

The National Hope in Context

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24th January 2002

According to the Old Testament (Jer.31:34; Ezk.36:27 et al), authentic and abiding Torah obedience is impossible apart from the enablement of the Spirit. In order for the nation to inherit the promises, the obedience of the law must be established in the only way possible, viz., the Spirit of faith. However, final freedom from the curse of the broken covenant (judgment and exile) requires more than the obedience of a few. Until the righteousness of the covenant is fulfilled by the entire nation at once and forever, there can be no permanent possession of the land. Herein lies the key to understanding the element of the covenant that is still outstanding with this people, and of the power and grace that is yet to be demonstrated through this elect nation ("for this is my covenant with them, when I shall (future) take away their sin " Ro.11:26-27 with Jer.31:33-34 et al).¹

Apart from an eternal righteousness through regeneration of the Spirit, a righteousness that brings a lasting remedy to the propensity to backslide, there can be no permanent or secure inheritance of the land. The prophets understood this and pointed to 'that day' when everyone born in Israel will be preserved in righteousness and blessed with the enlivening Spirit (Isa.54:13; 59:21; Jer 32:39,40). This astounding prospect anticipates not only the elimination of apostasy from Israel, but the end of the perennial presence of 'the remnant,' since at that time all of Israel will be uniformly righteous in heart and life (Jer.31:34; Isa. 4:3, 60:21). Only an everlasting righteousness can guarantee an enduring possession of the land (else the possibility of covenant failure would continually threaten of further discipline and exile).

History shows that more is required for permanent possession of the land than the presence of a righteous remnant, or even the fleeting revivals under kings Josiah and Hezekiah. While these may temporarily forestall judgment and exile, they are never sufficient to once and for all prevent it. The prophets and saints were never exempted from the fortunes suffered by the apostate nation. The promise meant that the personal renewal and circumcision of heart known only to the few, would be true of all who make up the nation 'in that day.' Until there is no longer a single Jewish individual living in the land who does not know the Lord (Jer 31:34 et al), the "transgression" of Israel is

¹If we look ahead to the millennial blessedness of the restored Jewish race, we see *history's greatest monument*

to electing grace. It is the vision of a miracle people, still in mortal bodies, dwelling in uninterrupted health and prosperity (Isa.33:24) for one thousand years without a single incident of defection from the covenant in all of their generations (Ro.11:26-29 with Isa.59:20-21; 60:21; 62:12; 4:3; 54:10,13; Jer.31:34; 32:37-40 etc. et al). Israel will exhibit ultimate testimony before all nations of the eternal preservation of the elect.

not yet "finished" (Dan 9:24). It is only when the whole of the nation is renewed after its last and greatest trouble (Dan 12:1,2) that the promise is fulfilled "forever."²

Israel is never assured of more than temporary possession of the land "until the Spirit is poured out from on high."³ Israel continues to be subject to the cycles of judgment until the eschatological 'new heart' (Jer.31:34; Ezk.36:36) and Spirit are given in order that the conditions of the covenant might be sufficiently kept so as to assure the permanence of the inheritance. In that day, the law will be in the heart of not only of a David or a Jeremiah, but in the heart of every one that is left (Isa. 4:3,4; 11:11,16; Jer. 31:2) of "the escaped of Israel" (Isa. 4:2).

Manifestly, God intends to vindicate his sovereign prerogative and ability to sanctify a people and to cause them to 'persevere in holiness' in order to make the promise eternally sure to them. Such an 'everlasting righteousness' precludes forever the prospect of future covenant failure. In this way, the inheritance is based on a better covenant (Jeremiah's new covenant) through a new creation of spiritual regeneration, and is thus secure forever. By a new creation of the Spirit, the law is written on the heart of every individual member of what will be in 'that day,' a broken and contrite nation (Jer.31:33). At that time, the threat of the broken law will no longer threaten expulsion, since now the power has come to fulfill the covenant in its proper and original intent, viz., by the gift of the Spirit who sovereignly reveals and quickens faith to "whom He will."

So then, God not only fulfills the covenant for his people, he fulfills it in them by the Spirit of holiness (see Jer.32:40). Personal regeneration of spirit and heart, known through the ages by only a small remnant, will be the corporate experience of the nation at the public and glorious appearance of the Messiah in the great 'Day of God.' And so, the nation that was initially conceived by a miracle (Isaac) is born in a day (Isa.66:8). Jesus reproved the learned Nicodemus for not recognizing that this principle of national re-birth is likewise prerequisite for every individual's entrance into the Kingdom of God. Jesus' concept of the kingdom is the divine initiative subduing the old order through the revealing, regenerating, and resurrecting activity of the sovereign Spirit, and this, whether presently in a 'first-fruits' of inward and individual renewal, or of the full and public harvest in the 'age to come' of comprehensive world redemption.

Moreover, Jesus understood that in his person the 'powers of the age to come' are already set decisively and powerfully in motion, producing salvation and healing in unforeseen advance of the 'last day,' hence the parables and sayings based on a 'mystery of the kingdom.' This in obvious contrast to the contemporary view of the nation. It is a mystery, reflected in scripture as hidden from Israel for judgment. That is to say that the long threatened eschatological judgment would descend on the presumptuous in a manner wholly unanticipated.

Due to the prophets' vivid portrayals of the climactic 'day of the Lord,' the eschatological judgments that would separate the apostate elements of the nation from the righteous remnant were inevitably associated with a time of national crises. This foretold period of brief duration, reaching to the 'last day,' was popularly named the

²According to a host of passages, the reborn nation is initially comprised of a remnant of penitent survivors in the wake of the final holocaust Jer.30:7; Dan.12:1, Mat.24:21 et al.

³Compare Isa.30:15; Zech.12:10; Ezk.39:29; Joel 2:28,29.

'messianic woes' or 'footsteps of the Messiah.' Against such a background of expectation one can begin to imagine the effect that this eschatological 'secret hidden from other ages' (Col.1:26; Eph.3:9) had on first century Israel, when during a time of relative normalcy, and with little disturbance of its public life, a silent judgment of solemn magnitude passes fatefully, albeit quietly, through the midst of the unsuspecting nation. Messiah indeed appears, but in an unforeseen, (even though enigmatically foretold, see Isa 52, Ps. 22), role of suffering and rejection as 'the stone of stumbling and rock of offense' (Isa. 8:14-17).⁴

The Messiah represents in his person and hidden advent, the eschatological plumbline of judgment that comes in unimagined advance of the 'the last day.' So understood, 'the mystery' functions to sift and judge the nation, visiting in advance the eschatological separation of the last day. At the same time 'a door of faith is opened to the gentiles,' ushering in a new dispensation of personal salvation that grants to gentiles a full and equal share in Israel's inheritance and hope through the representative, and sacrificially substitutionary body of the Messiah.⁵ It is 'the glory of this mystery' (Col.1:25-27), that the very Spirit of God perfected in the Messiah without measure (Jn.3:34 b) should indwell the faithful Gentile. This wonder vastly exceeds anything formerly looked for in connection with the millennial re-instatement of Israel. The Gentile had looked for the 'crumbs from the children's table' but received instead, the promise that said: "Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off." And of the promise that follows: "The Lord God, who gathereth the outcast of Israel, saith, I will gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him." (Isa. 56:5; Compare also the prophecy concerning Messiah's task to gather the Gentiles in Isa.49:5-9). Meanwhile, in the interim, the nation on the whole remains temporarily in the grip of apostasy and judgment under a sovereignly ordained condition of blindness and hardening. Provocatively, and by divine design, the mystery is at once an instrument of blessing and of judgment. It is goodness to all who by revelation perceive the wisdom of it, but paradoxically, to those who 'stumble,' the very device prepared to bless becomes itself 'a trap and a snare',⁶ the portent of judicial 'severity' (Rom.11:22). It is, although disguised and ill esteemed by the prudence of the age, the full 'summing up' of the 'hidden' and 'unsearchable riches' of the 'manifold wisdom of God'.⁷

That gentiles would be blessed in Abraham's seed was well known, but this expectation was naturally associated with the time of Israel's national restoration at the end of the age. That there should be a 'calling out of the gentiles' in advance of 'that day,' and in result of Israel's greatest 'stumbling,' was a mystery of staggering proportion.⁸ Only a revelation coming with the strongest attestation and confirmation could have convinced the throngs of pilgrims gathered at Pentecost (Acts 2) and as came in the

⁴Messiah models in his personal suffering, the eschatological 'woes' of the nation, i.e., "Jacob's trouble" (Jer.30:7)

⁵Eph.2:12-14; 3:6; Acts 26:6,7; 28:20; Jn.10:16; 11:52; Rom.11:17.

⁶Isa.8:14,15; Rom.9:32,33; 11:9,11 with Ps.69:22 compare also 1Pet.2:4-8; Mt.21:42,44 with Ps118:22; Isa.28:16 in light of Lk.7:19,23.

⁷1Cor.1:18-23; 2:7; Eph.3:8,9,10; Col.2:2,3 with Eph.1:9,10.

⁸Rom.9:32 and Isa.8:14-17; but see Deut.32:20,21; Ezk.39: 24,29 with Mt.21:43 and Rom.10:19.

conversion of Paul.

So it was the common expectation that the gift of the Spirit would be bestowed in immediate connection with the arrival of the messianic redemption. But that this grace should appear in advance of the Day of the Lord to gather an eschatological remnant (a 'church') from among the Gentiles while the elect nation is left in exile and under judgment (Isa.49:4-7) was, and remains, a mystery of immense degree. The question of Jesus is the question of whether or not the gospel is the revelation of a mystery pre-existing in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament.⁹ This supreme question holds the key to understanding the historical break between church and synagogue. Did God indeed conceal the foretold gospel in a mystery until the pre-appointed time of fulfillment and revelation? And did God by so doing effect at once a twofold purpose of judgment and salvation?

Therefore, when the church in lawless disregard for the plain meaning of language, re-interprets the Old Testament promises in exclusion of the national and historical hope, it misses entirely the wisdom and strategy of the mystery and thus becomes "wise in its own conceits" (Ro.11:25). However, for the Jew to ignore the witness of the New Testament is likewise presumptuous, arbitrarily omitting viable historical evidence that may hold a key of understanding that is altogether other than what has been historically represented by nominal Christendom.

The Church's Dereliction towards Israel: A Symptom of Apostasy

The church's failure to grasp the theological significance of the Holocaust is not stranger than its reluctance to recognize the most prophetically loaded event to occur since the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, specifically, the repossession of Eretz Yisrael, and the formation on its soil of a Jewish state. The reticence of the church concerning the importance of this modern sign is at once spiritually obtuse and a statement of the church's costly ignorance of the very mystery that is calculated to save it from the boastfulness of humanism (Ro.11:25). It is more than vincible ignorance; it betrays a disposition that sees no incongruity in the divine character if Israel's failure is final. But, "have they stumbled that they should fall?" "God forbid!" is the apostolic riposte that the larger part of that which calls itself the church has ignored to its eternal loss (Ro.11:11).

While the church waits to recover her original consciousness of Israel's role in world redemption, the nations are condemned to languish under demonic domination until Israel comes to understand Yom Kippur in the light of the cross (Zech.12:10). The sudden and powerful inbreaking of the revelation of this mystery will finally answer the prophet's question "shall a nation be brought forth in a day?" (Is.66:8).

⁹Eph.6:18; Rom.16:25,26; 1Cor.2:7,8; 15:1-5; Acts 26:22; Rom.1:5; Gal.1:11; Col.4:3; Eph.3:4-9 with Rom.11:25-29; esp. Isa.8:14-17.

The Eschatological Task of the Church

One crucial dimension of the eschatological calling of the Church remains virtually untapped and awaits vital fulfillment. It is the calling of the church to model before the Jewish Diaspora the presence of the departed Shekinah Glory through the power of the promised Spirit and so move Israel to emulation. Thus, we could say that the 'justification' (national regeneration) of Israel waits for the 'sanctification' of the Church, and world peace the resurrection of the fallen nation. Toward this end Paul labored indefatigably, that through a mature church, (which is always a martyr church), Israel might be impressed of its missing link. Paul was not one to rest short of the goal, knowing that the key to Israel is the church, and the key to the nations is Israel. Therefore, when the church in its corporate 'fullness' attains to move Israel to emulation, it attains also the conclusion of the age.

This is manifestly the Pauline perception of the divine strategy. Paul recognized, as we must, that so long as Israel languishes in estrangement and unbelief, so must the world. It is not commended as a panacea, but may we not consider that the church's anemia in evangelism derives in part from its neglect of the apostolic pattern in going 'to the Jew first.' The church has learned well enough that "they are not all Israel that are of Israel" but it will require an historical demonstration on an unprecedented scale to convince Israel that 'they are not all church that are of the church.'

It is prophetic irony that the rallying cry of national Zionism should be "never again!" when alas, once again, in a final test ('birth pangs of Messiah'), Israel will be thrust out into the wilderness of the nations (Ezk. 20), where this time a prophetically prepared church (Rev.12:6) will be waiting to lay its life down for the beleaguered remnant, soon to become a holy nation. When the kingdom is restored to Israel after a cleansing by fire, the creation will have its Jubilee of rest.

"What shall the receiving again of them be but life from the dead."

This paper is an excerpt from *The Historic Impasse Between Church & Synagogue*, by Reggie Kelly. The full paper is available on request.

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