

The Puritan Illusion - Part One

by Charles Alexander

The sermon critiques the Puritan Illusion, a view that the past history of the Christian Church is a comparative failure and that the real triumph of the Kingdom of Christ awaits a future Jewish conversion.

Scripture: Isaiah 59:20, Matthew 13:13, John 3:16, Acts 26:21, Romans 11:25, Romans 16:25, 1 Corinthians 2:13, Galatians 6:16, Ephesians 3:3

Topics: "Church History", "Kingdom Of God"

Description

Charles Alexander preaches against the belief that the past history of the Christian Church is a failure and that the triumph of the Kingdom of Christ awaits a future day when the Jewish people as a nation will be converted. He refutes the notion that the success of the Church is reserved for a future Jewish conversion, highlighting the faithful martyrs, saints, and preachers who have contributed to the Church's growth over the past twenty centuries. Charles emphasizes the importance of laboring faithfully in the present, despite discouraging circumstances, rather than waiting for a future event. He challenges the idea that the true success of the Church depends on a future Jewish conversion, urging believers to focus on their current ministry and not be swayed by illusions that undermine the true teachings of Scripture.

Transcript

Great efforts are being made to convince the Christian world of a most marvelous illusion that the past history of the Christian Church is a comparative failure and that the real triumph of the Kingdom of Christ awaits a day yet future when it is expected the Jewish people as a nation, will be converted.

We have no hesitation in saying that this view has no foundation in Scripture, and is derogatory to the work of Christ and the glorious achievements of His faithful martyrs, His suffering and persecuted saints, and His mighty and faithful preachers of the Word during the past twenty centuries.

The theory offers no encouragement to those who labour, especially today, in the most discouraging of circumstances, who for a lifetime have struggled on heroically in a declining age, to preach the Word of God to ever-dwindling congregations, to be told that God never intended their efforts to be crowned with much success, for that has been reserved for the favoured Jew who all along has been waiting in the wings of history, to come into his own. Despite the fact that some of the latest advocates of this illusion have held out this false hope as an actual spur to gentile preachers to be more eager and faithful in their ministry, we should like any of them to show how this will help the faithful men (few though they be) in this present day, to be told that all is well - they just have not been born for the age when satanic opposition

will be, if not abolished, at any rate severely curtailed, when struggle and persecution and discouragement in the ministry of the Word will be things of the past, and that in such a delightful preachers' paradise a generation of Jewish preachers and theologians will achieve in a few years or a few generations, what rivers of gentile blood and oceans of gentile tears and struggles, have failed to achieve in two thousand years.

With all the fibre of our being we protest against this illusion, which we shall proceed to show is contrary to Holy Scripture and subversive of the cause, of true Bible exposition. Its advocacy at this end of the twentieth century can only do incalculable damage to the understanding of Holy Scripture. The latest effort to impose this illusion upon us, comes from the pen of an honest and earnest friend whom we are forced to oppose only under pressure of regrettable necessity.

Through his work with the Banner of Truth Trust; Mr. Iain Murray has not only become internationally known as a publisher, author and historian but he has laid the Church of Christ under a considerable debt for making available great stores of theological learning reprinted from former times.

Nothing which we now have to say in this pamphlet must be allowed in any way to detract from this sincere tribute to one whom we are proud to number among our acquaintances. If at times we are compelled to differ from some of his conclusions it is in the sane spirit of charity and zeal for the Word of God which animates him in any differences he may feel it is his duty to express toward our unworthy selves. We regard him, and that without any reserve whatsoever, as a brother beloved whose indefatigable labours in the cause of Christ and truth we heartily commend to Almighty God.

Nevertheless, we regard Mr. Murray's very latest excursion into the field of authorship, as demanding close criticism. We refer to his volume entitled "The Puritan Hope", a work of some 300 pages (Banner of Truth)

MR. TOON'S VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION

We have before us, at the same time, another volume by an equally competent historian, Mr. Peter Toon, whom (as in the case of Mr. Murray), we are also proud to number among our acquaintances. Mr. Toon's volume is entitled "Puritans, the Millennium, and the Future of Israel" and is a collection of essays edited by Mr. Toon, who is the head of the Department of Religious Studies at Edge Hill College, Ormskirk, Lancashire, England. Those contributing to Mr. Toon's volume are men of high qualification in the field of study covered by this book (published by James Clarke, Cambridge and London).

Both volumes (that by Peter Toon and that by Iain Murray) relate precisely to the same subject, the chief difference of treatment, so far as we can judge, arising from the end which the respective authors have in view. Mr. Toon's volume, which appeared twelve months before Mr. Murray's, makes available the historical facts upon which the reader may form his own conclusions. In the case of Mr. Murray's book, we cannot escape the uneasy impression that its talented author has set out deliberately to fit a theory into history.

To the extent to which this may be true we must be pardoned for expressing the opinion that strictly speaking Mr. Murray's book is not history at all, but rather history adapted to a theoretical eschatology (a word meaning "the doctrine of the Last Things"). In other words, whereas Mr. Toon has fairly and impartially, and with great skill, presented a most interesting and graphic picture of a great formative period in the history of the Christian Church, with special emphasis on the theories of Biblical prophecy

around which great men's thoughts revolved in a period of massive change, Mr. Murray has adapted a historical background to preach to us a sermon on REVIVAL - a word which in the evangelical world of today has acquired a dubious value. That Mr. Murray's book has been written with this end in view is clear from its sub-title - "Revival and the interpretation of prophecy."

We cannot escape the impression that Mr. Murray's 'history' has been made subservient to his hope of 'revival' and that in pursuance of that end he tends to play high what suits the theory and to play down that which others might think should lead to other conclusions.

Mr. Toon's book on the contrary is a serious contribution to history, fascinating indeed to those who are anxious to take a serious look at the facts of former days with a view to learning lessons for today. Those who read both these books will find they add up to a 'cautionary tale' though Mr. Murray at any rate will not feel flattered to have his book so described.

The theme of Mr. Murray's book is well expressed on the cover - "Today, the Church's hope in respect to her mission of discipling (sic) all nations is again in eclipse. The world gives Christianity no future and evangelicals themselves doubt whether the cause of Christ can ever attain to a greater triumph before His Second Advent. Must the prospect for succeeding generations be darker than those of today? Can we expect any period of history to intervene before the advent of Christ? How can readiness for Christ's coming be consistent with the belief that revivals are yet to be given to the Church?... The author, employing both exposition of Scripture and much historical and biographical material, sets out the case for believing that it is not 'orthodox' to indulge in gloom over the prospect for Christianity in the world.

It is not long however, before the reader discovers that the real revival which the author has in view is not within the range of possibility as long as what might be called 'the gentile age' runs its course. Our hearts are to be cheered by the prospect that the really big event in Christian history is not due until the Jewish preachers arrive.

There is of course also a sting in the tail of this explanatory statement. The idea that those who dissent from Mr. Murray's view and hold to the conviction that this age is running down to judgment are either 'unorthodox' or are prophets of 'gloom', we must repudiate right heartily. The imminence of Christ's return (even supposing we may be mistaken as to how imminent that imminence may be) can never be a thing of gloom, but of glorious anticipation. He who shall come will come some glorious day; and why not soon? Is that either unorthodox or gloomy?

MILLENNIALISM

Mr. Murray appears to shun the charge of being a 'millennarian' (that is a believer in the mystic thousand years expected by many to occur at the end of the world as a period of unprecedented spiritual glory for mankind) but in our opinion he only substitutes a phrase for a word: for MILLENNIUM, the LATTER DAY GLORY, and in the common usage of the terms the one means the other. That Mr. Murray does not go nearly so far in his speculation as to this coming millennium we freely acknowledge, but as his history plainly shows, once thought is launched along that speculative road, there is no holding of the horses. Even during the puritan age, the expectation of the Latter Day Glory speedily took upon itself dangerous political forms (reproduced in our own time by the "Jehovah's Witnesses" cult). In more orthodox circles it rapidly became fashionable to engage in date-fixing and historical speculation, and finally the earlier millennialism was almost entirely supplanted by Dispensationalism which has proved itself to be an enemy to the gospel and a destroyer of the exposition of the Word of God.

Millennialism arises from attempts to interpret the 20th chapter of Revelation, the only part of the Bible where the Thousand Years of the supposed Latter Day Glory are specifically referred to.

The fact that according to this passage the Golden Age of the realisation of Christ's kingdom on earth collapses into a season of awful Satanic delusion and world-wide apostasy, is glossed over.

Mr. Murray no doubt appreciates the embarrassment of reconciling this colossal world-wide revolt against Christ with the phenomenal success claimed for the reign of the saints for the preceding thousand years. This may be why he attempts an alibi in his introductory chapter:

"The truth is that Revelation 20 contains what has been called 'the darkest passage in all the Bible'. It is better to admit that our view of that difficult chapter is uncertain, rather than commit ourselves to an interpretation which can only be harmonised with the remainder of Scripture by introducing confusion into the meaning of many passages otherwise clear."

This to our mind is a most damaging concession. To avoid the implications of the one great passage in the Bible which throughout history has been the starting point of the millennial theory, and to do so on the ground that it is too difficult to handle, can only lead to the conclusion that what our author is really trying to say is that Revelation 20 is best left alone because the theory of prophecy defended in his book is endangered thereby.

For our part we maintain that whatever interpretation some may attach to certain of its details, Revelation 20 is as clear a passage as any to be found in the Bible that the last chapter of man's history on earth is one of total world-wide revolt and delusion. It is not proper for any author to assume that a theory is scriptural when a vital passage with bearing upon that theory is brushed aside as 'too difficult'. He ought to admit the possibility that it is the theory that cannot be reconciled to scripture, and not the reverse.

Significant is the admission of our author (page 49) when he speaks of "the unwillingness of the majority to be committed to a prophetic scheme which virtually made Revelation 20 (a notoriously difficult chapter) the axis of the interpretation. Thus Elnathan Parr (died 1632) speaking of the future blessing promised in Romans 11, declines to employ Revelation 20 on account of its obscurity, though he notes that some have done so."

It is clear therefore that even in those 17th century days when the serious study of eschatology was in its optimistic and brash infancy, the millenarian party found Revelation 20 a serious embarrassment.

TOPLADY AND GILL

Mr. Toplady, in a brilliant description of this fanciful millennium, also avoids the same pitfall. Mr. Toplady (whom Mr. Murray lists as sharing the prophetic outlook which his book represents) goes far beyond the prudent limits which Mr. Murray observes for himself. With many another millennialist he enlarges enthusiastically on the great conflagration which marks the end of the present creative order and the introduction of a renovated, paradisaical earth, prepared for the millennial glory, leaving no surviving inhabitants from the premillennial scene and requiring the millennial earth to be peopled exclusively by immortals - resurrected saints - brought specially back from their heavenly rest to spend a thousand years in an earthly Eden presided over by a visibly reigning Christ, who vacates the eternal Throne for one at Jerusalem (apparently a rebuilt city on whatever geography the great conflagration has left behind). No wonder Mr. Toplady (for whom, by the way, we have the highest esteem) joined the band of those who

avoid any explanation of the fearful apostasy which is to bring to a close this millennial paradise. Where do those apostate nations come from, all grisly as they are with the accoutrements of bloody war, swarming over the paradisaical globe to destroy those of the First Resurrection who, having lived and died once on the earth, cannot any more die? And what has been the true value of this reign of Christ on the earth when a thousand years of it produce such a scene of hatred of God and truth?

We begin to understand why some of our friends regard Revelation 20 as "the darkest passage in the whole of the Bible" and we seriously suggest that it is only dark to themselves because it utterly destroys their Millennial theory.

DR. GILL'S DISASTROUS ATTEMPT

"The learned Dr. Gill" makes a braver effort than most of his fellow Millennialists to dispose of this "difficult chapter" by bringing back to the paradisaical scene a vast multitude of resurrected wicked from hell, along with an army of devils to join in battle with the immortalised saints.

Here are Dr. Gill's words:

"The rest of the dead are raised, all the wicked from the beginning of the world, arising where they died and, were buried" (Note: despite the fact that the great conflagration must have obliterated all trace of them 1,000 years before) "and that as they died enemies to Christ they will rise such; and as they laid down their weapons of war, their swords under their heads, they will be in a readiness, and rise with the same malicious and revengeful spirit, and though it will be a mad enterprise to attack saints in an immortal state and Christ, King of Kings, at the head of them, they are as capable of deception as ever (with the posse of devils at the head of them). It is their last struggle to save themselves from eternal ruin...."

This disastrous passage from Dr. Gill well illustrates the statement that to some at any rate Revelation 20 is "the darkest passage in all the Bible", and where other champions have been guilty of such inventions, they are content to "admit that their view of that difficult chapter is uncertain".

We are far from supposing that Mr. Murray has any feeling whatever for these calamitous errors. We mention Dr. Gill and Mr. Toplady merely to warn our readers that the confusion in the minds of Millennialists is not confined to one or two difficult passages of scripture, but it extends, fundamentally to a Millennial belief which we hope to show has no scriptural foundation, however much it may derive comfort from a long historic succession which by special pleading is graced with the word "Orthodoxy".

General consensus of opinion, even continued for many centuries, has no claim to Christian orthodoxy unless orthodoxy is defined, and unless, being defined it can be proved on scriptural ground to be true. No historian in his senses would claim on that ground that any of the various millennial opinions is orthodox. The one point these theories have in common is that some form of Jewish precedence is indicated and will prevail in a sort of golden age of religion. Beyond that there are almost as many opinions as there are millennialists, while outside their orbit are formidable opponents of any form of a future millennium. We refuse to believe that truth necessarily lies with majorities.

Our task is simplified by Mr. Murray's candid admission that the Puritan Hope of world-wide blessing through the conversion of the Jews is built upon one passage of Holy Scripture - Romans chapter 11. He readily concedes that he finds 'much obscurity' about other texts often quoted in aid, such as Matthew 23: 36-39; Luke 21: 24; and Matthew 21:9, and that "even taken together they scarcely amount to definite

evidence of a future conversion of the Jews as a people" (page 61). He comes to the conclusion that "the Puritan view of Israel's future as far as the NT is concerned, rests principally upon their exposition of that chapter" (i.e., Romans 11) -(page 61).

We venture to point out that it is a new thing in theology for a fundamental pronouncement on the teaching of the Christian Church to be made on the strength of one disputed passage of Holy Scripture. Our friends must do better than this.

In any event, before anyone embarks upon a voyage of interpretation the course must first be charted by a valid principle of interpretation.

NO GOVERNING PRINCIPLE

Mr. Murray's book announces no governing principle of interpretation either for its author or for the Puritan writers who are quoted. In the case of the latter we understand the omission: the Puritans just did not have any such governing principle. Their prophetic views had newly emerged, if not from the womb of nothingness, at least from the womb of the rabbinical schools to whom they had recourse in the great enthusiasm for Hebrew studies which arose out of the Reformation. Mr. Toon repairs Mr. Murray's omission. He has an important reference to this influence of the Jewish rabbis upon Puritan thought.

We quote from chapter 2 ("The Latter Day Glory") of Mr. Toon's volume:

"Theological influences and an optimistic eschatology."

"Of tremendous importance for the development of eschatology was the birth of Hebrew studies in Protestant universities. In 1549 Cambridge University appointed the German, Paul Fagius, to the chair of Hebrew and he was the first more or less competent scholar to occupy such a position in England. His successor was the famous John Immanuel Tremellius, a converted Jew. By 1600 there was in England a small] nucleus of able Hebraists and King James made use of their expertise to produce the translation of the Old Testament in the Authorised Version of the Bible. Not only did these Hebraists study the Old Testament in Hebrew and Aramaic but they also read the comments on it by the various Rabbis, many of whom predicted a glorious future on earth for the Jews. By 1617 the Biblia Rabbinica was in its fifth edition and two years later Johannes Buxtorf brought out the sixth at Basel. Surrounding the Hebrew Text and Massorah in this monumental work were the various rabbinical commentaries, principally by Rashi, Kimchi, Abraham Ibn Ezra, and Levi ben Gerson.

"As the seventeenth century progressed, the interest in the Hebrew language also developed in England between 1648 and 1653 no less than nine different Hebrew grammars were printed. The effects of this concern with the Hebrew Bible and rabbinical literature were at least threefold for eschatology. First there was the possibility of following Jewish exegesis and understanding the Old Testament prophecies (e.g. Ezekiel 37) as meaning a future literal restoration of the Jews to Palestine. Secondly, the word 'Israel' in Romans 11:25ff, which had been understood by Calvin and Luther as referring to the Church of Jews and Gentiles, could be taken to mean 'Jews', that is non-Christian Jews whose religion was Judaism. Beza himself favoured this interpretation of Romans 11 and he was followed by the various editors of the influential Geneva Bible, which was translated in Geneva by Marian exiles during the lifetime of Beza. In the 1557 and 1560 editions short notes explained that 'Israel' meant 'the nation of the Jews' but in later editions (e.g. 1599) the note on Romans 11 stated that the prophets of the Old Testament had predicted the future conversion of the nation of the Jews to Christ. Through this Bible and the writings of Puritans

(e.g. William Perkins' commentary on Galatians, and various books by Hugh Broughton) the doctrine of the conversion of the Jewish people was widely diffused in England, Scotland, and New England. Thirdly, the widespread feeling that the world was nearing the end of its course made rabbinical theory that in Old Testament prophecies a day represents a year most attractive for it enabled the mathematically-inclined to work out the date for the end of the world. This theory was developed from Ezekiel 4:6 where God tells the prophet that he is to lie on his side for forty days to represent the forty years of exile which Judah endured. The rabbis used the theory when interpreting the book of Daniel but for Protestants the possibility was open to try to make sense of the numbers of the Revelation of John! And for many Puritans this theory became an unquestioned premise."

We have said that the lack of a governing principle (other than what was borrowed from Jewish sources) was understandable in the case of the Puritan approach to prophecy, especially that branch of prophecy known as eschatology. Greatly stimulated by the tremendous political upheavals of the time, the enthusiasm for light upon the future raced ahead of intellectual prudence and produced the kind of result which might have been expected, especially the shape of theories in which Rome, the Jews and the Turks predominated. Those were the days long before General Allenby and the end of the Turkish Empire! The Turk was a formidable figure in Puritan eschatology.

In the case of the 20th century enthusiasm for Jewish restoration the same alibi is not available. There has been time, more than enough, to make a valuation of the history of "The Puritan Hope" and its outcome, and there is no excuse for anyone to make prophetic pronouncements or draw eschatological conclusions without first establishing valid principles of interpretation.

OUR PRINCIPLE

For ourselves we have never had any inhibitions about stating our principle. It is simply this: Biblical prophecy contained in the Old Testament can only be understood according to NT usage. Inspiration must interpret inspiration and the spiritual be explained by the spiritual, as Paul writes, "Comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Corinthians 2:13).

On this principle we discover that wherever the NT interprets OT prophecy concerning the kingdom of Christ it does so in a spiritual, not a literal or earthly sense.

The kingdom of Messiah, long expected by the Jews, was rejected by the nation when it was proclaimed not in earthly or national but in spiritual terms, by Christ, and His forerunner John the Baptist. In the Sermon on the Mount Christ announced a kingdom the subjects of which are described in the opening Beatitudes. It is a kingdom of regeneration and the Beatitudes are taken from the depths of OT prediction, notably Isaiah 61:13, the very passage our Lord used as His text in the synagogue of Nazareth, announcing those principles of the Gospel for which the congregation sought to destroy Him on the spot (Luke 4:16-30). This manifest gospel passage in Isaiah is near enough to chapter 59 (all one passage in the original) to shed an ominous light on the interpretations of those who take Paul's quotation of it in Romans 11:26 in a Jewish sense.

The Lord confounded Nicodemus, that eminent Jew and Pharisee, with his doctrine that only those born again should see this kingdom of God, and that those who are regenerate are gathered from the world at large, under the comprehensive term "whosoever" which manifestly repudiates any genealogical

interpretation. Need we quote John 3: 16?

To the woman of Samaria the Lord showed that Jerusalem had no significance in the kingdom of God (John 4:21) despite the prophecies of Isaiah which if literally interpreted require that the Redeemer and His law should proceed from Zion to all the earth.

Stephen asserted the same principle in another quotation from this relevant portion of Isaiah (compare Acts 7:48-49 and Isaiah 66 verse 1). For this piece of exegesis Stephen paid with his life. Another young man, Paul, took up the torch where it was flung down by Stephen, though not until his fury at Stephen's prophetic heresy had devastated the early Church. Ever after, Paul wrote and taught the spiritual nature of the kingdom foretold by the prophets - a kingdom in which the national privilege and prestige of the Jew disappear, and Jewish interest in the prophets survives only in an election of grace merged into, and indistinguishable from Christ's inheritance among the gentiles.

For this gentilism Paul was singled out by Jewry from among the apostles. When the others were tolerated In Jerusalem Paul was confronted with attack, murder, stoning and beating - because he pre-eminently taught that the kingdom of Messiah was no Jewish preserve, nor were the prophets to be understood in a Jewish sense.

"For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help from God I continue to this day witnessing both to small and great, SAYING NONE OTHER THINGS THAN THOSE WHICH THE PROPHETS AND MOSES DID SAY SHOULD COME...." (Acts 26: 21-22)

The epistle to the Galatians was written to establish this very thing, that the distinction between Jew and gentile was forever abolished. Was not Ephesians written to show that the burden of prophecy from the beginning was always the same, namely, that the true Israel was a mystic unity of Jew and gentile, and that this elect unity, the subject of the eternal purpose of God from before the foundation of the world, was the full and final and eternal manifestation of the divine wisdom, exhausting the entire purpose of prophecy? (See Ephesians 3)

This illusory "Puritan Hope" isolates one passage from Paul's letter to the Romans, to make him speak a language which he nowhere else uses or hints at, and which if allowed would set Paul against himself, and in effect hold him accountable for his eventual fate at the hands of his countrymen - not for what he said but for what he did not say. Why did not Paul speak up in the Jewish council to show how his accusers were entirely wrong concerning his doctrine of Christ and His kingdom? Why remain silent on the one thing for which the Jews condemned him, namely that he placed gentiles on an equality in the kingdom of Christ and made them rightful heirs with the Jews of all that the prophets had spoken? Why did he not somewhere in the process against him (so well reported in chapters 22-26 of the Acts of the Apostles), declare to his Jewish tormentors, "But Brethren you are mistaken: I believe that yours is the kingdom; I believe the prophets spoke of you when they prophesied the glory of Zion and the gathering of Jacob; your day will surely come, as a nation you are to be grafted in again; all Israel will be saved, and all I am telling you is how it will be brought to pass....."? Strange silence this. Truly Paul must have been beside himself (as Festus alleged he was), to let this stream flow over him and extinguish him, when a word about Jewish restoration would have saved Him!

A GREAT NOVELTY

In the Puritan Hope we are introduced to a great novelty in free and unfettered interpretation (that is, free of any attempt at laying down a vane guiding principle). We are told that all the foregoing is true but this does not exclude a special blessing for Israel in the future, and after all, what have we to complain about anyway? That coming Jewish blessing will mean more gentiles converted than ever before - life from the dead in fact! Thus not only is Paul made to speak with two voices, but the prophets likewise. The same text may be used by the gentiles now as denoting them, but later on it will be found to belong primarily to the Jew. When that day comes we shall see (this is what we are being told) that the Jew was primarily in view all the time in the prophecies, and in that great Judaic Day all the sacrifices, trials, martyrdoms, heroic achievements of the last 2,000 years will be totally eclipsed in a world-wide Latter Day Glory in which Jewry will be the only significant figure.

This attempt to ride two horses at one and the same time, we heartily repudiate. This moderate Chiliasm (a Synonym of millennialism) is more dangerous than the extreme forms thereof, as it plausibly offers both worlds to the unwary, and if unchecked will impose upon Reform in our day a system of handling the Word of God subversive of those expository values without which there can be no raising again of the banner of truth.

That some of the Puritans were able to ride both these horses at the same time without undue damage was because they lived too early in the day for the illusion to hinder their normal ministrations. With glorious inconsistency they used the prophetic scriptures without inhibition to preach the true kingdom of Christ in which Israel as a nation disappears for ever from view, and at the same time in their prophetic excursions they just as enthusiastically used the same prophecies to bolster up the Jewish expectation.

When our moderate chiliasts today claim the liberty of doing the same thing they only betray their naiveté. We are no longer allowed the luxury of holding two interpretations which cancel one another out. Either Romans 11: 25-26 belongs to the Jew or it belongs to the mystic Israel, the Church in which the Jew has lost his identity for ever. If the prophetic text upon which Paul is supposed to found this theory (Isaiah 59: 20) is a promise to the Jewish nation, then it must be awarded to the Jew exclusively or not at all. It is an offence against logic to hold both interpretations and to say (in effect) that the gentile is there also, but only by courtesy of the Jew, and that the real hope of the world is wrapped up with a Jewish interpretation which, after 2,000 years of the gospel has not yet begun to be fulfilled.

This is precisely what Mr. Murray's book is saying. We protest against it. We care not how many eminent names from the past (or the present) are cited in its favour. It is wrong. It is dangerous. It is heretical - and for the welfare of the people of God, the spiritual Israel .to whom the promises were made, it must be opposed though all the world says it is right.

We now proceed to expound anew the disputed text, Romans 11: 25-26:

"For I would not brethren that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits: that blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fullness of the gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob."

Paul is consistent with himself. He makes it clear in Romans 4 that the promises to Abraham are gospel promises in which the distinction between Jew and gentile is obliterated. (See Romans 4: 9-18:)

"...that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised it is of faith that it might be by grace to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all that he might become the father of many nations according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be ..." etc.

We remind our readers that Abram received his new name, Abraham 'the father of many nations' to denote in advance that his seed was the mystic nation to be gathered out of all peoples. The promise, Paul teaches, takes precedence over the earthly nation and the Law. The nation was constituted as a temporary expedient under the Law, 'until the seed should come to whom the promise was made.'

(See Galatians 3: 16-19).

A NATION BORN IN A DAY

The elect are one nation, one people, and to this is related the prophecy of a nation being 'born in a day'. Isaiah writes, "Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her children." This prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost when the new nation, the true seed of Abraham, came to being in one day, in place of the earthly people. Even Mr. Murray makes the elementary mistake of using this text to describe the future restoration of Israel (p.78).

The principle enunciated in Rom. 4 is thoroughly carried out by Paul in Galatians where there can be no dispute that the seed of Abraham is Christ and His Church, without distinction of Jew and gentile.

(See our booklet, "Moses or Christ", Serial Number 031).

Coming closer to the Eleventh of Romans, it is clear from the argument of Romans 9 that Paul is accustomed to use the word "Israel" in a twofold sense. As touching the flesh, Israel denotes the twelve tribes. As touching the gospel, Israel denotes the Church. Romans 9, verse 6, is a classic example of Paul's use of "Israel" twice in one verse, with a contrary meaning - "they are not all Israel which are of Israel" - (compare verse 8 - "That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed").

Therefore, to allege that the "Israel" of Romans 11, verse 25, must needs be the "Israel" of verse 26 because otherwise "too violent a transition would be involved", is overstating the case.

EXEGESIS OR FANTASY?

Mr. Murray, in his attempt to expound Romans 11, takes the line adopted by the moderate chiliasm of those who have followed the "Puritan Hope" in former times. Israel has been temporarily suspended from her former privileges and from national participation in the gospel promises. The gentiles were moved into the vacancy and will remain there till the time comes for the national conversion of Jewry. When this takes place, the gentiles will not suffer any loss, but in fact will experience greater blessing than ever before through the agency of converted Jews.

The limiting words in the favourite text of this school: "Blindness in part is happened to Israel till the fullness of the gentiles be come in" does not daunt them. Aware of the fate of their theory if they take the words in their obvious meaning, they teach that "the fullness of the gentiles" does not mean the completed number of the gentile elect. There will be more gentiles converted after the conversion of the Jewish people than ever before. There will be another "fullness" after the fullness of the gentiles is already "come

in".

Mr. Murray heads this section of his book with a quotation from his friend Mr. John Murray, to this effect - "There awaits the gentiles, in their distinctive identity as such gospel blessing far surpassing anything experienced during the period of Israel's apostasy, and this unprecedented enrichment will be occasioned by the conversion of Israel on a scale commensurate with that of their earlier disobedience".

Now the text says nothing of the sort. It is quite plain that "the fullness of the gentiles" is the complete number of Christ's elect among the nations of the world. There cannot be another "fullness" afterward. To assert on the basis of this text that the blessing of the gentiles after the elect number has been completed will far surpass anything experienced during the time of gentile privilege (now nearly 2,000 years in duration) is not exegesis, but fantasy.

To do our friends justice they have already determined, on the basis of an earlier verse in Romans 11, that there is a distinct assurance of this unsurpassed enrichment of the gentiles during the coming Jewish restoration, and to make this theory valid: they naturally must find a way through or around that fatal -verse 25. It does not seem to occur to them that the argument works both ways and that the clear statement that Jewish restoration (if any) cannot begin until the period of gentile blessing is ended, must be the governing factor.

In fact, we do not need to press this matter in order to overthrow the illusion, for we contend, that the advocates of "the Puritan Hope" are wrong in both instances. What we are doing is endeavouring to expose, from the writings of our opponents, their own inconsistency and thus to draw attention to the real weakness of the theory that it is not based on exegesis at all; that it makes Paul contradict Paul; and that it avoids a full and regular exposition of the text from Isaiah which Paul uses to crown the whole of his great argument (Isaiah 59:20, 21).

"LIFE FROM THE DEAD"

Before we turn to our own exposition of that text, we must first attempt to expose the false exegesis of Romans 11:15:

"If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?"

It is held by our opponents that as the fall of Israel from the favour of God resulted in the blessing of the gentiles (through the gospel being transferred to them from defaulting Israel), the blessing which will come to the gentiles through the restoration of Israel will be so great that it could be described as "life from the dead".

Now we have no hesitation in saying that this is exegetical nonsense. The text says nothing of the kind. It is a sheer imposition to use the last four words as applying to gentiles. "Life from the dead" applies of course to the salvation of the elect, among the Jewish people. What Paul is saying is that not all Jewry is cast off. There remains to this hour a remnant according to the election of grace. From the carcass of the rejected nation, the grace of God calls forth, in every generation, a remnant of Jews to salvation and this is indeed "life from the dead". To say it is anything else, is to subject the text to a preconceived theory, the ground of which must be found elsewhere. There is no such ground and our opponents make no attempt to establish any. In the absence of exegetical proof, their theory must go by default.

That the interpretation advanced above is the correct one, is proven by the preceding verse (14) - "if by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them". Paul is not speaking of a future salvation for the nation of Israel, but of the contemporary success of the gospel in his own day (and by inference, of course, in all generations of the Church) in saving elect individuals out of the rejected nation.

A further proof that Paul is speaking of the conversion of individuals, not of nations is furnished in the allegory of "The Olive Tree" with which Paul reinforces his doctrine. To make "the receiving of them" (verse 15) mean a national restoration to divine favour, would, in the terms of the allegory require a national regrafting of Israel into the olive tree (the symbol of the Covenant Church of God in Old and New Testaments). But this cannot be sustained unless it can be proved first of all that the gentile nations were already grafted in (See verse 17: "And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive, tree, wert grafted in among them and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree...")

Now the verse teaches, otherwise. Only individual gentiles are in view. No gentile nation has ever been grafted into the covenant of God and therefore no gentile nations can be broken off. Not even all Jews were broken off from the olive tree, for Paul speaks of "some of the branches" only, which were so broken off - a sentence which presents such difficulty to the Puritan Hope, that there is seldom any serious attempt to explain it. So far as we can see, Mr. Murray does not make the attempt though he leads us right up to verse 16.

To sum up this portion of the argument:

The casting away of the Jewish nation meant the opening of the door of mercy to all the world (as contrasted with that very small portion of the world which Israel represents). The return of some Jews in repentance to Christ is therefore regarded by Paul as life from the dead.

The Puritan Hope however, sees this 'life from the dead' as a millennial benefit from the conversion of Israel to the outside world! Here is a prime example of an interpretation being governed and dictated by a theory, without any attempt at thorough exposition.

To make this verse to mean a national regrafting of Israel, would require first of all that the gentile nations as such were already grafted in. But no gentile nation has ever been grafted into the covenant of God. Only individuals are so treated, and it is only as individuals that they can be broken off. The gentiles were never (as the Jewish nation), a theocratic community entirely governed by divine regulation so that their very name became synonymous with their religion. No gentile nation ever, stood in that relation to God nor ever can, therefore no gentile nation can be broken off from that stem into which they were never grafted. Individuals only are in view, and these are warned not to boast of their security and privilege as against the Jew, but to remember that faith alone puts us into the covenant and unbelief can put us out, even as Jewish persons, if they remain not still in unbelief, will be grafted again into the gospel stock.

Much play is made on the words of verse 12: "If the fall of them (the Jews) be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much More their fullness?" The Puritan Hope (and more besides these), would have us understand here that as the fall of Israel meant that the gentiles were enriched with salvation, what benefits might not flow to the gentiles when Israel is restored? But 'their fullness' only means the complete number of natural Israelites saved in all generations beginning with the apostles. The consequent benefit to the rest of the world by this constant stream of Jewish believers being added to the Church is evident by the example of Paul himself whose conversion has enriched the world

beyond all measure.

This 'receiving' of repentant Jews into the kingdom of Christ is later described by Paul as 'life from the dead' as indeed it is, but it is altogether beyond reason for the Puritan Hope to interpret this, in its enthusiasm, as life for the gentile world!

THE "MYSTERY" OF VERSE 25

We come to verse 25: "For I would not brethren that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits: that blindness in part is happened unto Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in."

Our friends desire us to understand by this, that the national salvation of Israel is the mystery, and that it awaits the end of the gentile era of salvation, designated by the phrase, 'the fullness of the gentiles'.

But why should the salvation of Israel be said to be a mystery, when our friends are prepared to quote almost if not every OT prophecy as proving this destiny of Israel? It could only be a mystery, surely, if they were hard put to it to find any text of that nature, as though it suddenly sprang to light out of nothingness when Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans. Mr. Murray quotes the early Puritan, Elnathan Parr as saying, "Paul saith that he would not have the gentiles ignorant; of what? That all the elect would be saved? Whoever doubted it? But of the calling of the Jews there was a doubt. He calls it a secret or mystery; but that all the elect shall be saved is no secret."

Elnathan Parr, however, is fighting with shadows. He is no longer with us to be interrogated or we might have pointed out to him that his objection is altogether irrelevant. No-one indeed ever doubted that the elect would be saved, but the alternative is NOT, as Brother Parr suggests, and as Mr. Murray approves, the national salvation of the Jew in the future.

The term "mystery" is a favourite one with the apostle Paul who uses it no less than 13 times in his epistles. The fount whence Paul derived this wondrous word is the word of Christ in Matthew 13, where "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" are proclaimed in parable. These "mysteries", understood only by the children of the kingdom, disclose the nature of Christ's kingdom, the Church, the manner of its inauguration and propagation, its growth, principles and final fulfillment.

It was withheld from Jewry whose hearts were hardened, and whose eyes were blinded, and their ears stopped from hearing, by the judicial judgment of God (Matthew 13: 13-15). The nation of the Jews was therein given over to unbelief (as we see to this day), the kingdom of God being taken from them and given to "a nation bringing forth the fruit thereof".

This is the mystery of which the writings of Paul are so replete. In this same epistle to the Romans (chap. 16: 25-26) he writes: "NOW to him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest and by the scriptures of the prophets made known to all nations for the obedience of faith".

Brother Parr (and his disciple, Mr. Murray) tells us that the mystery of Romans 11: 25 is the restoration of the Jew to divine favour. Is that then another mystery which Paul describes in Romans 16?

Would Brother Parr say that what Paul was talking about in Romans 16 was the "Latter Day Glory" of the Jewish people? But Paul says it was no such thing. It is in fact the Gospel, "made known to all nations for the obedience of faith".

In the Ephesian epistle Paul refers no fewer than six times to this mystery and always (including Chap. 5:32 where the human marriage mystery is stated to be the pattern of Christ's union with the Church) it refers to the gospel mystery of the union in Christ of Jew and gentile in one body, without distinction of nationality, as the last, final and full disclosure of the eternal purpose of God (see Ephesians 3: verses 3, 4 and 9).

Will Brother Parr tell us that this mystery is that God, is going to re-establish the Jew if not to Palestine, at least to the most significant place in the divine favour, as against the period of gentile predominance? Or is Paul talking about several "mysteries" all independent of each other? Mystery of mysteries this!

The mystery of Ephesian 1:9 and of those verses in Ephesians 3, together with the mystery of Colossians 4:3, and the mystery of Romans 16:25, are all one mystery, namely the gospel union of Jew and gentile in one mystical body united to Christ in eternal and covenant marriage bonds, inseparable from Him and from one another, all distinctions of nationality abolished for ever, one nation and one people born in a day (Isaiah 66: 8). This mystery is presented as the eternal purpose and counsel of God, the consummation of His wisdom and the realisation of all the movement of His great life through eternity and through time. (We beg our readers at this point to read all the texts specified at the beginning of this paragraph).

We refuse to admit that Paul had any other mystery to talk about in one verse wrenched from his writings to hand over to the disinherited Jew as the greatest thing that Christ ever did on earth. We protest against the derogatory argument meted out by the Puritan Illusion to the previous Church of Christ in her sufferings for 2,000 years past, and to the colossal achievements won by Christ's sword and bow through the devoted testimony of His Church.

We do not know by what yardstick our author measures the temple of God, but we suspect it is one which measures multitudes and crowds. David's great and final sin was the numbering of Israel. Food for thought there.

Nay, brethren, Paul's "mystery" in Romans 11 is not that of Brother Farr and his disciples but is the mystery of Christ's true and spiritual Israel, one whole and entire and worldwide nation, the true seed of Abraham, the children of the promise.

A mystery this, indeed, beside which Brother Parr's mystery pales into insignificance. In order to bring about the salvation of the gentiles as the legitimate inheritors of the promises made to Abraham, so that they could be lawfully regarded as the very seed of Abraham, grafted into the very stock of the covenant nation, it was necessary that the Jews as a nation should be disinherited and cast out, hence to be received again only as they came in the category of repentant sinners, individually grafted into a new order in which all racial distinction is obliterated.

In other words, the mystery is not the regathering of Israel, but their rejection as a nation to make way for a new nation, a new Israel, composed indifferently as to ancestral origins. Upon the understanding of this mystery depends the peace and the stability of gentile believers. That they needed to be instructed in the mystery, the case of the Galatians only too strongly demonstrates. The Church of Galatia was well nigh destroyed by the error that gentiles had to be grafted into earthly Israel, instead of the reverse, that Jews

required to be grafted into New Covenant stock on the same terms as gentiles.

Now we see what Paul meant by saying, "lest ye should be wise in your own conceits", for the Roman believers (at least that part of them which was gentile) needed to be warned that it was by grace alone they were saved, and that neither Jew nor gentile had any room for boasting. Let them remember that the blindness which had fallen upon Israel as a nation, was not total: it was blindness in part; that is, not all the nation was blinded. There were at that time in the world probably more converted Jews in proportion to their number as a nation, than any proportion of gentiles. The gospel came to the Jew first, and was well established in the synagogue long before the days of separate gentile assemblies. Later, when Gentile believers were multiplying fast; there was danger that the importance of Jewish salvation would be belittled. Paul keeps the balance for both sides, in days which lasted until AD.73, the year of the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple and the scattering of the Jewish survivors. Paul did not live to see that day, but he legislated in advance for it.

He tells us that this blindness in part was an enduring condition, "Until the fullness of the gentiles should be brought in." That is, until the second advent of Christ and the end of the world, the gentiles must expect to be joined from time to time by believing Jews, as is the case today.

CALVIN'S NOTE

We quote with approval John Calvin's note on the word 'until': "Until does not specify the progress or order of time, but signifies the same thing as though he had said, 'That the fullness of the gentiles....' The meaning then is that God had in a manner so blinded Israel, that while they refused the light of the gospel it might be transferred to the gentiles, and that these might occupy, as it were, the vacated possession. And so this blindness served the providence of God in furthering the salvation of the gentiles which he had designed. And the fullness of the gentiles is to be taken for a great number: for it was not to be, as before, when a few proselytes connected themselves with the Jews; but such was to be the change, that the gentiles would form almost the entire body of the Church."

Reconciling the warning to individual gentiles about being 'cut off' for unbelief when the election of grace most obviously requires the security of every true believer, Calvin writes thus on verse 22: "We now understand in what sense Paul threatens them with excision, whom he has already allowed to have been grafted into the hope of life through God's election. For first, though this cannot happen to the elect, they have yet need of such warning in order to subdue the pride of the flesh; which being really opposed to their salvation ought justly to be terrified with the dread of perdition. As far then as Christians are illuminated by faith, they hear, for their assurance, that the calling of God is without repentance; but as far as they carry about them the flesh, which wantonly resists the grace of God, they are taught humility by this warning."

Having shown the true meaning of the mystery of Israel in verse 25, our readers will not require further convincing that the "all Israel" of the following verse is the whole company of the elect, Jew and gentile together - the Israel of God. (Galatians 6:16)

There is therefore no inconsistency (as the Puritan Hope alleges) in differentiating between the two Israels mentioned in these two verses, for the doctrine of the two Israels is everywhere apparent in Paul's writings.

So far we have completed our study of the Pauline doctrine of Israel. It will now be our task to expound the prophecy of Isaiah quoted by Paul in support of his doctrine. This we must undertake in a supplementary pamphlet to which we shall address ourselves at once. Our resources are not sufficient to complete the entire study in one operation.

Meanwhile we commend to our readers' attention our previous studies "Moses or Christ" (an exposition of the epistle to the Galatians) [Number 031] and "Romans Eleven and the Two Israels" [Serial Number 043].

The commentary we are preparing on Isaiah will be a sketch of the entire contents of this great book so as to concentrate on the meaning of the Pauline quotation:

"As it is written, there shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob".

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