

Appendix G

THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL AND J. C. RYLE

JOHN CHARLES RYLE (1816-1900), the first Bishop of Liverpool, was, according to C. H. Spurgeon's consideration of that period, "the best man in the Church of England." Born near Macclesfield, Cheshire County, there remains today, at the church of St. Michael and All Angels, a memorial plaque rightly describing him as, "A Man of Granite, with the Heart of a Little Child." Anticipating a wealthy inheritance, the bankruptcy of his father was a crushing blow for this young man. Having been well educated at Eton and completing studies at Oxford, thoughts of entering Parliament were abandoned upon Ryle's conversion in 1837. As a result he was ordained as a minister of the Church of England in 1841, becoming a bishop in 1880. His whole ministry was marked by a singular devotion to the evangelical reformed faith, especially as confessed in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion of the Anglican Church. His vigorous, uncompromising, and yet kindly manner lives on in the books and tracts he authored that, to this day, have gone through numerous reprints.

In 1867 a collection of sermons by Ryle was published under the title, *Coming Events and Present Duties*, in which his clear yet carefully stated premillennial convictions were expressed. As with Horatius Bonar in his volume *Prophetical Landmarks*, which work Ryle highly recommends, here the dominant subject similarly concerns Israel. With regard to his understanding of the future of the Hebrew people, as well as the regathering of the Jews to the promised land, the following excerpts plainly express Ryle's firm convictions in this regard.

By way of introduction, Ryle sets forth his prophetic creed in eleven sections, several of which follow.

6. I believe that after our Lord Jesus Christ comes again, the earth shall be renewed, and

the curse removed; the devil shall be bound, the godly shall be rewarded, the wicked shall be punished; and that before He comes there shall be neither resurrection, judgment, not millennium, and that not till after He comes shall the earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord (Acts 3:21; Isa. 25:6-9; I Thess. 4:14-18; Rev. 20:1; etc.).

7. I believe that the Jews shall ultimately be gathered again as a separate nation, restored to their own land, and converted to the faith of Christ, after going through great tribulation (Jer. 30:10-11; 31:10; Rom. 11:25-26; Dan. 12:1; Zech. 13:8-9).

8. I believe that the literal sense of the Old Testament prophecies has been far too much neglected by the Churches, and is far too much neglected at the present day, and that under the mistaken system of spiritualizing and accommodating Bible language, Christians have too often completely missed its meaning (Luke 24:25-26).¹

WATCH!

In the first chapter titled "Watch," Ryle expounds upon Matthew 25:1-13, but especially the example of the five wise virgins who were awake in eager expectation of the coming of the Bridegroom. Here is what is to be anticipated:

The plain truth of Scripture I believe to be as follows. When the number of the elect is accomplished, Christ will come again to this world with power and great glory. He will raise His saints, and gather them to himself. He will punish with fearful judgments all who are found His enemies, and reward with glorious rewards all His believing people. He will take to Himself His great power and reign, and establish an universal kingdom. He will gather the scattered tribes of Israel, and place them

¹ J. C. Ryle, *Are You Ready For The End Of Time?* pp. 8-9. This is simply a retitled reprint of *Coming Events and Present Duties*.

once more in their own land. As He came the first time in person, so He will come the second time in person. As He went away from earth visibly, so He will return visibly. As He literally rode upon an ass, was literally sold for thirty pieces of silver, had His hands and feet literally pierced, was numbered literally with the transgressors and had lots literally cast upon His raiment, and all that Scripture might be fulfilled so also will He come, literally set up a kingdom and literally reign over the earth, because the very same Scripture has said it shall be so (Acts 1:11; 3:19-21; Ps. 102:16; Zech. 14:5; Isa. 24:23; Jer. 30:3, 18; Dan. 7:13-14).²

OCCUPY TILL I COME

The next chapter, "Occupy Till I Come" deals with a most vital matter. There continue to be those who speak out of one side of their mouth in declaring that God has finished with any national identity regarding Israel, especially concerning the promised land, while from the other side of their mouth they express some necessity for the "Jews," being vaguely defined, to hear the gospel. Some believe a remnant of the Jews will be saved through the centuries, while others expect the conversion of a large number of them toward the end of this age; though in either case, Jewish identity will be lost since this will be an engrafting within Christendom that completes the people of the God, the church, also known as the new supplanting Israel. To this Ryle responds, concerning Luke 19:11-13, where the twelve disciples erroneously "thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear."

I believe we have fallen into an error parallel with that of our Jewish brethren, an error less fatal in its consequences than theirs, but an error far more inexcusable, because we have had more light. If the Jew thought too exclusively of Christ *reigning*, has not the Gentile thought too exclusively of Christ *suffering*? If the Jew could see nothing in Old Testament prophecy but Christ's exaltation and final power, has not the Gentile often seen nothing but Christ's humiliation and the preaching of the gospel? If the Jew dwelt too

much on Christ's *second* advent, has not the Gentile dwelt too exclusively on the *first*? If the Jew ignored the *cross*, has not the Gentile ignored the *crown*? I believe there can be but one answer to these questions. I believe that we Gentiles till lately have been very guilty concerning a large portion of God's truth. I believe that we have cherished an arbitrary, reckless habit of interpreting first advent texts *literally*, and second advent texts *spiritually*. I believe we have not rightly understood "all that the prophets have spoken" about the second personal advent of Christ, any more than the Jews did about the first. And because we have done this, I say that we should speak of such mistakes as that referred to in our text with much tenderness and compassion.

Reader, I earnestly invite your special attention to the point on which I am now dwelling. I know not what your opinions may be about the fulfillment of the prophetic parts of Scripture. I approach the subject with fear and trembling, lest I should hurt the feelings of any dear brother in the Lord. But I ask you in all affection to examine your own views about prophecy. I entreat you to consider calmly whether your opinions about Christ's second advent and kingdom are as sound and scriptural as those of His first disciples. I entreat you to take heed, lest insensibly you commit as great an error about Christ's second coming and glory as they did about Christ's first coming and cross.

I beseech you not to dismiss the subject which I now press upon your attention, as a matter of curious speculation, and one of no practical importance. Believe me, it effects the whole question between yourself and the unconverted Jew. I warn you that, unless you interpret the prophetic portion of the Old Testament in the simple literal meaning of its words, you will find it no easy matter to carry on an argument with an unconverted Jew.

You would probably tell the Jew that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament Scriptures. To those Scriptures you would refer him to for proof. You would show him Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, Daniel 9:26, Micah 5:2, Zechariah 9:9 and 11:13. You would tell him that in Jesus of Nazareth those Scriptures were literally fulfilled. You would urge upon him that he ought to believe these Scriptures, and receive Christ as the Messiah. All this is very good. So far you would do well.

² Ibid., pp. 22-24.

But suppose the Jew asks you if you take *all* the prophecies of the Old Testament in their simple literal meaning. Suppose he asks you if you believe in a literal personal advent of Messiah to reign over the earth in glory, a literal restoration of Judah and Israel to Palestine, a literal rebuilding and restoration of Zion and Jerusalem. Suppose the unconverted Jew puts these questions to you, what answer are you prepared to make?

Will you dare to tell him that Old Testament prophecies of this kind are not to be taken in their plain literal sense? Will you dare to tell him that the words Zion, Jerusalem, Jacob, Judah, Ephraim, Israel, do not mean what they seem to mean, but mean the *Church of Christ*? Will you dare to tell him that the glorious kingdom and future blessedness of Zion, so often dwelt upon in prophecy, mean nothing more than the gradual Christianizing of the world by missionaries and gospel preaching? Will you dare to tell him that you think it “carnal” to expect a literal rebuilding of Jerusalem, “carnal” to expect a literal coming of Messiah to reign? Oh, reader, if you are a man of this mind, take care what you are doing! I say again, take care.

Do you not see that you are putting a weapon in the hand of the unconverted Jew, which he will probably use with irresistible power? Do you not see that you are cutting the ground from under your own feet, and supplying the Jew with a strong argument for not believing your own interpretation of Scripture? Do you not see that the Jew will reply, that it is “carnal” to tell him that the Messiah *has* come literally to *suffer*, if you tell him that it is “carnal” to expect Messiah *will* come literally to reign? Do you not see that the Jew will tell you, that it is far more “carnal” in you to believe that Messiah could come into a world as a despised, crucified Man of sorrows, than it is in him to believe that He will come into the world as a glorious King? Beyond doubt he will do so, and you will find no answer to give.

Reader, I commend these things to your serious attention. I entreat you to throw aside all prejudice, and to view the subject I am dwelling upon with calm and dispassionate thought. I beseech you to take up anew the prophetic Scriptures, and to pray that you may not err in interpreting their meaning. Read them in the light of those two great polestars, the first and second advents of Jesus Christ.

Bind up with the *first advent* the rejection of the Jews, the calling of the Gentiles, the preaching of the gospel as a witness to the world and gathering out of the election of grace. Bind up with the second advent the restoration of the Jews, the pouring out of judgments on unbelieving Christians, the conversion of the world and the establishment of Christ’s kingdom upon earth. Do this and you will see a meaning and fullness in prophecy which perhaps you have never yet discovered.

I am quite aware that many good men do not see the subject of unfulfilled prophecy as I do. I am painfully sensible that I seem presumptuous in differing from them. But I dare not refuse anything which appears to me plainly written in Scripture. I consider the best of men are not infallible. I think we should remember that we must reject Protestant traditions which are not according to the Bible, as much as the traditions of the Church of Rome.

I believe it is high time for the Church of Christ to awake out of its sleep about Old Testament prophecy. From the time of the old fathers, Jerome and Origen, down to the present day, men have gone on in a pernicious habit of “spiritualizing” the words of the Prophets, until their true meaning has been well nigh buried. It is high time to lay aside traditional methods of interpretation, and to give up our blind obedience to the opinions of such writers as Poole, Henry, Scott and Clarke, upon unfulfilled prophecy. It is high time to fall back on the good old principle that Scripture generally means what it seems to mean, and to beware of that semi-skeptical argument, “*Such and such an interpretation cannot be correct, because it seems to us ‘carnal’!*”

It is high time for Christians to interpret unfulfilled prophecy by the light of prophecies already fulfilled. The curses of the Jews were brought to pass literally: so also will be the blessings. The scattering was literal: so also will be the gathering. The pulling down of Zion was literal: so also will be the building up. The rejection of Israel was literal: so also will be the restoration.³

³ Ibid., pp. 46-49.

SCATTERED ISRAEL TO BE GATHERED

The chapter titled “Scattered Israel to be Gathered,” is based upon Jeremiah 31:10, “Here the Word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock.” Ryle maintains that the Gentiles are addressed here concerning their duty to makes known God’s will with regard to the nation of Israel. In particular this means the inevitable future restoration of the Jews to the land, following a prolonged scattering, that far exceeds in wonder the return that immediately followed the Babylonian captivity. To this end, Ryle vigorously upholds a consistent meaning with regard to the term “Israel” being a reference to the nation.

For many centuries there has prevailed in the Churches of Christ a strange, and to my mind, an unwarrantable mode of dealing with this word “Israel”. It has been interpreted in many passages of the Psalms and Prophets, as if it meant nothing more than Christian believers. Have promises been held out to Israel? Men have been told continually that they are addressed to Gentile saints. Have glorious things been described as laid up in store for Israel? Men have been incessantly told that they describe the victories and triumphs of the gospel in Christian churches. The proofs of these things are too many to require quotation. No man can read the immense majority of commentaries and popular hymns without seeing this system of interpretation to which I now refer.⁴ Against that system I have long protested, and I hope I shall always protest as long as I live.

I do not deny that Israel was a peculiar typical people, and that God’s relations to Israel were meant to be a type of His relations to His believing people all over the world.

I would have it most distinctly understood that God’s dealings with individual Jews and Gentiles are precisely one and the same. Without repentance, faith in Christ and holiness of heart, no individual Jew or Gentile shall ever be saved.

What I protest against is, the habit of allegorizing plain sayings of the Word of God concerning the future history of the *nation* of Israel, and explaining away the fullness of their contents in order to accommodate them to the Gentile Church. I believe the habit to be unwarranted by anything in Scripture, and to draw after it a long train of evil consequences.

Where, I would venture to ask, in the whole New Testament, shall we find any plain authority for applying the word “Israel” to anyone but the nation of Israel? On the contrary, I observe that when the Apostle Paul quotes Old Testament prophecies about the privileges of the Gentiles in gospel times, he is careful to quote texts which specifically mention the “Gentiles” by name. The fifteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans is a striking illustration of what I mean. We are often told in the New Testament that, under the gospel, believing Gentiles are “fellow heirs and partakers of the same hope” with believing Jews (Eph. 3:6). But that believing Gentiles may be called “Israelites”, I cannot see anywhere at all.⁵

Concerning the future of national Israel, Ryle is quite emphatic concerning the eventual return of the Hebrew people to the promised land. He provides supportive quotes from ten of the prophets (Isa. 11:11-12; Jer. 30:3, 11; Ezek. 37:21; Hos. 1:11; 3:4-5; Joel 3:20; Amos 9:14-15; Obad. 1:17; Mic. 4:6-7; Zeph. 3:14-20; Zech. 10:6-10), and explains:

Reader, however great the difficulties surrounding many parts of unfilled prophecy, two points appear to my own mind to stand out as plainly as if written by a sunbeam. One of these points is the second personal advent of our Lord Jesus Christ before the Millennium. The other of these events is the future literal gathering of the Jewish nation, and their restoration to their own land. I tell no man that these two truths are essential to salvation, and that he cannot be saved except he sees them with my eyes. But I tell any man that these truths appear to me distinctly set down in holy Scripture and that the denial of them is as

⁴ It hardly needs mentioning that these volumes are almost exclusively Gentile in authorship. B.E.H.

⁵ Ryle, *Are You Ready*, pp. 107-108.

astonishing and incomprehensible to my own mind as the denial of the divinity of Christ.⁶

In relation to this matter of Israel's return to the land, a further qualification is made.

I might show you by scriptural evidence that the Jews will probably first be gathered in an unconverted state, though humbled, and will afterwards be taught to look to Him whom they have pierced [Zech. 12:10-14], through much tribulation.⁷

AND SO ALL ISRAEL SHALL BE SAVED

The crucial text of Romans 11:26 is understood in a manner consistent with the explanation of the meaning of "Israel," as earlier defined, being plainly a reference to the nation identified with Judaism.

To a plain man, untrammelled by traditional interpretation, the words of this prophecy appear very simple.

Israel shall be saved: that means the Jewish nation and people. It cannot possibly mean the Gentiles, because they are mentioned in the verse which directly precedes our text, in direct contrast to the Jews. "Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until; the fullness of the Gentiles be come in" (Rom. 11:25).

All Israel: that means the whole people or nation of the Jews. It cannot possibly mean a small elect remnant. In this very chapter the Israelitish nation and the *election* out of Israel are mentioned in contradistinction to one another. "Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it; and rest were blinded" (Rom. 11:7).⁸

Hence, notwithstanding centuries of oppression under "the just displeasure of God," and at the same time unparalleled preservation unlike any other racial group, yet,

the history of Israel then has not yet come to an end. There is another wonderful chapter yet to be unfolded to mankind. The Scripture tells us expressly that a time is coming when the

position of Israel may be entirely changed, and they shall be once more restored to the favor of God.⁹

Then follows reference to several supporting passages of Scripture (Zech. 12:10; 13:1; II Cor. 3:16). However special mention is made concerning Ezekiel 36:24-38. In this regard Ryle comments:

Once more I remind you that this wonderful passage *primarily* belongs to the JEWS. No doubt the Church of Christ may *secondarily* make spiritual use of it. But let us never forget that the Holy Ghost first caused it to be written concerning Israel.

But time would fail me, if I attempted to quote all the passages of Scripture in which the future history of Israel is revealed. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Zechariah all declare the same thing. All predict, with more or less particularity, that in the end of this dispensation the Jews are to be restored to their own land and to the favor of God. I lay no claim to infallibility in the interpretation of Scripture in this matter. I am well aware that many excellent Christians cannot see the subject as I do. I can only say, that to my eyes, the future *salvation* of Israel as a people, their *return* to Palestine and their national conversion to God, appear as clearly and plainly revealed as any prophecy in God's Word.

But I freely confess that these are deep things. Enough for you and me to know that Israel shall be restored to their own land, and shall be converted and saved, without entering too minutely into particulars. Let me close this branch of my subject with the Apostle's words: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out" (Rom. 11:33).¹⁰

However, for Ryle, such a perspective concerning God's ongoing regard for national Israel brings with it a responsibility toward this distinctive people. From Israel came our Bible, the first preaching of the Bible, the mother of Jesus and her Son. Although the

⁶ Ibid., pp. 112-115.

⁷ Ibid., p. 115.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 145-46.

⁹ Ibid., p. 151.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 152-54.

Jews presently remain in unbelief concerning their messiah, Jesus Christ, nevertheless it should be incumbent upon Gentiles that they do all they can to show kindness and thoughtfulness toward their spiritual benefactors.

[W]e may all pay our debts *indirectly* by striving to remove stumbling-blocks which now lie between the Jews and Christianity. It is a sorrowful confession to make, but it must be made, that nothing perhaps so hardens Israel in unbelief as the sins and inconsistencies of professing Christians. The name of Christ is too often blasphemed among Jews, by reason of the conduct of many who call themselves Christians. We repel Israel from the door of life, and disgust them by our behavior. Idolatry among Roman Catholics, skepticism among Protestants, neglect of the Old Testament, contempt for the doctrine of the atonement, shameless Sabbath breaking, widespread immorality, all these things, we may depend upon it, have a deep effect on the Jews. They have eyes and they can see. The name of Christ is discredited and dishonored among them by the practice of those who have been baptized in Christ's name. The more boldly and decidedly all true Christians set their faces against the things I have just named, and wash their hands of any complicity with them, the more likely are they to find their efforts to promote Christianity among the Jews prosperous and successful.

More directly, Ryle concludes with the following recommendations concerning this vital subject of the destiny of Israel in Scripture.

1. Take up the subject because of the *important position which it occupies in Scripture*. Cultivate the habit of reading prophecy with a single eye to the literal meaning of its proper names. Cast aside the old traditional idea that Jacob, and Israel, and Judah, and Jerusalem, and Zion must always mean the Gentile Church, and that predictions about the second Advent are to be taken spiritually, and first Advent predictions literally. Be just, and honest, and fair. If you expect the Jews to take the 53rd of Isaiah literally, be sure you take the 54th and 60th and 62nd literally also. The Protestant Reformers

were not perfect. On no point, I venture to say, were they so much in the wrong as in the interpretation of Old Testament prophecy. Even our venerable Authorized Version of the Bible has many "tables of contents" which are sadly calculated to mislead, in the prophetic books. When the Revised Version comes out, I trust we shall see a great improvement in this respect.

2. In the next place, take up the Jewish subject because of the times in which we live. That man must be blind indeed who does not observe how much the attention of politicians and statesmen in these days is concentrating on the countries around Palestine. The strange position of things in Egypt, the formation of the Suez Canal, the occupation of Cyprus, the project of the Euphrates railway, the drying up of the Turkish empire, the trigonometrical survey of Palestine, what curious phenomena these are! ¹¹What do they mean? What is going to happen next? He that believeth will not make haste. I will not pretend to decide. But I think I hear the voice of God saying, "Remember the Jews, look to Jerusalem."

3. In the next place, take up the Jewish subject *because of the special blessing* which seems to be given to those who care for Israel. I challenge anyone to deny that few ministers of Christ have been so useful of late years and made a greater mark on the world than the following well-known men, Charles Simeon, Edward Bickersteth, Haldane Stewart, Dr. Marsh, Robert M'Cheyne and, though last not least, Hugh McNeile. They were men of very different gifts and minds; but they had one common feature in their religion. They loved the cause of the Jews. In them was the promise fulfilled. "They shall prosper that love thee" (Ps. 122:6).

4. In the next place, take up the Jewish subject because of its *close connection with the second Advent of Christ and the close of this dispensation*. Is it not written, "When the LORD shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory"? (Ps. 102:16). "If the casting away of Israel be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the

¹¹ Granted that the Turkish empire has not "dried up," yet Ryle well anticipates the significant role of Britain that leads to the Jews' possession of their own land. Refer to, David L. Larsen, *Jews, Gentiles and the Church*, pp. 135-221. B.E.H.

dead?” (Rom. 11:15). The words which the angel Gabriel addressed to the Virgin Mary have never yet been fulfilled: “He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:33).

5. Last of all, let us annually support that great and good institution, the Jews’ Society, by our money and our prayers. Our money will be bestowed on an old and faithful servant of Christ, which does Christ’s work in Christ’s own way. Our prayers are well bestowed if given for a cause which is so near our Master’s heart. The time is short. The night of the world is drawing near. If ever there is a “nation born in a day”, that nation will be Israel. Let us pray for that blessed consummation, and give habitually as if we really believed the words, “All Israel shall be saved.”¹²

¹² Ibid., pp. 157-159.