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Charles Christian Hennell

Excerpt

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CHAPTER I.

HISTORICAL SKETCH, FROM THE BABYLONISH CAPTIVITY TO
THE DEATH OF JESUS.

THE Jewish nation, which was of considerable political importance in the days of David and Solomon, was much weakened, during the reigns of Ahaz and his successors, by the encroachments of the Assyrians, and extinguished, for a time, as a political power, by the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. [B. C. 588.]

But the national feeling in a people of 800 years' standing, of peculiar manners, associations, and religious worship, survives the capture of their towns; and, during each successive transportation of their tribes [B. C. 725-588], and their subsequent captivity at Babylon, the Jews consoled themselves with the hope of a speedy restoration to their own land.* They compensated themselves for their present insignificance with the expectation of future greatness;† and their very sufferings were made a theme soothing to their vanity, by being considered, not as the effect of superior power on the part of their

* Jer. xxxii. 15, For thus saith the Lord of Hosts, houses, and fields, and vineyards, shall be possessed again in this land. xxxiii. 7, And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them as at first. xlvi. 27, But fear not thou, O my servant Jacob, and be not dismayed, O Israel; for behold I will save thee from afar off, and thy seed from the land of their captivity, and Jacob shall return, and be in rest and at ease, and none shall make him afraid. (l. 19; Ezek. xxxvii., xxxix. 25; xxvii. 25; Micah ii. 12.) Tobit xiv. 5, Afterwards they shall return from all places of their captivity, and build up Jerusalem gloriously, and the house of God shall be built in it for ever, with a glorious building, as the prophets have spoken thereof.

† Obadiah 17, But upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance—and there shall be holiness, and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions; 18, And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Esau for stubble—21, And saviours shall come upon Mount Zion to judge the Mount of Esau, and the kingdom shall be the Lord's.—Micah iv., Micah v. 8, And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles as a lion among the beasts of the forest. Isaiah xlix. 18-26; lx., For the nation and kingdom that will not

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enemies, but as a paternal and corrective chastisement from their own God.*

[B. C. 536.] When Cyrus permitted the small remnant of pure Jews to re-occupy their own land, and to re-build their temple and city,† their most extravagant hopes seemed about to be realized. A new era opened upon them;‡ they were in the way to take rank again amongst the nations; and if this could be attained out of a state of general servitude, a patriotic Jew might easily believe his nation destined, in the end, to eclipse Egypt and Assyria.§

Accordingly in their writings about the time of the restoration, (and a large proportion of those called the prophets appear to be nearly of that date,)|| these topics occur in almost every page. The imagination and literary talents of the Jews had been much developed by their contact with the Chaldees and Persians, and naturally displayed themselves chiefly on such a stirring theme. Besides, the Jewish leaders would encourage their poets

serve thee shall perish: yea those nations shall be utterly wasted. The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and they shall call thee the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel...thy people also shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever...a little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation; I the Lord will hasten it in its time.

* Ezekiel, *passim*, xxxix. 23; Micah i. 5, For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel. Isaiah xlii. 24, Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? Did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned? xlvii. 6, I was wroth with my people, and have given them into thine (Chaldea's) hand. xlviii. 10, Behold I have refined thee (Jacob), I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. Lam. iv. 22; Hosea xiv. 1; Daniel ix. 11.

† By comparing Ezra i. 3, with 1 Esdras iv. 63, it is seen that the decree of Cyrus was not understood as limited to the temple.

‡ Haggai ii. 9, The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former. Zech. i. 16-21; ii. 10-13.

§ Isaiah xiv. 2, Israel shall take them captive, whose captives they were; and they shall rule over their oppressors.

|| Haggai, B.C. 520; Zechariah, B.C. 519. Many parts of the older prophets appear to be interpolations of the same time. (See Ezek. xxxix. 23-29.) In chap. xiii. reasons will be given for considering Isaiah, xl. chap. to the end, as written in the time of Cyrus.

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and orators to choose such subjects, in order to animate the people under difficulties.

It is not surprising, then, to find in the poetic writings of the Old Testament extravagant descriptions of a kingdom of Israel which should cover the earth,* and of a great prince who should restore the throne of David.† The beautiful anticipations which, under various forms, have existed in nearly all nations, of the future perfection of the earth,‡ were, in the minds of the Jews, blended in a peculiar manner with the hopes and fortunes of Israel. On this subject each prophet or poet indulged in his own fancies; but one prevalent notion seems to have been that this kingdom would be established, and their final triumph over the nations effected, not so much by military

* Haggai ii. 22; Zech. ii. 21; Micah iv. 5; Isaiah ii. 2; Dan. vii. 13, 14.

† Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24, And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them.—xxxvii. 22-26, And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel, and one king shall be king to them all; and they shall be no more two nations...and they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, and their children's children for ever, and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.

Jer. xxiii. 5, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.

Isaiah xxxii. 1, 18, Behold a king shall reign in righteousness... and my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings.

Jer. xxiii. 17, For thus saith the Lord, David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of Israel.

The kings of Judah were called the Lord's anointed; therefore the expected restorer of their throne came to be described emphatically as the Anointed or Messiah; and it became a favourite literary amusement with the Jews to find passages of their scriptures applicable to him. Many passages consequently were thus applied which originally referred to real personages. Schoettgenius gives a minute account of all the texts interpreted by the ancient Rabbis concerning the Messiah. *Horæ Heb. lib. 2.*

‡ It is not likely that Virgil had read Isaiah; yet the resemblance between the ideas in his *Pollio* and those of the Hebrew poet has struck all readers.

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means, in which they were obviously deficient, as by some special intervention of their protector, the God of Israel. It was supposed that the presence of the Deity would be then made manifest to them in a more visible manner than had been known hitherto, and that signs and wonders, more impressive and more public than those granted in the days of Moses, would at last proclaim to the whole world the connexion subsisting between God and his chosen people.* Hence this state of things came to be called popularly the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of Heaven.†

The captivity and restoration were thought of less and less as events rolled on; but the writings which they had occasioned, remained amongst the Jews, a conspicuous part of their scanty literature. There is, indeed, in them so much of rich imagery and wild beauty, that they are to this day read with pleasure by those who look upon them merely as poetical relics; it is no wonder, then, that they should have continued for centuries in the hearts and mouths of all patriotic Jews, and that, when sufficiently veiled by antiquity, the prophets, as well as the law, should have been revered as divine oracles.

Events, however, did not correspond with these pro-

* Haggai ii. 6, 7, For thus saith the Lord of Hosts, yet once it is a little while, and I will shake the heaven and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory. Zech. ix. 13, 14, When I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man: and the Lord shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning; and the Lord God shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south. Zech. xiv. 3, 4, Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east, and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. See also Zech. xii. 4-8; Zephaniah iii. 8-20; Malachi iii. iv.; Joel i. 15, ii. 27-32, iii. 1, 2, 9-21; Hosea ii. 21-23; Ezek. xxxix. 21, 22.

† Zech. xiv. 9, And the Lord shall be king over all the earth. Ezek. xxxvii. 23, So they shall be my people, and I will be their God. xxxiv. 30, 31; Zech. viii. 8.

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phencies of Jewish greatness. With slow and painful efforts, their temple and city were rebuilt under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah [B. C. 536—445]; but they remained insignificant as a nation, and were successively tributary to the Persians and Macedonians, until the revolution effected by Judas Maccabæus. [B. C. 166.] Under him and the subsequent able princes of the Asmonæan race, they attained the rank of a respectable second-rate power, although inferior to the adjoining kingdoms of Syria and Egypt. But the Asmonæan dynasty grew weak from internal dissension; and during the quarrel between Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, Jerusalem was taken by Pompey, who first imposed upon the Jews a Roman tribute. [B. C. 63.] Under the patronage of the Romans, Herod the Idumean obtained the sovereignty, [B. C. 40,] to the exclusion of the native Asmonæan family; and although generally hateful to the Jews as a heathen and usurper, maintained by a vigorous government the respectability of the nation. After his death, [B. C. 3,] however, the Jews were compelled to make another step towards national servitude, by the appointment of Roman governors of Judea [A. D. 6 or 7], who exercised a jurisdiction superior to the family of Herod, and of the Jewish sanhedrim.

Throughout all these changes, the Kingdom of Heaven may be seen to have been from time to time a popular idea,* and during the Roman encroachments, it revived in full force. The romantic exploits of Maccabæus had

* Tobit xiii. 15, 18, Let my soul bless God the great king. For Jerusalem shall be built up with sapphires, and emeralds, and precious stone: thy walls, and towers, and battlements, with pure gold. And the streets of Jerusalem shall be paved with beryl, and carbuncle, and the stones of Ophir; and all her streets shall say Alleluia!

Josephus says that the Pharisees persuaded Pheroras, Herod's brother, that he was the predicted king, who would have all things in his power. *Antiq.* xvii. 2d chap.

In the preaching of John the Baptist (Matt. iii. 2) the kingdom is introduced without any explanation, as a well-known idea.

Josephus, War vi. ch. 6. "What did most elevate them in undertaking this war [A. D. 66-70] was an ambiguous oracle found in their sacred writings, how about that time one from their country should become governor of the habitable earth."

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renewed the Jews' spirit of independence, and encouraged the hope that the holy nation might, at length, in its turn succeed Assyria, Persia, and Macedonia, in the empire of the world. And now, that God's people should again be slaves to the Gentiles, was a thought of grief and indignation. The Jewish princes and aristocracy were easily soothed into submission to their powerful masters, who allowed them to retain many of their privileges; but the indignation of the populace broke out in continual tumults and insurrections,* which the Roman governor, aided by the priests and nobles, always quickly suppressed. The most remarkable of these was the insurrection of Judas the Galilean or Gaulonite,† who persuaded the

* Soon after the accession of Archelaus, occurred the sedition against Sabinus, and those of Judas, son of Ezekias, Simon, slave of Herod, and Athronges. "And now Judea was full of robberies; and as the several companies of the seditious lighted upon any one to head them, he was created a king immediately, in order to do mischief to the public." *Josephus, Ant. xvii. ch. 10.*

† "Moreover Cyrenius came himself into Judea, which was now added to the province of Syria, to take an account of their substance, and to dispose of Archelaus's money; but the Jews, although at the beginning they took the report of a taxation heinously, yet did they leave off any further opposition to it by the persuasion of Joazar, who was the son of Boethus, and high priest. So they, being over-persuaded by Joazar's words, gave an account of their estates without any dispute about it; yet there was one Judas, a Gaulonite, of a city whose name was Gamala, who, taking with him Sadduc, a Pharisee, became jealous to draw them to a revolt, who both said that this taxation was no better than an introduction to slavery, and exhorted the nation to assert their liberty... They also said that God would not otherwise be assisting to them, than upon their joining with one another in such counsels as might be successful, and for their own advantage; and this especially if they would set about great exploits, and not grow weary in executing the same: so men received what they said with pleasure, and this bold attempt proceeded to a great height. All sorts of misfortunes also sprang from these men, and the nation was infected with this doctrine to an incredible degree. One violent war came upon us after another, and we lost our friends who used to alleviate our pains: there were also very great robberies and murders of our principal men. This was done in pretence, indeed, for the public welfare, but in reality for the hopes of gain to themselves; whence arose seditions, and from them

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Galileans to resist an extraordinary taxation imposed by Cyrenius, the Roman Governor of Syria. Josephus does not mention the fate of Judas himself; but it is probable that it was the usual one of the insurgents against the

murders of men, which sometimes fell on those of their own people (by the madness of these men towards one another, while their desire was that none of the adverse party might be left), and sometimes on their enemies; a famine also coming upon us, reduced us to the last degree of despair, as did also the taking and demolishing of cities; nay, the sedition at last increased so high, that the very temple of God was burnt down by their enemies' fire. Such were the consequences of this, that the customs of our fathers were altered, and such a change was made as added a mighty weight toward bringing all to destruction, which these men occasioned by thus conspiring together; for Judas and Sadduc, who excited a fourth philosophic sect among us, and had a great many followers therein, filled our civil government with tumults at present, and laid the foundation of our future miseries by this system of philosophy, which we were before unacquainted withal; concerning which I shall discourse a little, and this the rather, because the infection which spread thence among the younger sort, who were zealous for it, brought the public to destruction." (Then follows a description of the doctrines of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes.) "But of the fourth sect of Jewish philosophy, Judas the Galilean was the author. These men agree in all other things with the Pharisaic notions; but they have an inviolable attachment to liberty, and say that God is to be their only ruler and Lord. They also do not value dying any kinds of death, nor indeed do they heed the deaths of their relations and friends, nor can any such fear make them call any man Lord; and since this immoveable resolution of theirs is known to a great many, I shall speak no further about that matter; nor am I afraid that any thing I have said should be disbelieved, but rather fear that what I have said is beneath the resolution they shew when they undergo pain; and it was in Gessius Florus's time, [about A. D. 65,] that the nation began to go mad with this distemper, who was our procurator, and who occasioned the Jews to go wild with it by the abuse of his authority, and to make them revolt from the Romans; and these are the sects of Jewish philosophy." *Antiq.* xviii. 1.

"Under his (Caponius's) administration it was that a certain Galilean, named Judas, prevailed with his countrymen to revolt; and said they were cowards if they would endure to pay a tax to the Romans, and would, after God, submit to mortal men as their Lords. This man was a teacher of a peculiar sect of his own, and was not at all like the rest of those their leaders." *War* ii. 8.

Josephus finished writing his Antiquities in the 13th year of Domitian, A. D. 94.

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Romans, since we find soon afterwards that the taxation was universally submitted to, and that his two sons, James and Simon, were crucified under the procuratorship of Tiberius Alexander.

The account which we have of Judas the Galilean comes from Josephus, who, being himself a noble and a conservative, disliked all attempts at insurrection and innovation; yet through his angry comments it is easy to perceive that Judas was a man of great talent, and that he left a deep impression on the minds of his countrymen; for he is characterized as being not only the leading revolter against the Romans, but also the head of a fourth philosophic sect, which occasioned the alteration of the customs of Moses, and, though agreeing with most of the pharisaic notions of religion, had an inviolable attachment to liberty, saying that God was to be their only ruler and lord. Judas was therefore both a political and religious reformer; and as his sentiments spread extensively among the Galileans, these provincials came to be looked upon with suspicion by the Romans for their disaffection to the tribute, and by the other Jews for their liberalism or heresy in religion.

Even before the time of Judas, the Jews had begun to allow themselves free discussion on the subject of their religion. The system of Moses, intended for a secluded people, was found to be inconsistent, in many points, with the spirit of the age, when they were forced into continual contact with other nations. From the restoration of the laws of Moses by Maccabæus, all the efforts of the strict Mosaic party were unable to stop the influx of the customs and notions of the Greeks, and to prevent the admixture of Gentile philosophies with the law and the prophets. As early as in the priesthood of Jonathan Apphus, [B. C. 161,] the Jews were divided into three principal sects of Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes, of which the latter, consisting chiefly of the lower ranks, presents a remarkable picture of simplicity and moral purity, tinged by the austere spirit of monachism. The principles of benevolence, morality, and religion, being implanted in the nature of man, it is natural that some of those combinations for common objects which men love to form together, should be directed to the

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cultivation and advancement of these principles. Hence there have frequently been seen, in different ages of the world, societies attempting to exhibit schools of perfect virtue, and to attain the highest possible degrees of temperance, benevolence, and piety. In the Essene sect we see an example of such a society influenced by a religion of Monotheism, and by the national literature already described. The condition of the three sects, and especially of the Essenes, forms such an interesting and important feature in the Jewish history at the period we are now arrived at, that it is worth while to transcribe the accounts of them given by Josephus and Philo.

Josephus says, (*War* ii. ch. 7,) “For there are three philosophical sects among the Jews. The followers of the first of whom are the Pharisees, of the second the Sadducees, and the third sect, which pretends to a severer discipline, are called Essenes. These are Jews by birth, and they cherish mutual love beyond other men. They reject pleasure as evil; and they look upon temperance and a conquest over the passions as the greatest virtue. There prevails among them a contempt of marriage; but they receive the children of others, and educate them as their own, while yet tender and susceptible of instruction. They do not indeed abolish the marriage institution, as being necessary to perpetuate the succession of mankind; but they guard against the immodesty of the women, who, they think, in no instance preserve their fidelity to one man.

“The Essenes despise riches, and are so liberal as to excite our admiration. Nor can any be found amongst them who is more wealthy than the rest; for it is a law with them, that those who join their order should distribute their possessions among the members, the property of each being added to that of the rest, as being all brethren. They deem oil as a pollution, and wipe it off, should any inadvertently touch them, for they think it an ornament to be plain, and always to wear white apparel. They appoint stewards to superintend the common interests; and these have no other employment than to consult the good of each member without distinction.

“This sect is not confined to one city, but many of them dwell in every city, and if any of their sect come from

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other places, what they have lies open for them, just as if it were their own ; and they go in to such as they never knew before, as if they had been ever so long acquainted with them. For which reason they carry nothing with them when they travel into remote parts, though still they take their weapons with them, for fear of thieves. Accordingly there is, in every city where they live, one appointed particularly to take care of strangers, and to provide garments and other necessaries for them. But the habit and management of their bodies is such as children use who are in fear of their masters. Nor do they allow of the change of garments, or of shoes, till they be first entirely torn to pieces, or worn out by time. Nor do they either buy or sell any thing to one another ; but every one of them gives what he hath to him that wanteth it, and receives from him again in lieu of it what may be convenient for himself : and although there be no requital made, they are fully allowed to take what they want of whomsoever they please.

“ And as for their piety towards God, it is very extraordinary ; for before sun rising they speak not a word about profane matters, but put up certain prayers which they have received from their forefathers, as if they made a supplication for its rising. After this, every one of them is sent away by their curators, to exercise some of their arts wherein they are skilled, in which they labour with great diligence till the fifth hour. After which they assemble themselves together again into one place ; and when they have clothed themselves in white veils, they then bathe their bodies in cold water. And after this purification is over, they every one meet together in an apartment of their own, into which it is not permitted to any of another sect to enter ; while they go, after a pure manner, into the dining-room, as into a certain holy temple, and quietly set themselves down ; upon which the baker lays them loaves in order ; the cook also brings a single plate of one sort of food, and sets it before every one of them ; but a priest says grace before meat, and it is unlawful for any one to taste of the food before grace is said. The same priest, when he hath dined, says grace again after meat : and when they begin and when they end, they praise God, as him that bestows their food upon