

The Messiahship of Jesus

by Alexander McCaul

Lecture V

Luke XXIV. 25, 26

Then said he unto them, O fools, and slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?

In the last lecture, it was stated that the non-fulfilment of certain prophecies relating to the times of Messiah is the chief objection which the Jews urge against the truth of Christianity. It was shown that the usual answers to this objection are insufficient, or even prejudicial to the Christian cause--and it was suggested that the argument used by our Lord to remove the doubts of his disciples, furnishes the true reply. Partial faith and partial consideration of the prophetic Scriptures appear as the cause of their common malady. Both fixed their eyes upon the promises of glory, and totally overlooked the predicted humiliation which was to precede. Our Lord endeavoured to remove the unbelief of his followers by directing their attention to all that the prophets have spoken, and by teaching them to distinguish between the suffering and the glory. The same distinction, if valid, will solve the difficulties propounded by the Jew. To prove its validity is the object of the present lecture.

The Jew, appealing to the prophets, says, The tribes of Israel have not been gathered--the kingdom of David not restored--the reign of universal peace and holiness not begun. Appealing to the same prophecies, we reply, You are mistaken in the time. The prophets announce two advents: one to suffer--the other to reign in the manner you expect; and we thus make good our assertion.

If it can be shown that the predictions concerning Messiah's advent differ with regard to place, time, and circumstance, and of each give a twofold description, it will necessarily follow that there must be two distinct advents. But that this is the fact cannot be denied, even by the adversaries of Christianity. The prophet Daniel (vii. 13, 14) declares that Messiah is to come from heaven. 'I saw,' says he, 'in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.' The prophet Micah, on the contrary, declares that he should come forth from Bethlehem, of Judah; and the numerous promises that he should be born of the family of David, as necessarily determine that this earth must be the scene of his entrance into his office.

If the Son of David is to come from heaven, as in that holy place none are born of women, he must previously have been born upon earth, and thence ascended up thither; that is, before the advent here described by Daniel, he must have come once already in order to be born, and therefore his advent to receive the kingdom promised him must be the second. The Jews, therefore, must either admit two advents, or believe that Messiah is a merely celestial being; and then deny that he is that which Daniel declares him to be, 'The Son of man,' and that which the prophets announced he should be, 'The son of David.'

The very same doctrine follows inevitably from Jewish tradition. The Jerusalem Talmud says expressly, that Messiah was born long since in Bethlehem of Judah, and gives the name of a Jew

who went and saw him.¹ The Babylonian Talmud² and the book of Zohar also imply that in the times in which they were written, Messiah had been born and already grown up to man's estate, and was then in Paradise interceding for Israel. The former book says that he was seen by a celebrated rabbi, and asked concerning the time of his advent. The popular faith, therefore, of the Jewish people, founded upon the prophetic writings, proves that those writings contain intimations of two distinct advents, one for the purpose of being born in Bethlehem of Judah, the other a return from Paradise, where for centuries he has tarried.

A consideration of the times marked out by the prophets will lead to the same conclusion. Jacob, by declaring that 'the sceptre should not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come,' fixed the time of the advent to a period before the destruction of the Jewish polity. Haggai, by predicting that the glory of that temple at whose building he assisted, should be greater than the glory of the first temple; and Malachi, by promising that the Lord should suddenly come to his temple and execute judgment upon the sons of Levi, both determine that Messiah was to come before the desolation of the temple and the dispersion of the people; and yet other predictions imply that Messiah was to come after a period of long and total dispersion of the people, and desolation of the temple and city.

Thus Isaiah, lix. 20, says, that 'the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and to them that turn from transgression in Jacob;' and then follows the promise, 'Thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side . . . the isles shall wait for me, the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the Lord thy God,' which implies dispersion; and that other promise, 'The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir-tree, the pine-tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious . . . whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through thee, I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations,' necessarily implies a previous desolation both of the temple and the city.

The prophet Micah describes the time of Messiah's glory also as consequent upon the desolation of the temple. He announces that 'in the last days the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains,' which the Jews universally apply to the days of the Messiah; but the preceding verse says, 'Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the Lord's house as the high places of the forest.' Daniel declares, 'that when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished,' thus expressly fixing that great deliverance by Messiah to the end of their present dispersion.

Here, then, are two periods of time fixed for the advent of Messiah, which yet are separated by the long interval beginning with the desolation of the holy city, and extending to the time of the restoration of the Jews. As the prophets assert that in each period Messiah is to come, and the periods are not identical, it follows that there must be two advents.

The difference between heaven and earth, between the time before the destruction of the temple and after its destruction, is, however, not more clear than the distinction of circumstances under which the advent of the Messiah is to take place. In one class of prophecies he is described as in a state of the most profound humiliation; in another, as exalted to the highest degree of glory, and

1 Berachoth, fol. 5, col. i. Old Paths, No. 50.

2 Sanhedrin, 98, col. i. Old Paths, *ibid.*

the throne of universal empire. The very same prophet presents Messiah in shapes the most opposite.

David in one place describes him 'as a worm and no man: a reproach of men and despised of the people;' and in another place speaks of him as universal king, having dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth, before whom all kings shall bow down, and whom all nations shall serve.' Isaiah describes him in similar language, as 'exalted and extolled, and very high,' and yet 'as despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.' In one place, as an example of meekness, saying 'He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench;' and in another, as the merciless destroyer of his enemies, exclaiming, 'I will tread them in my anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment.'

The most careless peruser of the prophecies must know that antithetic passages of this nature are so frequent that to adduce proof at all is almost superfluous, and the wayfaring man, though a fool, must perceive that the two states here described can be neither identical nor synchronous. How then are they to be disposed of? Are they two different states of the same person, or are there two Messiahs, to one of whom belongs the humiliation, and to the other the glory? And here be it remarked, that this apparent contrariety is not the mere offspring of Christian prepossession. The Jews themselves have perceived it, and have endeavoured to account for it.

It is mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud, that one of the rabbis was staggered by the conflicting statements of the prophets Zechariah and Daniel, one of whom says that Messiah is to come 'poor and riding upon an ass;' the other, that he is to come in heavenly majesty in the clouds. An attempt is, however, made to reconcile them, by asserting that these predictions are conditional; and that the humiliation or the glory of Messiah's advent depends upon the piety or impiety of the Jewish people. If they deserve it, says the rabbi, Messiah will come in the clouds of heaven; if they do not deserve it, he will come poor, and riding upon an ass. A reference to the words of the prophets is, however, sufficient to show that this solution is altogether unwarranted. The predictions are free from all appearance of condition. Daniel positively predicts that Messiah shall come in the clouds of heaven, and Zechariah as unequivocally asserts that he shall come to Zion, poor, and riding upon an ass; and therefore the more modern Jewish interpreters have given up the idea of a condition.

The attempted solution has, however, this advantage, that it testifies to the existence of the difficulty, and to the fact that it was long since felt by the Jews themselves. Its insufficiency, even in their minds, appears from a second solution proposed in passages where the difficulty is still greater. The prophet Zechariah not only announces an advent of humiliation, but declares that he shall be put to death, saying, 'They shall look upon me whom they have pierced;' and again, 'Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.' These passages were deemed incapable of condition, and therefore the rabbies, unable, on their principles, to resist the Christian interpretation, or to reconcile the abject humiliation and the divine glory as co-existent in the same being, have had recourse to a diversity of person, and invented two Messiahs, one, whom they call the son of Joseph, of the tribe of Ephraim, who is to suffer death; the other, the son of David, who is to reign in glory.

But to this it must be replied--1st. That even as a tradition, the idea of two Messiahs is very

uncertain. The rabbies are neither consistent nor uniform in their interpretation of those passages where they say a Messiah of the tribe of Joseph is announced. In that passage of the Talmud where it explains Zechariah's words, it expressly admits that David is the father of the person spoken of, though he is called the son of Joseph. 'When,' says the Talmud, 'Messiah, the son of Joseph, saw that he was to be slain, he said unto God, O Lord of the world, I ask of thee nothing but life. God replied, Before thou spakest, long ago, thy father David prophesied concerning thee saying (Ps. xxi. 4), 'He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever.' ' Here is a strange confusion, which either betrays the surreptitious insertion of the word Joseph, or proves that under the two names, the son of Joseph and the son of David, the more ancient rabbies understood one and the same person. But however explained, the confusion makes the tradition utterly uncertain, and the word of God proves that it is false. If there are two Messiahs, they must be contemporary, or one must come after the other. Their co-existence is however disproved by the prophet Ezekiel (xxxiv. 22, 23), who says, that when God saves his people, they shall have only one shepherd. The possibility of succession is taken away by Hosea, who says that until they seek Messiah, the son of David, they shall abide without a king and a prince.³

In no case, therefore, can there be two Messiahs; and consequently the original difficulty presented by the predicted humiliation and glory of Messiah still remains, and can only be solved by the adoption of two advents. Thus, the difference of place, the difference of time, and the difference of circumstance existing in the prophetic accounts of Messiah, all combine to prove that he must come twice: and this doctrine enables us to answer the Jewish objections to the Messiahship of our Lord. The Jew says, Before the coming of the Messiah, Elijah the prophet was to come, as Malachi says, 'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.' But Elijah has not come, therefore Jesus of Nazareth cannot be the Messiah. We reply, in all sincerity, and without any of that allegorizing evasion which has given such offence to the Jewish nation--we reply as Justin Martyr answered Trypho, and as Justin's Lord answered his disciples--'Elias truly shall come and restore all things,' but you are mistaken as to the time. The prophet Malachi does not say that Elijah was to come before the advent of humiliation, but before 'the great and terrible day of the Lord.' His non-appearance, therefore, at the first coming of Christ is so far from being an objection, that it is a confirmation of his claims.

In like manner, when the Jew objects that Messiah was to possess the throne of David, as Isaiah says, and an universal empire as announced by Daniel, both which characteristics are wanting in Jesus of Nazareth, the answer is similar. Isaiah makes the glory consequent upon his humiliation, and Daniel declares that until his ascent to the Ancient of days, Messiah is not to receive that dominion, glory, and kingdom in which all people, nations, and languages shall serve him, and which shall never pass away.

This answer fully meets all the difficulties of the case, and preserves one uniform and consistent principle of interpretation for all the prophecies--it agrees with the primitive expectations of the Catholic Church, and maintains the purity of God's promises, and their freedom from everything like equivocation or double-dealing. Its agreement with the principles of the gospel has, however, been denied, and grave objections urged against its correctness. It will be necessary, therefore, to show that the doctrine of the two advents is in strict accordance with the analogy of the Christian faith.

It is said that this doctrine will lead to inconvenient consequences, that it is inconsistent with the

³ Kimchi on Zech., p. 160.

spirituality of Christ's kingdom, that it savours of the spirit of the Judaizing corrupters of the gospel. To all this I would reply, in the first place, generally, that the words of the text necessarily imply the very system which has been advocated, as supplying the true answer to Jewish objections. When Christ says, 'O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken, ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?' he implies, that the disciples did believe some things that the prophets had spoken, and by abstaining from all reproof, that their faith in what they did believe was correct; and it follows further, as they did not believe what the prophets spake concerning Messiah's sufferings, that the part of the prophetic sayings which they did believe was that which related to Messiah's glory, and that their faith concerning this glory was correct. Their faith was, however, that of their nation. It was not a mere spiritual glory in heaven, but a national glory upon earth which they expected; the request of Zebedee's sons to sit, the one on his right hand and the other on his left: the declaration of the two disciples, 'We trust that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel,' and the question of the Apostles, 'Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' prove beyond doubt that they participated in the faith and the hopes of their nation. Our Lord's remonstrance with them implies that this hope was correct, and that the glory which was the object of it shall yet be manifested.

The words of the text, however, imply more than this. They teach that all things that the prophets have spoken are to be believed, and that faith which receives one portion of the prophecies and rejects another, is inconsistent with that wisdom which cometh down from above. 'O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.' The disciples of our Lord, and the Jews of ancient and modern times believed the prophecies concerning Messiah's glory--they neglected or explained away all that related to his humiliation, and therefore the Lord condemned them both of folly and of sin. Is the Christian of the present day more wise or more pious who receives all that the prophets have said concerning his humiliation, and rejects that which even the foolish and unbelieving disciples believed? Our Lord's principle is faith in the glory as well as in the humiliation--an universal reception of all that the prophets have spoken, and with this the proposed doctrine of the two advents agrees; it cannot therefore be inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel.

We do not, however, shun a more particular examination of the gospel, convinced that an accurate consideration of all that Christ and his apostles have spoken will silence every objection arising from a hasty view of particular passages. Thus, one of the main objections to the doctrine of Christ's kingdom upon earth is founded upon the words--'My kingdom is not of this world.' An examination of the particular expressions will show that it affords no fair foundation for the doctrine forced from it. The statement that Christ's kingdom is not of this world, is by no means opposed to the other statement, that the Messiah shall yet have a kingdom upon earth. In the world and of the world are two very different things. Christ's disciples, yea Christ himself was in the world, but not of the world. As is said in St. John, 'The world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.'⁴ As it was possible, therefore, for Christ himself and his disciples, so it is also possible for his kingdom to be in the world, though not of it.

The concurrent testimonies of Christ and his apostles, the epistles, and the gospels, demonstrate that it is not only possible, but certain. In the parable of the tares, the Lord teaches that this world, purified from all contamination, is the place of his kingdom. 'The field,' he says, 'is the

4 John, xvii. 14, 15.

world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the consummation of the age. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be at the consummation of this age. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity.' The place whence the tares are gathered he calls his kingdom, but the place where they grew and remained until the harvest, and whence they are gathered, he also declares to be the world. The world, therefore, is the place of the kingdom which the Son of man is to possess at the consummation of the age.

Similar was the annunciation of the angel, when he said--'The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever.' The throne of David and the house of Jacob are not to be sought in heaven. And to this agrees Christ's declaration concerning the meek, that 'they shall inherit the earth;' his promise to his disciples, that 'they should sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel;' and his command to all to pray--'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' The meek do not inherit, and never have in any sense inherited the earth, but have hitherto been only strangers and pilgrims. The apostles have never ruled over the twelve tribes of Israel. The will of God is still treated with scorn. These things remain, therefore, to be fulfilled when the kingdom of God shall come.

When St. Peter preached to the Jews, he urged them to repent, that the Lord might come to them again in mercy, saying, 'Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out; when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord, and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached to you, whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets, since the world began.'

St. Paul's hope was, as expressed in the epistle to the Romans, that 'The creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God;' and, in the epistle to the Hebrews, he expounds the eighth Psalm of the future dominion of the Lord Jesus Christ over the world. 'For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. But one testifieth in a certain place, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God might taste death for every man.'

In this reasoning of the apostle we learn that the world of which David speaks is the world to come, and that the son of man who is to rule over it is the Lord Jesus Christ. With this interpretation in mind read the Psalm through. Continue the words which the apostle cites, 'Thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air and the fish of the seas, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas,' and then say whether it is possible to imagine any other place but this earth as the scene of this dominion.

The apostle St. John, in the Apocalypse, teaches the same doctrine. He tells us that the hope of the redeemed in heaven is, that they shall share Christ's kingdom upon earth. Their song to the

Saviour is, 'Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.' Yea, the universal expectation is the fulfilment of those glorious words, 'The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.'

That, therefore, Jesus of Nazareth is to have a kingdom upon earth can be doubted by none who receive the authority of the New Testament. Sin and sorrow are not to find here an eternal habitation--violence is not for ever to fill the earth--nor Satan to be always the god of this world. Christ and his apostles have taught us to believe, to pray, and to wait for that happy period when 'God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes of his people, when there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things shall have passed away, and he that sitteth upon the throne shall say, behold I make all things new.'

How astonishing that any should be found in whose eyes a hope like this should appear inconsistent with the spirituality of the gospel, or unworthy of the Saviour of the world. Is it possible that any one, free from the taint of Gnostic delusion, can regard the restoration of this earth to its state of primitive blessedness, the exaltation of its inhabitants to their more than original purity, and the deliverance of all creation, animate and inanimate, from the taint and curse of sin, and the outpouring of the Spirit of God upon all flesh as a carnal expectation? Can the difference of locality cause a change so mighty as to make that unholy and unspiritual on earth which is holy and spiritual in heaven? What is it that sanctifies the abodes of cherubim and seraphim and constitutes the glory of the courts of heaven? Is it not the manifestation of Christ's presence, and the blessed influences of God the Holy Ghost? And cannot the same presence and the same influence make earth a paradise, and this or any other world the blessed abode of holiness and joy? There is nothing in heaven's materiality to cause a difference. It possesses no intrinsic, no uncreated, no essential holiness. Considered as portions of creation all localities are alike. The will of God, or the perversity of his rational creatures alone can cause the diversity. In Christ's presence, wherever it be, there is fulness of joy, and at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

The objection, therefore, that Christ's return to reign on earth is carnal or unworthy of the Holy One and Just, is devoid of all solid foundation, and can be plausible only to the unthinking. But it is far worse than invalid, it is based on the most presumptuous principle of infidelity, and leads directly to an entire rejection of Christianity. If the professed believer in Jesus of Nazareth rejects Christ's kingdom upon earth, as being unworthy of the now incarnate Son of God, how would he have answered the Gnostic or the Docete of old--yea, how is he to answer the Jew or the Deist of the present day, who makes the very same objection to the possibility of God's manifestation in the flesh? If his reason is able to judge of the one, he cannot deny that the heretic's reason is competent to pronounce concerning the other; and thus we must proceed from the rejection of Christ's reign upon earth to the rejection of his incarnation, and thence to the rejection of the Old Testament, and rest at last in the mere ideal God of the deist, or the aeon of the early heretics.

That such were the expectations and the faith of the catholic Church in its purest times, I have already intimated in my last lecture. It is past all controversy that the early Christians looked for their consummation of bliss in Christ's kingdom upon earth; and it is equally certain that the first enemies of this doctrine were found amongst the Gnostics, and that its final overthrow was owing to the influence of one who, however admirable for his learning and piety, is not celebrated either

for his judgment or his orthodoxy. The Platonizing Christianity of the school of Origen first created a distaste for the doctrine of the Bible and the faith of the early Church. The proud claims of Roman supremacy made their rejection indispensably necessary, and the lingering effects of Popish poison have continued the dominion of the opposite system long beyond the times of the Reformation. But the most judicious divines of our own Church have gradually been led by the study of the prophecies, to return to the faith of primitive antiquity. Newton, Lowth, Blayney, Newcome, Horsley, VanMildert, may be mentioned as holding the principles, or maintaining the views now contended for. And the great author of the *Analogy of Natural and Revealed Religion*, by giving his suffrage in their favour, may convince the most fearful that this answer to Jewish objection is agreeable to sobriety of judgment and to soundness of reason. In that celebrated work he says,

As several of these events seem, in some degree expressly, to have verified the prophetic history already, so, likewise, they may be considered further as having a peculiar aspect towards the full completion of it; as affording some presumption that the whole of it shall, one time or other, be fulfilled. Thus, that the Jews have been so wonderfully preserved in their long and wide dispersion, which is, indeed, the direct fulfilling of some prophecies, but is now mentioned only as looking forward to somewhat yet to come: that natural religion came forth from Judea, and spread in the degree it has done over the world, before lost in idolatry; which, together with some other things, have distinguished that very place in like manner as the people of it are distinguished: that this great change of religion over the whole earth was brought about under the profession and acknowledgment that Jesus was the promised Messiah;--things of this kind naturally turn the thoughts of serious men towards the full completion of the prophetic history concerning the final restoration of that people; concerning the establishment of the everlasting kingdom among them, the kingdom of the Messiah; and the future state of the world under this sacred government.

Thus far, Bishop Butler.

In answering the Jew, then, by pointing to the second advent as the season when the promises of glory are to be accomplished, we are making no compromise of Christianity, and starting no novel or unheard-of tenets, but treading in the footsteps of some of the greatest ornaments of our own Church, returning to the doctrine of primitive antiquity, and, above all, following the uniform testimony of the New Testament. We are not devising a new scheme of interpretation to help us out of a difficulty. We advocate a great truth, which, if the voice of controversy were for ever hushed, it would still be our duty to maintain; but which, now, when the ignorance of it endangers the salvation of a great and numerous people, it would be treason against the majesty of heaven to withhold.

Study the books of Jewish controversy, from the first age of the Church to the present day; or go and converse with the Jews in every country whither the wrath of an offended God hath scattered them. Inquire into their reasons for rejecting Christianity, and you will find in every age and every clime the same objection, the non-fulfilment of the promises of glory. An answer must, therefore, be had, and what other answer shall we choose but that which solves the whole difficulty, without having recourse to force or evasion, maintains one consistent principle of interpretation, and has the sanction of the Lord Jesus Christ, when he says--'O, fools, and slow of

heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory.'

Lecture V in Alexander McCaul, *The Messiahship of Jesus: The Concluding Series of the Twelve Lectures on the Prophecies* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1952).