

נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתבות עולם ירמיה ו' טז

"THE OLD PATHS."—Jer. vi. 16.

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THIS year, the Jewish and the Christian times for celebrating the feast of the passover nearly coincide; and the coincidence ought to remind us both of that happy period, when all the children of man, so long divided, shall again be united into one great, holy, and happy family; all rejoicing in the mercy and favour of their Heavenly Father, and all loving each other in sincerity and truth. To that period we look forward, and even now we use our humble endeavours to accelerate its approach. Yea, one of the reasons, why we endeavour to lead Israel to a rejection of the oral law, is because we firmly believe that it is one of the main hindrances in the way of their happiness and that of the nations of the world. We have no wish to rob you of any one blessing promised in the Word of God. We would not deprive you of one hope founded upon God's promises. On the contrary, we rejoice to think that notwithstanding all the vain traditions of the Scribes and Pharisees, it has pleased God to keep alive in your hearts the memory of his past mercy, and the hope of his future goodness. To the consideration of these two points, the law of Moses and your appointed prayers lead you at this season, and through the mercy of God, and the love of some of your brethren, we of the Gentiles have been brought to rejoice in similar considerations. Let us then endeavour to anticipate the future, and rejoice together even now, omitting on this solemn occasion a special discussion of the oral law. If God's mercy were all past, and only a matter of history, we might and ought to feel grateful for the benefits bestowed upon our fathers: our joy would, however, suffer a considerable diminution. But this is not the case. In the midst of your grateful acknowledgment for the wonders in Egypt, you can mingle a prayer for the future, and say,

לשנה הבאה בירושלים :

"Next year in Jerusalem."

רחם נא א' אלהינו על ישראל עמך ועל ירושלים עירך ועל מובדק ועל הימך ונבנה ירושלים עיר הקדש במהרה בימינו והעלנו לזרובח ושחחנו בה :

"O Lord our God, have mercy, we beseech thee, upon Israel thy people, and upon Jerusalem thy city, and upon thine altar, and upon thy temple; and build Jerusalem, the holy city, speedily, in our days, and bring us up into the midst of it, and make us glad therein."

(Haggadah Shel Pesach.) And to this prayer we can say, "Amen" with all our hearts. The future restoration and blessedness of Israel is one of our fondest expectations; and whilst we contemplate the circumstances and the glory of, the first Exodus, the Word of the living God leads us to look forward to that which is to come.

כמי צאחק מארץ מצרים אראנו נסלאח :

"According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him marvellous things," is the promise by the mouth of Micah the prophet (c. vii. 10).

החזירים יהיה אז לשון ים מצרים חנקו ידו על הנדר בעים ורודו והכדו לשבעה גדלים הדרך בנעלים : היהיה מסלה לשאר עמו אשר ישאר מאשור כאשר היהיה לישראל ביום עלותו מארץ מצרים :

"And the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea, and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and shall make men go over dry shod. And there shall be a highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left from Assyria: like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt," is the declaration of the prophet Isaiah (xi. 15, 16). Seeing that neither of these declarations was fulfilled at the return from Babylon nor at any period since, we firmly believe that they shall be fulfilled in the time to come, and that therefore the compilers of the Haggadah were fully warranted in intermingling, with their passover thanksgivings, a prayer for the fulfilment of the promised mercies; and we do not scruple to say that in this respect, the Jewish rabbies have been right, whilst many Christian interpreters have been wrong; though they might have known and given a true explanation of all similar passages, if they had only followed the plain words of their master Jesus of Nazareth, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets." (Matt. v. 17.) We make this remark to show that we do not condemn the rabbies inconsiderately; but that we are willing to do them all justice, where their opinions agree with the Word of God. Their expectation of the future restoration of Israel is well founded, and their faith in the promises relating to it worthy of all imitation. Oh, that the whole nation had more of it— that their hearts were more directed to the land

of their forefathers—that their thoughts were more full of the divine promises. Then they would cry more earnestly to God, and He would “hear their groaning, and remember his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” as he did at the deliverance from Egypt. The careless and the ungodly deceive themselves with the idea, that when God’s time comes, the deliverance will take place without any endeavour of theirs. Let them read the law of Moses, and they will find that though God had promised to bring their fathers out of Egypt, the deliverance itself was preceded by a time of prayer and crying unto God. To Abraham He had said,

ידוע חרע כי נר ידוה ורעץ בארץ לא להם ועבדים
וענו אחום ארבע מאות שנה . . . ידור רביעי שבונו
הנהגה נר :

“Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years. . . . But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again, &c.” (Gen. xv. 13, 16.) But this promise was no warrant for their remaining careless, and at ease; it was on the contrary a basis for earnest prayer and supplication, and a plea for mercy. And, therefore, when the time drew near, we read,

ואגדו בני ישראל מן העבדה ויעקו וחלל שועתם
אל האלהים מן העבדה :

“And the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God, by reason of the bondage.” And God himself gives this as one reason why He came to deliver them.

ועתה והנה צעקת בני ישראל באה אלי :

“Now, therefore, behold the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me.” Exod. iii. 9.) Here, then, all Israelites who desire the fulfilment of God’s promises should learn that state of mind, which is a pre-requisite to the interposition of their great deliverer. Israel can no more be delivered now than of old, unless they earnestly desire deliverance. To what purpose should He deliver and restore those, who care nothing about the land of their forefathers, nor about the glory of the nation—who say, We are very comfortable and happy here, and all we desire is to be like the other nations (הדוה כנרים)—what good would it do to us to return to the land of Israel? God’s promises are not to such groveling and unbelieving spirits. Along with his promise of mercy, he gives a command for continual supplication.

המזכירים את יהוה אל דמי לכם : ואל חתנו דמי לו
עד יכונן ועד ישים את ירושלם הדהגה בארץ :

“Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in

the earth.” (Isaiah, lxii. 6, 7.) And in Ezekiel, after the declaration, “This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste, and desolate and ruined cities, are become fenced, and are inhabited,” &c., he adds—

כה אמר אדני יהוה עד ואת ארדש לבית ישראל
לעשות להם :

“Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.” (Ezek. xxxvi. 37.) Upon which Rashi remarks—

אחפזה להם בחפלה ברורשם אחוה על ואת :

“I will be made favourable to them through their prayer, when they seek me with regard to this.” Hence prayer is commanded; in Hosea we are told, that without prayer deliverance is impossible.

אך אשובה אל מקומי עד אמר יאשכו ובקשו פני
“I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face.” (Hosea v. 15.) Let the children of Israel return then, and seek the Lord their God, and David their King, then they shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days. (Hosea, iii. 5.)

In the consideration of the deliverance from Egypt there is, however, one circumstance which should teach the Israelites to rejoice with trembling, and that is, that the majority of those, who went forth from Egypt, never entered the land of Israel, but died in the wilderness on account of their sin and unbelief. That which has happened, may happen again. Israel might be delivered again from the lands of their dispersion, and be led forth with a mighty hand, and outstretched arm, and with great signs and wonders, and yet after all die in their sins. Indeed, it is not merely a legitimate deduction from the past, but an express prophecy of the future. “As I live, saith the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you; and I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord God. And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.”

ונרוחי מכם המודים והמשעים בי מארץ מגוריהם
אוציא אחום ואל אדמח ישראל לא ינוא :

“And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me; I will bring them forth from the country

where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel." (Ezek. xx. 33—38.) Here then we see, whether we consider the past or the future, that a mere temporal deliverance is not sufficient—that God's greatest temporal blessings, and even his mighty signs and wonders, may leave us in the more dreadful and fatal captivity of sin. Surely if a miraculous deliverance could deliver the soul, those that saw the miracles in Egypt, and experienced the Lord's mercy in their preservation from the destroying angel, and in the passage through the Red Sea, ought to have been perfect in holiness. Yet we find, after all that they saw and heard, that they were a disobedient and faithless generation, and that they perished in the wilderness. The history, then, of this great deliverance reminds us in the most forcible manner of the bondage of sin, and the necessity of a more noble and gracious emancipation. Israel was in bondage in Egypt, and the Lord had compassion and delivered them. All mankind, Jews and Gentiles, are born slaves to sin, and dreadful is the misery which they have suffered, and hopeless the prospect for the future, unless God have provided a way of escape. Now is it likely that that God who had compassion on the Israelites in their temporal affliction, should look, unmoved and un pitying, upon the temporal and spiritual wretchedness of the whole human race? Is it conceivable that those gracious ears, which heard the cries of Israel in Egypt, should be deaf to the groans and lamentations of all the sons of men? Is it consistent with the Bible-character of God to provide a remedy for temporal sorrow, and yet furnish no means of deliverance from everlasting woe? Is it like our Heavenly Father to stretch out his hand to save a few of his children from Egypt, and yet leave the great majority to perish in ignorance and sin? Blessed be God, who, in his great mercy, sent Jews to our forefathers to tell us of the blood of another and greater passover, which can preserve Gentiles as well as Jews from the wrath to come.

משח פסחנו נובח ונשיר :

"Messiah, our passover, is sacrificed for us ;" and therefore we too keep the feast, and join in the hymn of thanksgiving, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He hath visited and redeemed his people." You remember the paschal lamb of Egypt. We can say—

הנה שח אלהים והנשא את חטאת כל העולם :

"Behold the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." You remember the sprinkling of blood that delivered your fathers from temporal death. We rejoice because,

דם ישוע המשיח יסדרנו מכל חטא :

"The blood of Jesus, the Messiah, cleanseth us from all sin." You remember how, four

days before the passover, it was necessary to select a lamb without spot and without blemish. We think of the true Paschal Lamb, the Messiah, how, four days before the great sacrifice, he came up to Jerusalem, and was examined before the tribunals, and declared to be without sin. Pilate's testimony was, "Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people ; and behold I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him ; no, nor yet Herod : for I sent you to him ; and lo nothing worthy of death is done unto him." (Luke xxiii. 14, 15.) You remember how the destroying angel passed over the houses where the blood was sprinkled : we look forward to that more dreadful time, when He shall come as the Psalmist describes.

יבא אלהינו ואל יהיה אש לפני חטאי וסביבנו נשערה
מאד : יקרא אל השמים מעל ואל הארץ לדון עמו :
אספר לו חסדי נורוד ברחמי עלי ובה :

"Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence : a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people. Gather my saints together unto me : those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." (Ps. l. 3—5.) And we hope to be found amongst that number, and that the blood of the true Sacrifice will then deliver us. It is evident that the Psalmist here is not speaking of the sacrifices of the temple, for immediately after we read—

שכעז עמי ואדברו ישראל ואיניו בך אלהים אלהיך
אנכי : לא על גודך אויביך ועולותי לפני חסדי : לא
אפק מבייתך שר ממלאתך שחמים :

"Hear O my people, and I will speak : O Israel, and I will testify against thee : I am God, even thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt-offerings, to have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds." Here God plainly excepts the offerings of bulls and goats, and thereby overthrows the exposition of Rashi and others, who say that the covenant and sacrifice here alluded to are the same as those described at the giving of the law, when Moses said, "Behold the blood of the covenant," &c. (Exod. xxiv. 8.) The sacrifices then offered were "burnt-offerings and peace-offerings of oxen," which God here declares that he will not accept. Besides, God is not speaking of many sacrifices, but of one sacrifice of oxen, by virtue of which sinful men may stand before him as saints at the great day of judgment, and obtain mercy. This certainly cannot mean the sacrifices of the Mosaic covenant at Sinai, for by reason of

that sacrifice, they will appear as guilty sinners who have broken God's covenant, as he himself says—

אשר המה חסרו את בריתו :

“ Which my covenant they brake.” (Jer. xxxi. 32.) At that solemn hour the Mosaic covenant will only condemn, and therefore cannot be meant here. Indeed the rabbies appear to have felt the untenableness of this exposition, and therefore invented another figurative one—

יש דוש כי על ברית מילה שדחיקו ישראל בה בגלות :

“ There is also an allegorical interpretation referring it to the covenant of circumcision, which Israel has faithfully adhered to in the captivity.” (Kimchi in. loc.) But this exposition is as unfounded as the former. Circumcision is never called a sacrifice in Scripture. Neither will it serve a man in the day of judgment. What then is the sacrifice which is here intended? We answer, the true passover, the blood of the Messiah, whereby the new covenant is ratified. Some object that the shedding of blood is altogether unnecessary—that if God will forgive at all, he can forgive without atonement or sacrifice. But this objection will equally affect the sacrifice of the first passover. On the very same grounds, we may say, What necessity was there for killing a lamb, and sprinkling its blood upon the door-posts? The directions given by Moses are very striking—“ Kill the passover. And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side-posts with the blood that is in the bason; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning. For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians: and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side-posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come into your houses to smite you.” (Exod. xii. 21—23.) Surely the blood was not necessary to make known to him which house belonged to an Israelite. He could have saved them as well without the blood as with it. Why then destroy the life of a lamb, and give them all this trouble? Suppose that an Israelite had thus argued at that time, had refused to kill the passover, or having killed it, had neglected to sprinkle the blood, or having done both, was not con-

tent to abide in his house, but had gone forth before the morning, what would have been the consequence? Certain punishment. God was indeed determined to save Israel, but only in a certain way: and he that did not choose to submit to God's method, would naturally lose the benefit of his appointment. Our business is not to argue with God, but having ascertained His will, to submit to it. Inquire, then, what God means by “ his saints who have made a covenant with Him by sacrifice;” and endeavour to enter into that covenant, that when He appears to judgment, ye may be gathered unto Him. If the Christian view be not the true one, then since the destruction of the temple there has been no sacrifice, and no way of entering into that covenant with Him. You observe the season—you abstain from leaven—but there is no sacrifice. The main, yea the essential, element of the passover is wanting. The lamb cannot be slain. And even if it could be, if you had again a temple and a high-priest, and all the service of the sanctuary, still the sacrifice of the passover would only be a memorial of mercies long since gone by. It would be no real atonement for your sins, and when you had slain it, and eaten of it, the question would still remain, How am I a sinner to appear in the presence of the righteous Judge?

The first part of this paper will have shown you, that we are firm believers in the future glory and blessedness of Israel; that we do not, therefore, in offering you our hope for eternity, wish to deprive you of your own hopes for time. No, we wish you every blessing which God has promised by the mouth of Moses and the prophets, and can affectionately join in the words—

לשנה הבאה בירושלים :

If it should please God to spare us all to see the re-union of all the families of the earth, we should rejoice to unite with others in acknowledging “ that ye are the seed whom the Lord has blessed.” But we should rejoice a thousandfold more to meet you in the heavenly Jerusalem, and to mingle our voices with yours in singing,

“ Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.” Amen.

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