him fit to be king of the world.

These sufferings of Messiah found no prominence in the Messianic trust of the Jews. The sufferings were lost in their hope of national glory under the king. But more surprising still is the fact that the Bible's great promises about the Messiah and his sufferings carried an even darker threat. Messiah would suffer in ignominy, bitter shame and unspeakable loneliness. He would die an outcast. The nation waiting for Messiah would reject him when he came! Even the Scriptures which the Jews so fervently protected, counting the very letters lest one should be lost, would witness against them:

“Reproach hath broken my heart: and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none: and for comforters, but I found none.” (Psalm 69:20)

“But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.” (Psalm 22:6-8)

“He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” (Isaiah 53:3)

Remember, all of these Scriptures are in the Old Testament written hundreds of years before Jesus came. This is the incontrovertible evidence that the Bible was right.

Prophecy had Spoken

These sad but irrefutable words, written in the days of the prophets, were preserved by the Jews in their intense love for their ancient Scriptures as the essential part of their national heritage. Put in simple words: the Jews carried Messiah's death warrant in their Scriptures and, to their deep shame, they signed it when he came.

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to devise a more positive proof of the truth of Scripture than exists in this situation where events were described a long time before they occurred and the description was committed to the enemies of Christ and Christianity. It is like entrusting state secrets to an enemy country for safe keeping.

Thus the Bible was right. The great sweep of history from Ur of the Chaldees, the home of Abraham, to Bethlehem where his Great Descendant Jesus was born, bears witness to the truth of God's word.

Jesus and his Bible

The life and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ in all its beauty, wonder and redemptive power rest squarely upon and fit perfectly into the basis of the Old Testament, He quoted from its opening pages, from its closing pages (whether in the Jewish order of books or in the usual Bible order to which we are accustomed), and referred extensively to its history and teaching in all his finest sayings. Jesus is the Old Testament come true, or, expressed in another way, he is what the Old Testament is really all about. There is, however, one possible further doubt to be cleared. It is perhaps credible to maintain that the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing what the Messianic promises had said, set about deliberately to fulfil them; that he engineered their fulfilment in order to attract attention to himself and to make out that he was the Promised One of the Old Testament Scriptures. There are various ways in which this seemingly tenable argument can be answered. In the first place, it was impossible for Jesus to "arrange" his birth in Bethlehem. Secondly, the life of Jesus is free of every kind of self-glory or status-seeking; his purity, sincerity and uprightness of character lend no weight whatever to the suggestion that he was a charlatan, a mere pretender; nor does the openness and consistency of his behaviour fit in with the possibility that he was a sincere but self-deluded man. Throughout his life, Jesus was a pure, compassionate and unsullied person, all the time and everywhere. There is no room here for pretence and self-delusion.

But the real answer to the suggestion that Jesus contrived the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies lies in a number of significant factors which place the Lord Jesus Christ beyond all cavil. Let us examine these.

These are the Miracles

Any simple reading of the Gospel makes it plain that the miracles of the Lord Jesus Christ are an essential part of his mission. They were not merely marvels; they were consistent with his character. Their purpose and direction were concerned with his wider work of redemption of men from sin and death. Even so, they, too, were foretold in the Old Testament in clear terms:

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good

tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound ... to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.” (Isaiah 61:1, 3)

Thus the Lord’s miracles were not simply acts of wonder-working or displays of power or of ability beyond that available to normal man. They were part and parcel of his preaching to people in need—the sick, the blind, the dumb, the lame, the leper and the hungry. All of these men and women were parts of the human race which the Lord Jesus Christ had come to save. If he could heal the body, he could heal the mind and make men altogether whole. It was in these terms that he spoke to those whom he healed:

“And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace; and be whole of thy plague.” (Mark 5:34)

“Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.” (Mark 2:9-11)

The miracles of the Lord Jesus Christ as described in the Gospels are not simply appendages to the story of his life; they are part of its very fabric and are part of his fourfold evidence to his own truth and integrity. His extraordinary powers, given by the bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon him by God were clear evidence of his Sonship.

The Rejection and Sorrows of the Son of Man

The rejection, sorrows and suffering of the Son of Man are unique. He suffered not because he had inflicted suffering on himself or because he was a violent man who caused people to retaliate in self-defence or because he provoked aggression by himself being aggressive. He neither advocated nor favoured violence in others. He simply “went about doing good.” His sufferings were in some ways a consequence of his total righteousness. It is as though his absolute goodness of character focussed the evil in those who were unwilling to accept him. He was a challenge to all that they stood for and in the end the forces of violence came out into the open.

This paradox of the meekest man on earth bearing the most appalling personal suffering is one for all of us to contemplate. No one has ever deserved less the cruel stripes which were laid upon him and no one in all history has suffered greater injustice than he. Even so, his

suffering and shame, the despite and pain, were all foretold in the Old Testament and were clearly re-stated by the Lord himself to his disciples before the final scenes began.

“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:4- 5)

“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.” (Matthew 16:21)

Christ accepted His sufferings without Complaint

There was, therefore, no question of the sufferings of Christ being “engineered” by his own violence against others. He was the sheep before his shearers, silent and unprotesting; he was the lamb who was led to the slaughter and knew precisely where he was going. He himself believed the sure word of prophecy in the Old Testament, even though it foretold his own rejection and pain, and he never attempted to escape; in fact, he set his face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem knowing exactly what awaited him there.

“Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished.

“For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on:

“And they shall scourge him and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again.” (Luke 18:31-33)

The Unequalled Death of Christ

While, therefore, it is unthinkable that Jesus of Nazareth would have devised his own sufferings, it was certainly impossible for him to have “arranged” his death. Consider the facts, some of which are easily forgotten or overlooked.

The Jewish mode of execution was by stoning and, indeed, Jesus was himself threatened with this on more than one occasion (see John 10:31). Stoning was the death inflicted on Stephen, the first recorded Christian martyr (see Acts 7:59). But stoning was not the way in which Jesus was to die. His execution was by a method wholly foreign to the Jewish penal system; he died a living death on public exhibition by Roman crucifixion. How came it that a sinless peasant from Nazareth, whose short life had been spent in wondrous preaching and in works

of healing, should attract the attention of the Roman governor in Jerusalem and from him receive the sentence of death? True, it was foretold in the Old Testament in plain terms:

“The assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.” (Psalm 22:16)

But, it is remarkable that this should have been written so long before the Roman Empire had come into existence.

Moreover, the Lord plainly knew the manner of his coming death and that it would have worldwide significance:

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.” (John 3:14-15 and John 12:32-33)

Recapitulation

The evidence of Bible truth from the life of the Lord Jesus Christ and from the promises concerning him in the Old Testament is most remarkable and merits our setting it out in simple form as a kind of check list. Here it is:

The following were clearly promised in the Old Testament:

- Messiah would be a man but God would be his father.
- Messiah would be a Jew of the tribe of Judah.
- Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.
- Messiah would be a great healer.
- Messiah would be a peaceful preacher.
- Messiah would be rejected by his own nation.
- Messiah would suffer and would die.
- Messiah would be brought to trial by the Jews.
- Messiah would be judged by the Gentiles.
- Messiah would be executed by crucifixion.

These details are clearly stated, often repeatedly, throughout the Old Testament by a variety of writers over a period of about a thousand years, long before Jesus was born. When the time came for their fulfilment they fell naturally into place in the record of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ without any sense of contrivance or stress but altogether as part of the total fabric of his wonderful life and terrible death. There is no finer way in which to see how this

finds its place in the New Testament account than by reading the final weeks of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Any one of the Gospels will suffice to demonstrate the truth of this statement. Please do yourself the honour of reading one of the Gospels, particularly in its concluding chapters, bearing in mind how all the many colours of Old Testament prophecy are brought into wondrous whiteness in the glory and righteousness of Christ. The final scenes where the ruling Jews seek to ensnare Messiah to his death and at last bring him before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, for trial at their accusation, are both compelling and movingly vivid. The brief account of the way in which he was beaten, spat upon, mocked and finally crucified is itself remarkable in the underdramatization of what was indeed the greatest trial and the most despicable execution in all history.

So accurate was the forecast of the prophets that the soldiers playing dice for his clothes at the foot of the cross, and his crucifixion between wicked men, were clearly foretold, as was also his burial in the tomb of a rich man (see Psalm 22:18 and Isaiah 53:9, 12). All this ample testimony to the unfailing truth of the Bible is of itself sufficiently convincing to satisfy the enquiring mind. But the greatest evidence is still to come.

Chapter 4

RESURRECTION—RIGHT AGAIN!

The King-pin to all the Evidence

The tragic death of Jesus is the core of the New Testament record and the sad prophecy of the Old. But it has a beautiful twin, an inseparable and marvellous counterpart, the very answer to the seeming defeat of the Lord Jesus in death. That Jesus “rose again the third day” is the triumphant reply to his rejection and death. “He is risen” was the announcement of the angels on the morning of his resurrection and “We are witnesses” was the fearless declaration of his Apostles who saw him after his rising from the tomb.

This is the glorious centre of the Gospel which gives sense to the whole pattern of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. No resurrection, no Christianity. It is one of the features of the New Testament that the Apostles who had not stood by Jesus in the hour of his greatest need were also disbelieving when the first news of his resurrection came to them. The news was completely unexpected and they regarded the first intimations as fancy or delusion. Not until Christ himself stood among them, talked with them and shared a meal with them, did they believe the glorious truth that he was alive again—and that for ever more.

But the Resurrection was not Unforeseen

There was, however, a most interesting aspect to this exciting and wonderful top-stone to the Gospel record. His resurrection was not unexpected by the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Though the Apostles were reluctant to receive it or had failed to grasp his seemingly clear words, Jesus had plainly foretold his own death and his resurrection. This is what he said:

“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.” (Matthew 16:21)

It is little wonder then that the angels reminded the disciples of these words on the morning of the resurrection when they said: “Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.” (Luke 24:5-7)

Nor is it surprising, although it is powerfully set forth, that the Lord Jesus himself took his faithful but reluctant-to-believe apostles to task on the subject of their failure to take hold of this great hope. There is a surprise, however, over the manner in which the Lord upbraided them for their unbelief. He did not simply remind them of his own words, which he might well have done. Instead he told them that the whole tragedy of his rejection and death, and the glory of his resurrection, were all clearly foretold in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Jesus gave a Bible lesson, indeed a Bible-was-right lesson, showing them “in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” Telling them how slow they had been to believe, he said:

“O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” (Luke 24:25-27)

The bulwark of Christ’s own faith had been the plain promise of Scripture whose truth he had never doubted. For this reason, he had faced death and had been confident of the joyful outcome. He who in his preaching had promised his believers that “he would raise them up at the last day” (a clear reference to the resurrection of believers—see John 6:39, 40, 44, 54) was himself convinced that God would raise him from the dead. Listen once more to his positive affirmation of the rightness of the Old Testament Scriptures regarding his own life, death and mission:

“These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.” (Luke 24:44.)

But what Scriptures were they?

But what were the Old Testament Scriptures upon which he relied? How could he be so sure about his resurrection? and that he would rise so soon after his burial? There were several hints which spoke surely of his victory and these were undoubtedly a comfort to the Lord Jesus Christ:

“He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” (Isaiah 53:11-12)

In Scriptures such as these there was certainty of a victorious outcome to the sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. His redemptive work would triumph. “He would see of the travail of his soul,” spoke volumes and made the crown of thorns more tolerable and the slow, agonising death ultimately worthwhile. This was even more clearly spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: “When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand” (Isaiah 53:10.) “His seed,” foretold the birth of disciples and of their unquenchable assurance in his resurrection out of the pangs of the death and suffering of their Lord.

But the verse which spoke most clearly of death, burial and resurrection was a Psalm one thousand years old. The Psalm is unusual in its message for it speaks also of the ascension of Christ to heaven and to joy eternal. Let us examine the verse and set alongside it the import it had for Christ. The Psalm is Psalm 16.

“Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell.” (Verse 10)

This is a straightforward Old Testament description of burial in the grave, as can be seen by comparing Psalm 16:10 with Psalm 89:48, where the word “grave” is a translation of the same Hebrew word shown as “hell” in Psalm 16:10.

But Psalm 16:10 is also a promise that Christ would not be left in the grave but would be delivered.

“Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” (Verse 10)

This is remarkable in that Christ is personally promised that though he would be buried, he would not return to dust like other men: he would be delivered from the normal power of the grave. Death’s decay would be frustrated.

“My flesh shall rest in hope.” (Verse 9)

Death would be but a sleep and not an end to everything; there would be hope, hope by awakening from death.

“At thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” (Verse 11)

This is a promise that Christ would ascend after his resurrection to the right hand of God in heaven.

This remarkable Old Testament prophecy could not possibly have had any other fulfilment than that brought about by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and by his ascension to heaven. It shines like a jewel and has remained untarnished ever since it was written.

This verse formed a cornerstone of New Testament preaching and is quoted in Acts 2:25- 28 and Acts 13:34-37.

Is the Application of Psalm 16 to Christ Unique?

The power of this Scripture is such as to draw a clear contrast between the death of Jesus and any other death there has ever been. For example, it would be right for us to ask whether the Psalm could also apply to David, the sweet psalmist and beloved King of Israel, who wrote it. In other words, was the Psalm an expression of David’s own hope and faith? This question was examined in New Testament times and, though all the Jews had profound respect and love for David, it was quite clear that the key sections of Psalm 16 were not applicable to David the writer. Look again at the following words:

“Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” (Verse 10)

Then listen to the comment of the Apostle Peter on this very Scripture:

“Let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.” (Acts 2:29)

And also the words of Paul when he used the same Scripture:

“For David after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.”

“Be it known to you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man (Jesus) is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.” (Acts 13:36-38)

The truth is crystal clear. The remarkable prophecy of Psalm 16:10 fits Christ perfectly, like a bespoke garment, and it fits no one else. Only Jesus escaped the normal consequences of death, the inexorable return to dust. The Bible was right—as always.

The Total Weight of the Evidence

It is the succession of fulfilments of the words of the Old Testament which is impressive. If one or two prophecies had come true, it would perhaps have been thought-provoking, but little more. But when the items of prophecy are numerous and cover a whole range of activities, from simple previews of details of the crucifixion to the staggering fact of the resurrection, we are compelled to recognize that these are no ordinary writings—they are the words of God. That is why the Bible was right.

Chapter 5

THE EVIDENCE PILES UP

Prophecy Takes an Unexpected Turn

Now let us look at another factor which involves most of the readers of this booklet. Yes, we, the readers, are clearly caught up in some of the prophecies of the Old Testament in an unmistakable fashion. This is how.

The Jews are a very small nation. Their separation and exclusiveness are and have always been national characteristics. The non-Jews, known as Gentiles, were regarded by the Jews as inferior and heathen. Indeed, the Jews’ religion was unique and exclusive. For example, their belief in the one God and the unique quality of their laws placed them in a class apart. God had said: “You only have I known of all the families of the earth,” and this proved to be true in a host of ways. Thus it was that the Jews were never assimilated by the surrounding nations or their enemies, even when they were taken into captivity. The great empires came and went, but the Jews remained. Egypt, Babylon, Media, Persia, Greece and Rome inscribed their ways on the pages of history and left their buildings and art and ruins behind. The Jews simply lived on—apart—custodians of the Bible.

It is therefore a matter of considerable surprise and interest to discover that the Jewish writings of the Old Testament (God’s word given through the prophets point to a large and radical change which the coming of Messiah would bring about. This change marks a complete shift of emphasis in the divine programme. For a time, the Jewish sun would set but the sky would grow brighter for the Gentiles. Most readers of this booklet are themselves part

of the fulfilment of the prophecy. The Gospel of Messiah has reached our Gentile shores. Indeed, implicit in the promise, though unstated in the actual words of Scripture, was the certainty that the Bible would be distributed world wide. It is a very remarkable fact that today the greatest distribution of the Old Jewish Scriptures (the Old Testament) as well as of the New is from the publishing houses of the Gentile world. With these facts in mind, read the ancient words of Scripture in which the promises were made, beginning from the first promises to Abraham, the father of the Jewish race, until the Gospel exploded in the first century and a door of faith was opened to the Gentiles.

“In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” (Genesis 12:3)

“Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon’ him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.”

“I the lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles.” (Isaiah 42:1, 6)

These and kindred Scriptures were clear indications that the Gentiles would be brought into increasing favour with the coming of Messiah and would respond to his teaching. It is therefore a cause of satisfaction to notice that when the Lord Jesus Christ was born the wise men who came bringing their gifts to lay before him were Gentiles, men from the eastern countries. The real harvest of the Gospel from among the Gentiles was not reaped until the Lord Jesus himself had ascended into Heaven and the Apostles went out evangelizing throughout the Roman world. They made every effort to convince the Jews who were settled in distant places, and sometimes they succeeded. Frequently, however, they were turned away in scorn and sometimes with persecution. On one occasion Paul and Barnabas had preached the Gospel in a Jewish synagogue in Asia Minor but the Jews resisted their teaching and rejected their pleadings. Paul and Barnabas then made this declaration:

“It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.” (Acts 13:46-47)

Thus it was that the Gentiles became custodians of the Christian Gospel and the Jews for the most part became its enemies. This most unlikely development of the promises of the Old Testament—unlikely that is unless the divine hand is at the helm—proves once again that the Bible was right. Why should the Jewish Scriptures depict beforehand the rejection of Jesus by the Jews and the acceptance of the Gospel by the Gentiles?

This is just one more of the manifold witnesses called by God to stand for His truth and to prove the certainty of His word. The Gospel spread like a flame through Gentile lands,

bursting the boundaries of Asia and over-running the countries of Europe. By this means God posted His witnesses throughout the world wherever the Bible is read or the Gospel is heard.

But what, then, of the Jews?

The rejection by the Jews of their long-promised Messiah was to have very serious consequences. It is strangely ironic and a sign of the stubbornness and pride of the Jewish nation that although they were (in human eyes) but a petty kingdom, without a king of their own and ruled over by a Roman appointee of Caesar, they were still convinced that they were invincible and that Jerusalem was indestructible. This self-delusion was powerful. It was not simply patriotism in the accepted sense, it was the absolute conviction that because they were Jews by descent from Abraham, they were under God's unfailing care—whatever might happen they would survive as a nation. It was unthinkable to them that Jerusalem and its magnificent temple should ever be destroyed.

But what of the ancient prophecies? What of those old words of God by Moses? Moses had made it known that disobedience would be visited by punishment and persistent disobedience by banishment from the land of Palestine. Would not those words be fulfilled if, of all the things that they had done, Israel rejected the crown of God's revelation, His only begotten son?

Blessings or Cursings?

The facts are very clear. Jesus knew the Old Testament well and he repeated its message to the nation. In the first place he provided an opportunity for the Jewish rulers to be fully aware of his teaching and his work of compassion. He came to Jerusalem, openly, and preached in the outer precincts of the temple and the rulers came to listen critically and mercilessly. Even so, some of his most memorable and penetrating sayings were uttered in their hearing, sayings we quote in everyday life, such as, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's", and, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself".

More than that. There was the irrefutable evidence of his miracles. For instance, the healing of the blind man in Jerusalem was attested to beyond any possible chance of refutation and this the rulers knew well (read the whole story in John 9). The evidence of his Messiahship was spelled out in terms beyond any ambiguity. This they knew but to accept him meant a rejection of all their self-centred, narrow-minded and empty religion—the hollow sham of the beautiful teaching of the Old Testament. They were not willing to change. Jesus must be suppressed.

This situation was a classic fulfilment of the blessings and cursings prophecies through Moses. The Jews had chosen the cursings. The choice was set before them as it had never

been presented before—Messiah with the Gospel of the kingdom of God or Judaism. Men almost always choose darkness rather than light and first-century Israel were no exception.

Fateful Warnings by Jesus

Jesus warned his people plainly of the destruction which would follow their waywardness. But, first he expressed his deep longing for Jerusalem and her people.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!” (Luke 13:34)

“ And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace but now they are hid from thine eyes.” (Luke 19:41-42)

There are few more expressive longings amongst the words of Christ. His visits to Jerusalem during the years of his ministry were for the city’s good. He was her salvation, her light and her glory, and he appealed to her to awaken to the unprecedented moment of opportunity. The sadness of their rejection of him is given in four words— “Arid ye would not.”

The Lord Jesus Christ, beloved son of God; born of Mary of the seed of David the king, the seed of Abraham the father of the race, had provided Israel with her greatest moment.

She had rejected her Messiah, had chosen instead the incomparable evil of self-will and expediency. The rulers trusted that by this means they would be able to keep peace with Rome in the hope that one day the shackles of Caesar would be exchanged for freedom as a sovereign state. But how could this be seeing that they had crucified him who was born to be their king, Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews?

Messiah’s sad denunciation of their refusal to hear him contained its own warning, the death knell of Israel under Rome.

The Fall of Jerusalem Foretold

Because Jerusalem had refused the tender mercies of Messiah she would pass into the cruel embrace of Rome. The jewel of Judea would be worn in the crown of Caesar and the beautiful temple would be razed to the ground. The prophecies of Jesus are most explicit on this subject and are a reiteration of the words of the Old Testament to which more specific detail is added. Listen to the words of Christ:

“For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.” (Luke 19:43-44)

“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.” (Luke 21:24.)

The judgment of God on Jerusalem did not break immediately after the crucifixion of His Son, nor even during the next year. Not everything would be lost. The extraordinary kindness of God would accomplish something even in the hard-hearted city before she brought her final downfall upon herself.

The Final Years of Opportunity

The risen Christ was preached in the streets of Zion, even the very courts of the temple heard the Gospel echoing among the crowds of the people. Those erstwhile timid Apostles, who had been scattered in disarray when Jesus was arrested, were transformed into fearless, outspoken witnesses to the fact that Jesus whom the nation had crucified was risen from the dead. And many people believed. The Christian Gospel had invaded the heart of the holy city of Judah, and had set thousands free for Christ, released from the shackles of sin and the traditions of men. Even the rulers were caused to think again and having arrested the Apostles saw how wonderfully convinced and transformed they were. “They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus”. (Acts 4:13) But the main core of the elders of Zion was incorrigible; established Judaism was beyond reform. Judah was Judaism and Judaism was Judah. The result was persecution of the Apostles as heretics and traitors to the Jewish cause. Death and imprisonment were meted out and the preaching of the Gospel moved out of Jerusalem and Judah according to the command of Jesus that it should be spread to Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth. Thus was fulfilled the word of the ancient Scripture:

“In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” (Genesis 12:3)

and

“I will give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles.” (Isaiah 46:6)

So it was that the Gospel took root in all places round the Mediterranean coast and spread from Asia to Europe and to the distant lands and isles across the sea.

Once again the Bible was right and you and I, readers of the things concerning the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, are witnesses to the spread of that glorious word and to the truth of the old prophecies in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Chapter 6

THE EVIDENCE TODAY

Two Dispersals

It is both strange and paradoxical that two entirely different and opposed dispersals were taking place at the same time. The Gospel was spreading from mouth to mouth and hand to hand as the preaching envoys carried their faith and hope of salvation beyond national frontiers, penetrating the darkness of ignorance and idolatry as by a shaft of pure light. Somewhat later, in pursuit and by centrifugal force, came the Jews scattered from their homeland by the Romans, seeking refuge wherever they could, appearing in almost every land under the sun. How peculiarly appropriate therefore it is that God has planted His two-fold witness among the Gentiles: on the one hand His rebellious and scattered people, the Jews; and, on the other, the Bible, bearing the wonderful message of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and containing in both Old and New Testaments the prophecies which clearly foretold the scattering of God's people.

The Bible was right therefore in saying that these two witnesses would be evident in Gentile lands. The chances of this happening without divine oversight are infinitely small. Every intelligent and unbiased reader must acknowledge the tremendous implications of these twin events. If the Bible is so evidently right in these basic but important matters, then we should certainly and confidently pay heed to what it has to say about life and death and world destiny. It cannot be wrong in these areas having been so right for Belong about so many things. Chance, coincidence, guesswork and any other expedient explanation of that kind is absolutely untenable as an argument against the facts of fulfilled prophecy. Such pleas are desperate unthinking attempts to avoid the consequences of accepting the clearly established truth of the Book. It stands on its own feet, on its own record, and is invincible and true.

The 20th Century Witness and the 1st Century Example

Almost as though God had anticipated the unbelief, disbelief and disobedience of this part of the 20th century in which the Bible and Christian religion are neglected, He has provided a further and almost fantastic piece of evidence of the truth of His word the Bible. It is evidence which is before our very eyes and is known in every part of the world. The evidence is something of which men of every nation have been made forcibly aware; it is an inescapable part of the world scene, the divine placard at the world's crossroads, a staggeringly improbable and persistent circumstance in world events.

Look at it this way. When Jerusalem was sacked in A.D. 70 and the Jewish national existence came to an end, there were two remarkable facts. The first was a small one, one which was significant for that age only but of importance to the persons involved. It was this. Jesus gave a sign to his followers that any that happened to be living in Jerusalem when its downfall was imminent should seek to escape. Christ's actual words were:

“When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of her ‘depart out; and let not them which are in the countries enter thereinto.” (Luke 21:20-21)

This was a signal provided by God so that believers could escape from the destruction of Jerusalem and its environs. The disciples were obedient, they escaped the appalling destruction which befell Jewry. The words of the prophecy seem strangely improbable in that it looked from the wording as though it would be too late to escape from Jerusalem when she was already surrounded. But the divine eye sees all, even before it happens. The iron ring of Rome closed in to strangle Jerusalem and escape seemed impossible. No doubt the disciples looked for a while with dismay upon their apparently hopeless flight. How could the word of the Lord be so wrong? But God's word is never wrong. Wonderfully and all unexpectedly, the iron ring relaxed, the Romans withdrew for a while before they closed in for their final siege. Jerusalem breathed a sigh of relief and thought once more of her invincibility and inviolability. The disciples departed according to the warning of Jesus. They slipped out when escape seemed unnecessary. Why should they not stay, now that danger was passed?

But this was not to be. Danger was only suspended, the intermission was by divine appointment and lasted only for a short while. Then came the end. The siege began in earnest, terrible and unrelenting. The impregnable city stood fast against Rome, seemingly laughing at its fate, but the supplies of food were dwindling and the end was merely a matter of time. Ghastly and loathsome behaviour overtook the citizens of Jerusalem who, desperate for food, resorted to all imaginable devices to survive, even to eating their own children. Finally, rent by internal dissension—even when at the height of the siege—the city fell and the end came. The magnificent temple which took almost half a century to build was set on fire and the city was laid low. Once again an Old Testament description became awfully true:

“The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem.”

“How is the gold become dim! How is the most fine gold changed!”

“The stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street.” (Lamentations 4:12, 1)

The tragedy of Jewry was bound up with the tragedy of Christ. He was Jerusalem's crown, the God-sent Saviour, the Messiah of Scripture, and was condemned to death in the very city over which he was destined to reign. He was crucified outside her walls in open shame, an outcast of the people.

Her rejection of him was the signing of her own death warrant and though the execution was stayed for a while until the Gospel of the risen Christ was preached within her walls, the end came, an ignominious and shameful close to centuries of rich history, and untold numbers of her inhabitants were crucified outside the walls of that glorious city by the soldiers of Rome; and those who survived were led captive and were scattered throughout the world.

Christ whom they crucified rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, is exalted and immortal in glory; the city who refused him was downtrodden and gone.

The Romans did not Destroy the Messianic Hope

The destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersal of the Jews worldwide were not the end of the Jewish land and its people.

Although the ring of the soldiers' feet in the streets of Jerusalem seemed to spell finality to her destiny, there were words of Jesus spoken forty years before A.D. 70 which contained the kernel of a promise:

“They (the Jews) shall be led away captive into all nations and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled.” (Luke 21:24)

This is a remarkable verse. Read it again. In the first place the fall of Jerusalem (which Jesus had also described in an earlier prophecy in Luke 19) is explicitly stated and so is the exile of the Jewish nation (“Led away captive into all nations”). Then we notice that the events would introduce what is described as “the times of the Gentiles”. This must mean the time of the Gentile domination of Jerusalem and the land of Palestine (after all, the Gentiles were already dominating their own, the Gentile, lands). How long would these Gentile times last? Jesus does not say but he makes one thing very clear, that they would not last indefinitely. In the divine calendar the end of Gentile times was marked off. Jesus indicated this fact, without stating the date, by his use of the word “until”. “Until” shows clearly the Gentile domination of Jerusalem would come to end. What would this mean?

If the Gentiles ceased to rule, then the Jews are the only people left to take over—unless the land and city were to pass into oblivion. But how would the Jews take over? After all, they were to be scattered worldwide and their nationhood would end when the Romans took possession. How, then, could the Jews assume rulership once more when the Gentile overlordship had ceased? There is only one way. The Jews must go back to Palestine.

The Miracle of the Return

It is this wholly improbable and seemingly impossible event which is the final piece of evidence in the marvellous chain of “the Bible was right” prophecies. The Old Testament had already made plain—plain beyond cavil—that the scattered people would be re-gathered. There is nothing clearer in all the Scriptures than the promises that the Jews would return to their own land. Listen to these wonderful words which ring as clear as a bell about this great news:

“For, to, the day is come, saith the Lord, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers and they shall possess it.” (Jeremiah 30:3)

“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.” (Jeremiah 31:10)

“For I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all countries and I will bring you into your own land.” (Jeremiah 36:24)

“Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, whither they be gone, and gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land.” (Jeremiah 37:21)

Let us be quite clear about the import of these verses of Scripture. It is not that someone in the 20th century, having witnessed the return of the Jews to their own land, has scoured the Scriptures looking for verses which might indicate that the Jews would go back to Palestine. On the contrary. These Scriptures have been understood for centuries to mean just that and nothing less. The word was so plain that Bible readers never doubted what they meant. The obstinate fact for those who believed the Scriptures was that Palestine remained a poorly cultivated country dominated by the Turkish power and there was no sign of any change. The promises seemed to be dormant.

But God’s word never fails. The Bible had been right, the Bible was right, and the Bible would be right. In other words, the turn of the tide was waiting for the fulfilment of “until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled”.

The Tide Turns

The turn of the tide came. Towards the end of the 19th century, a new longing was awakened in the heart of some Jews. A little spark of their old nationhood had been kindled and it was fanned into flame. The Zionist movement was formed and in due course it directed its effort to the establishment of a place in Palestine for Jews. Slowly at first, but with a wondrous

intensity, the longing for “home” grew in the hearts of thousands of Jews, known as the Jews of the Dispersion, most of whom had never in their lives set foot in Palestine.

Finally, a great lift was given to their hopes when, during the first World War, the British Government promised to use its best endeavours to establish in Palestine a national home for the Jews. That was the promise given in the Balfour Declaration.

This was the real beginning. The Jews had at last an anchor in their own land. From a few thousands of Jews who were there at the end of the last century, the population grew. It grew by sheer idealism against the restraining hand of the British Mandate. Despite hindrances and hardships, they came back in their hundreds, in their thousands, drawn by an unrestrainable inner yearning, awakened by who knows what, after more than eighteen hundred years of quiescence. The bitter and almost unbelievable persecutions of Nazi Germany increased the great urge and the struggle for survival was added to the almost evangelistic fire of Zionism. Britain struggled hard to maintain some kind of balance between the Palestinian occupants of Palestine and the incoming tide of Jews who were constantly expanding their toehold on the land and working with extraordinary industry to bring fertility back to the neglected and poorly farmed soil.

Even the end of the second World War and the revelation that up to six million Jews had died in the concentration camps and by persecution in Nazi Germany and her satellites did not bring freedom of access to Palestine to the Jews who were striving to create nationhood out of annihilation, community out of the ghettos.

In the end the British gave up the struggle to maintain the situation and left the country to find its own solution. Thus, the State of Israel was born in May 1948, and the Bible was proved right once again.

The Witness Today

There are now about three million Jews in Israel, gathered there by God, though most of them would not acknowledge that God’s hand is in their regathering. They exist as an independent sovereign state for the first time for two thousand five hundred years. Indeed, it was at that time, when they were taken captive to Babylon, that the prophet Daniel had spoken of “the times” that would pass over Israel and the world.

But what does this miraculous rebirth of Israel signify? How does it stand in the purpose of God? It is a strange fact that Israel was destroyed as a nation in A.D. 70 because they had rejected Christ and then had refused the glad tidings of the Gospel. They have now returned to Palestine nigh on nineteen hundred years later—still in disbelief of Christ, indeed large parts of the nation are not even believers in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There has

been no change of heart and the present nation of Israel believes in itself and almost only in itself.

The Scripture which foretold the end of Gentile times and paved the way for the return of the Jews to their own land also foretold world problems and distress which would accompany the resurgence of the Jews.

Chapter 7

WHERE DO YOU STAND?

World Problems

There has hardly been a time in world history when so many dark and permanent problems have pressed upon mankind without any sign of relief or help. The Middle East is a focus of so much trouble. The advent of Israel has upset the balance of power and fomented an old hatred between Arab and Jew. Even the world powers have aligned themselves according to their attitude to Israel. It is interesting also that the Middle East is the treasury of a large part of the world's oil. The power of oil has been felt in every nation under the sun and the economies of the world have been seriously affected by the awakening of the Arabs to the stranglehold they could have on world money.

It is not merely the dimensions and complexity of the problems that beset the world which are the fulfilment of prophecy, but the fact also that they have appeared at a time when the Jews have returned to their own land and have established their own nation and state. This coming together of events is unique in world history and is totally beyond the capacity of any man to engineer. It is the Bible's token that the Bible was right! Right all the time and every time!

What Next?

What then? What does the Bible offer other than an unbelieving nation returned to their own land after nineteen hundred years and a multiplicity of problems of seemingly insoluble composition? These are but "signs", signs of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are the evidence, the irrefutable guarantees that the Lord Jesus Christ will return personally to the earth. No one on earth would have been held as rebellious or foolish not to believe in the second coming of Christ if there had been no sign, no evidence, no witnesses to the truth of the promise. But God does not work like that. In every age men have been able to see proof of the truths of God's word. In every age God has given abundant proof. It is never the proof that is lacking but, simply, the will to believe it and to accept its consequences.

“The Lord God will do nothing but he revealeth his secret to his servants the prophets.”
(Amos 3:7)

This is the Scriptural principle, and with it runs a clearly stated second:

“Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.” (Isaiah 46:9-10)

There is no doubt therefore that the Lord Jesus Christ will return to the earth. God has given His Signs. A little consideration will show that it is most beautifully fitting and right that the Lord himself should appear again on earth among men. His return will be the crown to all that has gone before. All the ancient promises will be fulfilled in him. The promised Seed of the Woman, the Deliverer, the Saviour, the Redeemer, the son of Abraham, the son of David, the son of God —the Lord Jesus Christ—will be back on earth again as King of kings and Lord of lords. The memory of his rejection, shame and crucifixion outside the walls of Jerusalem will be swept away, or remembered only as the means whereby the world which has rejected God, shamed His name and killed His Son will be turned again to acknowledge the sovereignty of God and His merciful over-lordship. Christ will be enthroned in Jerusalem where David was king, not as a human king with all the limitations which that would hold, but immortal, glorious, all powerful, all righteous, reigning over a worldwide kingdom and educating the nations in service to God.

This powerful and timely return of Jesus Christ was foretold by the Lord himself in that same prophecy of the downfall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 which promised the reawakening of the nation at the end of Gentile times. This is what the same prophecy said:

“Then shall they see the son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.” (Luke 21:27-28)

If the Bible has been right thus far, it will surely be right at the end in the coming of Christ. The Lord Jesus himself will appear on earth as the final evidence of God’s purposes and supremacy.

The Second Coming and Ourselves

The glorious second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is the theme of a host of Scriptures. It is the essential and wonderful complement to the first coming in which our redemption was wrought by the wondrous life, submissive death and glorious resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“The Bible was right”, is not simply a logical and incontrovertible proof of the truth of Scripture. It is certainly that, but it is more. When the Bible is right, God is right. Indeed, it is because God is right that the Bible, His inspired word, must be right.

When we know that God is right, we can— nay, we must—take careful note of the consequences of that understanding. If God has been right in the fulfilment of His word through millennia of time we can be absolutely sure that He will also fulfil all that He has said concerning His love and His care for us.

It was God’s word that foretold the rise and fall of nations and the history of the Jews. It was God’s word which foretold in graphic detail the work of redemption of the Lord Jesus Christ, redemption wrought for us.

Because the word of God has proven true in these respects, so Jesus Christ the Son of God as our Saviour is true also. Indeed, he is called the Way, the Truth and the Life. All that God has said concerning him has been confirmed and to those who accept him and his teaching in a life of willing discipleship, forgiveness of sins and eternal life are promised.

Where do you stand in relation to Christ? He is the pivot of the world, the essence of the promises of God, the meaning behind all creation, the only hope for man and men. Where do you stand? There is no neutral position for those who know about him. His love and longing for us are clear as they were for Jerusalem. Remember—

“How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings ...”?

There is no human past, however dark, which God will not forgive; no present life, however wayward, that he cannot change for the willing minded. Repentance brings forgiveness. Discipleship brings hope of that glorious future planned for the sons of God when all the promises of God will be fulfilled.

Those promises are the present delight and peace of mind of those who become the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. For them life has new meaning and an undying hope. It is then that the Bible is right for you.

The world and its history have meaning and purpose. No longer are they a fortuitous unfolding of events. Instead history is being providentially moulded so that the intertwined promises of God, culminating in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, will be realised by the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth when the Lord Jesus Christ returns and is enthroned in Jerusalem.

And, if you are among those who, knowing these things to be true, change their allegiance

from man and self to Christ and to God in accordance with the simple commands given in the Scripture, you will inherit eternal life with Christ at his return. This is a wonderful hope and a prospect beyond anything our minds could otherwise contemplate. To be freed from the limitations of mortality and delivered from death into sinless joy in fellowship with God for ever is the prospect of inheritance for the saints of God in whatever age they have lived. At the return of Christ all who have known and understood this hope, with the opportunity and responsibility it brings, both the living and the dead, will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. The faithful will receive the gift of immortality, countless and endless and expanding joys; the unfaithful and unworthy will learn of their folly and self-will in which they have dishonoured Christ and his Father and they will pass away from the judgment seat of Christ, the only hope of life, into their chosen destiny, eternal oblivion.

At which side of Christ do you wish to stand when he returns? On his right among the faithful? or on his left among those who will go into outer darkness with wailing and gnashing of teeth? Surely there is only one sensible choice for those who know beyond all reasonable doubt that the Bible is right.

HARRY TENNANT

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