*of Serenity*, by the Rev. David Wallace (2s. net); and *Walking with God*, by the Rev. David Purves, M.A., D.D. (2s. 6d. net). They are all well worth their money. Perhaps Dr. Purves has the advantage in style, but he cannot surpass the other men in earnestness or in vivid presentation of the gospel.

Two still smaller and cheaper volumes from the same publishing house are *Via Crucis*, by the Rev. J. Macartney Wilson, B.D.; and *True Manhood*, by the Rev. F. C. M. Buck, A.T.S. (1s. net). Last of all and most acceptable comes a volume of children's sermons by the Rev. A. E. Johns, entitled *Little Words for Little Worshippers* (1s. 6d. net).

# The Messianic Interpretation of Prophecy.

By the Rev. F. H. Woods, B.D., late Fellow of St. John's College, Oxford.

**Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?** —Matt. xi. 3.

From our present Christian point of view, this question seems at first sight a very simple one, and the answer obvious. 'Yes, of course,' we are inclined to say, and what we mean is something of this sort: 'The Carpenter of Nazareth was in fact He that was destined to come, and whose coming was foretold by the Jewish prophets.' If we were further asked whether Christ corresponded to these prophecies as the Jews of our Lord's Day understood them, we might be disposed to answer, 'No, they understood them to refer to a literal and temporal kingdom, but their real reference is to the spiritual Kingdom of which He was speaking when He said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn $18^{36}$).' The first statement is certainly true as regards the expectation of many, perhaps most, of the simple-minded and uncultured people of our Lord's Day. The question which is said to have been asked shortly before the Ascension, 'Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' (Ac $1^{6}$), seems to show that some at least of the apostles shared this opinion. With this we may compare the difficulty felt by the disciples on the road to Emmaus. 'We hoped that it was he which should redeem Israel'? (Lk $24^{21}$). But the second statement, that our Lord's contemporaries misunderstood what the Prophets meant, is at least open to question, if we ought not indeed to say that it is certainly wrong. For surely it is most reasonable to suppose that a writer means precisely what he says, unless we have some very definite reason to believe the contrary. Of course, there would be such a reason, if there were any hint that the Prophets were speaking in parables. It might be said that this appears to be the case with the vision of Ezekiel's temple, where, in spite of the matter-of-fact description, some of the details are so extravagant as to be practically impossible, and where what is apparently material passes altogether into the mystical and symbolic when the prophet describes the streams of water which flowed out from beside the altar. Again, we have in Is 11 a beautiful symbolic picture of the Messianic age when the cow and the bear are to feed, and their young ones lie down together, and the lion to eat straw like the ox. This follows, it may be pointed out, immediately upon the description of the Messianic King. But in such a case there is no ground for believing that the figure of a king is consciously used as a symbol of one far higher than an earthly king. It is one thing to use earthly figures to represent spiritual and heavenly things, quite another to use unnatural figures to express features which may, after all, have only an earthly meaning.

There is no reason, therefore, to suppose from this passage that Isaiah contemplated a superhuman Messiah. It is true, of course, that the Shoot from the stock of Jesse is to be endowed in a supernatural degree with the highest faculties. But these faculties do not belong to Him in His own Being, but are the special endowment of the Holy Spirit, and are just the particular faculties necessary for executing what was a specially kingly duty, the hearing of causes. It is also a significant fact that the prophecy of the Messianic King is immediately followed by the prediction of such temporary events under his auspices as the union of the northern and southern kingdoms, and a successful attack on their surrounding enemies.

It may be said, indeed, that such passages were

believed by early Christians to have been fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth. The first Gospel, for example, evidently refers to the name 'Branch' of this prophecy in the words, 'He shall be called a Nazarene' (Mt $2^{23}$). The same prophecy is also definitely referred to Jesus by St. Paul, 'There shall be the root of Jesse, and he that ariseth to rule over the Gentiles; on him shall the Gentiles hope' (Ro $15^{12}$; cf. Is $11^{10}$). And there can be little doubt that our Lord had such passages definitely in view when He said that He came not to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil (Mt $5^{17}$). But in what sense did He claim that he fulfilled the Prophets? By fulfilling the Law, He did not mean that he was re-enacting the Decalogue as it stood, but, as He Himself explained in detail, that the Law of the Gospel was to be an enrichment of the Decalogue, forbidding all infringements of its spirit in deed, word, or even in thought and feeling. But if so, are we not justified in explaining the fulfilment of the Prophets in an analogous sense? It is surely no more necessary to suppose that the Prophets meant by their predictions the Christ as He actually proved to be than that the early Legislator intended by the Decalogue to forbid angry feelings or impurity of thought. When Christ claimed to be the expected King, He was using no mere metaphor. He summed up in Himself the three chief functions of royalty. He came to be our Law-giver, our Master, and our Judge. Thus understood, we are justified in saying with St. Augustine, both as regards the Law and the Prophets, that the New Testament was latent in the Old, that the Old became patent in the New (Aug., *Quæst. in Ex.*, lib. ii. Quæst. lxxviii.).

I should perhaps add that it does not follow that all references of prophetic and other passages to Christ and Christian events in the New Testament are justifiable. Having quite legitimately once seen Christ foreshadowed in the Old Testament, the early Christian writers were tempted to find Him everywhere. *E.g.* the words, 'Out of Egypt have I called my Son,' in Hos $11^{1}$, refer obviously to the nation called out of Egypt, and cannot legitimately be pressed, as it is in the first Gospel (Mt $2^{15}$), into the service of Christology. Again, even where a passage is certainly Messianic, it does not follow that the exegesis of details given by a New Testament writer is necessarily satisfactory. The Messianic name 'Branch' was intended by Isaiah no doubt to mean that the Messiah would spring from the royal house of David. It might be regarded as fulfilled in a sense in the genealogy of Jesus; but it is a mere play on words to interpret it of His having been brought up at Nazareth (see Mt $2^{23}$).

It would be beyond the scope of this inquiry to consider the passages of the Old Testament bearing on what is called 'the Suffering Messiah,' because it is very obvious that this did not form part of the Messianic expectation in our Lord's Day (see Lk $24^{21.\ 26}$, Ac $8^{32-34}$). The Cross was, in fact, the great stumbling-block in the way of the Jews accepting Jesus as the Christ (1 Co $1^{23}$). But this much may be said, that if such passages are to be explained as Messianic we are justified in requiring some sort of analogy between the Old Testament sufferer (whether an individual or the nation) and Jesus of Nazareth.

So far we have been dealing with what was in the main the more popular conception of the Messiah, a mighty King who would overcome all their enemies, and rid them from the detested power of Rome, establish peace in the world, and rule over them in perfect justice. To some extent they probably realized also the other side of the picture, the perfect people as well as the perfect King. It was such expectations that made them so anxious to proclaim Jesus as their King, and that explain also their utter disappointment when He refused their claim.

But there was another view of the expected Messiah in our Lord's Day, which may be called that of the comparatively learned. This expression must, however, be regarded as including all those who were conversant with the current religious literature of the age, and it would appear to embrace a very large circle. The literature I refer to is not contained, with two exceptions (Daniel and 2 Esdras), either in the Old Testament or in the Apocrypha, but in a body of writings commonly known as Pseudepigraphic or Apocalyptic. They were most of them written either during the lifetime or in the century before the time of our Saviour, and even when shortly after His time they fairly represent Jewish religious opinion as current in His day. Differing as they do in details and in standpoint, they commonly agree in the following particulars: They are written in the name of some Old Testament character—Enoch, Isaiah, Baruch, or the like,—in

whose mouth certain prophecies are put which, in point of fact, are events which have already taken place. The pseudonymous writer is also represented as foretelling other events of a more mystical and supernatural character which are yet to come to pass. Among these still future events is the Advent of the Messiah who is no longer a human King, but one who comes from heaven to judge the nations of the world and rule for ever over God's people. The earliest book of this class of literature, and one of which the others are more or less copies, is Daniel. That this book was written in the early part of the Maccabean struggle is evident from the fact that the writer describes in the pseudo-prophecies of Daniel, historical events up to the year 167 B.C., and afterwards gives very vague predictions concerning the last acts and fate of Antiochus Epiphanes which differ considerably from the facts.[1] Further, while the historical references during the supposed history of Daniel are full of inaccuracies, the history of the Seleucid dynasty, as the events approach the time of the Maccabean revolt, is given in accurate detail. The object of the book is evidently to console the Maccabees and their supporters, and to urge them on to deeds of fortitude and faith. With this object in view the writer relates wonderful stories in which the faith and courage of Daniel and his companions had been abundantly vindicated. On the other hand, in the fate that had befallen heathen tyrants for their blasphemies and desecrations, he foresees the fate of that arch-blasphemer and desecrator Antiochus. In the madness of Nebuchadnezzar we have very probably a foreshadowing of an Epiphanes converted into an Epimanes. The writer goes on to relate a number of visions in which under symbolic figures events are described by the interpreting angel which point to the great truth that all nations are in the hand of God; that as one nation after another had fallen, so the last and most terrible would collapse, and that then the Kingdom of the Messiah would rise upon its ruins. It may seem difficult to us, from our modern point of view, to justify this book, and others of its class. It would, however, be extremely unfair to compare it to such a modern forgery as *Ossian's Poems* by Macpherson, for it cannot really be proved that the writer ever intended to pass off the work as Daniel's, any more than the writer of Koheleth or Wisdom seriously supposed that these books would be accepted as genuine works of Solomon. In fact, the common practice of writing pseudepigraphic literature at the time shows how very transparent was this purely literary device. On the other hand, of the great beauty and religious value of the Book of Daniel it seems almost impertinent to speak. It is, however, the Messianic picture as portrayed in this and other Apocalyptic books that now concerns us.

[1] See esp. Dn $11^{36-45}$.

The most important vision for our purpose is that of Dn 7. After the description of the world powers ending with the fourth (*i.e.* the Seleucid) dynasty, and the little horn (*i.e.* Ant. Epiphanes) that had the eyes of a man and a mouth speaking great things, there follows the splendid scene of the Great Assize in which Jehovah is seen seated upon His Throne in all the Majesty of Divine glory, attended by thousands and thousands of His ministers. The judgment is set and the books are opened. The writer passes on to the execution of the sentence upon all the peoples of the world, but especially upon the little horn. A third scene opens with the coming on the clouds of heaven of one like a Son of Man, who is brought near to Jehovah's Throne and receives from Him an everlasting Kingdom over all peoples, nations, and tongues.

It will be observed that this picture differs from the earlier representations of the Messiah, not only in His apparently superhuman character, but also in the fact that He is not Himself the executor of the sentence upon Israel's enemies, but only appears after it has been carried out.

It might be suggested, on the contrary, that in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chap. 2 the stone (vv.[34. 45]) which breaks in pieces the powers of the world is intended to represent the Messiah. That this is not the case is clear, however, from v.[35], where the stone becomes a great mountain. The stone, therefore, must be explained as being in some sense or other the nation itself.

A later vision speaks of a period of trouble, which is to precede a general Resurrection in which the wise are to shine as stars in everlasting glory. It is not very easy to see exactly how this prediction is related to the earlier, but it is natural to suppose that the troubles are to precede and the Resurrection to follow the Advent of the Messiah.

The dignified but glorious representation of the

Messiah's advent in Daniel could not be surpassed by later Apocalyptic writers, but it was amplified in many details. One very striking additional feature is the full description of the convulsions of nature and of the social order which would precede or attend His Advent. Thus we read in the Assumption of Moses ($10^{1-10}$): 'Then shall the earth quake, and it shall be shaken unto the ends thereof, and the high mountains shall be brought low and shall be shaken, and the valleys shall sink down. The sun shall no more give his light, and shall be turned into darkness. The horns of the moon shall be broken, and shall be wholly turned into blood. And the course of the stars shall be brought into confusion. The sea shall withdraw into the abyss, and the wells shall cease, and the rivers dry up.'[1] In the Book of Jubilees we read ($23^{12}$): 'In those days there will be plague upon plague, wound upon wound, sadness upon sadness, evil rumour upon evil rumour, and many similar terrible punishments, one after another; sickness, destruction, frost, hail, snow, fever, cold, stiffness, drought, death, sword, imprisonment, and every kind of sorrow and sickness.'[2] Again, the Advent is described as attended by thousands of angels, as in Enoch $1^{9}$, a passage familiar to us from its quotation in the Epistle of Jude (v.[14]), 'And behold He cometh with ten thousands of His Holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to destroy all the ungodly and to convict all flesh,' etc.[3] It need hardly be said that the Apocalyptic writers did not derive such additional features from their own imagination. Passages which speak of great natural disorders as either figuring or attending Divine judgments are common throughout the Prophets.[4] It will be sufficient for my purpose to quote Joel $2^{30.31}$: 'I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD come.' Here the context in $3^{2.3}$ readily lends itself to an eschatological interpretation. Indeed, the thought that all nations would be gathered together to fight against Israel and meet with a final overthrow is a conception met with more than once in the later prophets, as we may see from Ezekiel's description of the fate of Gog in the land of Magog (38. 39), the destruction of Jehovah's enemies outside Jerusalem in Is $66^{19.24}$, Zec 14, and from other passages. The attendance of the Holy ones may have been suggested by the opening words of the Blessings of Moses (Dt $33^{2}$), where, according to LXX,[5] Jehovah is said to have come with the ten thousands of Holy ones, and His angels at His right hand. But what was new in the Apocalyptic writers was the way in which they connected these thoughts so as to form a complete cycle of events which were to occur in the Last Days.

The later Apocalypses usually follow Daniel in describing Jehovah Himself as both the Judge and apparently the executor of the sentence against the adversaries; but occasionally both these functions are ascribed to the Messiah. Thus in the Sibylline Oracles (iii. 55) we read, 'And then will God send a king from heaven to judge each one with blood and the glow of fire';[6] and in the Book of Enoch (lxii. 2) it is said that 'the Lord of Spirits seated him on the throne of his glory, and the spirit of righteousness was poured out upon him, and the word of his mouth slew all the sinners, and all the unrighteous were destroyed before his face,' with which we may compare lxix. 29, etc. etc.

The resemblance between such passages from the Apocalyptic writings and our Lord's eschatological discourses is obviously too close to be explained by saying that they are independent compilations of the same Old Testament prophecies. There is certainly a direct connexion between the two. How, then, should we explain this? It has been maintained that the narration of their discourses has been largely, perhaps unconsciously, coloured by the current Messianic views of the age, as we find the latter in the Apocalyptic writers. Indeed, one scholar[7] (whose theological studies in Oxford have justly won him very high regard) goes so far as to propose that we should regard what he calls the Apocalypse of St. Mark ($13^{5-37}$) as originally a quite independent document inserted into the primitive Gospel. He suggests that in this document the writer attributes the

[1] Quoted in Oesterley's *Doctrine of the Last Things*, p. 83.
[2] See Oesterley, *op. cit.* p. 82.
[3] The quotations from Enoch are taken from Charles's second edition, 1912.
[4] Cf. references in Oesterley, p. 83.
[5] The Heb. of the last clause is quite unintelligible, and the text is probably corrupt.
[6] Cf. Oesterley, *op. cit.* p. 89.
[7] Rev. B. H. Streeter in Sanday's *Studies in Synoptic Problems*, pp. 179–183.

speculations of His age to Christ in the same spirit in which the earlier Apocalyptic writers attributed theirs to Daniel, Enoch, and others, that it was written just after the fall of Jerusalem; that its chief objects were to warn his readers against Antichrist and to console them with the assurance on the Master's own authority that the fall of Jerusalem was the immediate prelude to His coming. It might be objected that such a method of criticism would soon leave us with very little to criticise. But it would be more pertinent to observe that the analogy to the Apocalypses breaks down on one very essential point. They were all written in the name of an ancient Jew, and their being so ascribed would have deceived nobody. But to have put a long discourse into the mouth of Christ only forty years after His death would have been nothing more or less than a deliberate and wanton forgery. On the other hand, the possibility of our Lord's language, even in the Synoptists, having been influenced by current opinion during a period of oral transmission is not one to be lightly dismissed. Indeed, we seem to have in St. Luke a clear instance of a somewhat similar colouring by recent events of the actual eschatological discourses in question, where he paraphrases the very difficult phrase (Mk $13^{14}$), 'When ye see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not,' with the words, 'When ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand' (Lk $21^{20}$). But when we have made all allowance for such an influence, there still seems to be little doubt that our Lord in the main accepted the Apocalyptic predictions of the Messiah quite as much as those of the Prophets, and expected to fulfil them in His own person. Does it follow that as loyal Christians we are bound to accept as literally to be accomplished all that He said of His Second Advent? I think not. Here, again, two alternatives present themselves. In the first place, we may naturally ask whether the knowledge of these future events might not have belonged to those Divine attributes of which the Son of God emptied Himself (Ph $2^{7}$) when He became man. And this may seem all the more probable when we consider that it was expressly in connexion with a fact belonging to His Second Advent that He disclaimed such knowledge (see Mk $13^{32}$, and parallels); and further, that He seems certainly to have held the opinion current in the early Church that His Advent would take place in the lifetime of some of His apostles. 'Verily I say unto you, There be some here of them that stand by, which shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power' (Mk $9^{1}$).

But this is not the only possible explanation of our Lord's language. It is by no means improbable that He accepted these utterances of Apocalyptic writers, just in the same spirit that He accepted the predictions of the Prophets, not so much in their literal acceptation, but as more or less allegorical. I mean that He foretold a personal return to the world, but that the details were little more than the scenery in which that thought was represented. It is obvious that the Synoptists, at any rate, recognized a partial fulfilment of our Lord's eschatological discourses in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. In the Fourth Gospel an Advent of Christ is recognized in the coming of the Holy Spirit, who thereby establishes the kingdom that is not of this world. But in both the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptics a more perfect realization of the Kingdom is to be found at the general resurrection when the King returns to the world (see Mt $13^{30\text{-}49}$ $25^{31}$, Mk $8^{38}$, Jn $21^{22}$).

In conclusion, I would observe that it would be a very serious mistake to regard such discussions as these as having merely an academic interest. As Christians we look forward in hope to share after this life the Kingdom of Christ in glory. Yet let us not forget that, after all, the greater stress was laid by our Lord on His Kingdom upon earth. But King and Kingdom, as I said before, are far from being mere metaphors. If Christ is our King, we as His subjects owe Him whole-hearted obedience. If the Church on earth is in any real sense the Kingdom of God, and we are fellow-citizens with the saints, then to us oppression and injustice, not to mention selfish indolence, must be absolutely intolerable. We cannot look on with equanimity at cruelties sometimes practised in the name of civilization, at the white slave traffic, at sweating, and the like, and must sigh and pray for the time when war shall be no more. We shall do our very utmost as loyal citizens to bring about the time when the Kingdom of this world shall become the Kingdom of our God and His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever. Amen.