

Israel and the Nations.

Psalm 67.

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It would greatly tend to give clearness and definiteness to missionary effort to keep fully before our minds God's original purpose in sending the gospel to the Gentiles, or nations. This we have stated in the most distinct manner in Acts 15. "Simeon hath declared," says James, "how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, *to take out of them* a people for His name."

It gives no warrant for the idea, so persistently held by the professing Church, that the whole world is to be converted by the preaching of the gospel. To convert the world is one thing; to take out of the nations a people is quite another.

The latter, and not the former, is God's present work. It is what He has been doing since the day that Simon Peter opened the kingdom of heaven to the Gentile in Acts 10; and it is what He will continue to do until the moment so rapidly approaching, in which the last elect one is gathered out, and our Lord shall come to receive His people unto Himself.

Let all missionaries remember this. They may rest assured it will not clip their wings, or cripple their energies; it will only guide their movements, by giving them a divine aim and object. Of what possible use can it be for a man to propose as the end of his labours something wholly different from that which is before the mind of God? Ought not a servant to seek to do his master's will? Can he expect to please his master by pursuing other than his clearly expressed object?

It is blessedly true, that all the earth shall yet be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. There is no question as to this. All Scripture bears witness to it. To quote the passages would literally fill a volume. All Christians are agreed on this point, and hence there is no need to adduce evidence.

But the question is, how is this grand and glorious result to be brought about? Is it the purpose of God to use the professing Church as His agent, or a preached gospel as His instrument, in the conversion of the world? Scripture says No; with a clearness which ought to sweep away every doubt.

Here let it be distinctly understood that we delight in all true missionary effort. We heartily wish God's speed to every true missionary — to every one who has left home, and kindred, and friends, and all the comforts and privileges of civilized life, in order to carry the glad tidings of salvation into the dark places of the earth. We desire to render hearty thanks to God for all that has been accomplished in the fields of foreign missions; though we cannot approve some modes by which the work is carried on. We consider there is a lack of simple faith in God, and of subjection to the authority of Christ, and the guidance of the Holy Ghost. There is too much of human machinery, and looking to the world for aid.

But all this is not our present object. The point with which we are occupied in this brief paper is this — *will* God make use of the professing Church to convert the nations? We ask not, *has* He done so? for, were we to put the question thus, we could only receive an unqualified negative; for the professing Church has been at work for eighteen long centuries; and what is the result?

Let the reader take a glance at a missionary map, and he will see in a moment. Look at those large patches of black, designed to set forth the dismal regions over which heathenism bears sway. Look at the red, the green, the yellow, setting forth popery, the Greek church, and Mohammedanism.

And where is — we say not true Christianity, but even nominal Protestantism? That is indicated by those spots of blue which, if all put together, make but a small fraction indeed. As to what even this Protestantism is we need not now stop to inquire.

What, then, say the Scriptures on the great question of the conversion of the nations? Take, for example, the lovely psalm that stands at the head of this paper. It is but one proof among a thousand, but, we need hardly say, perfectly harmonizes with the testimony of all Scripture. We give it in full.

"God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us; that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise Thee, O God; let all the people praise Thee. O let the nations be glad, and sing for joy: for Thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Let the people praise Thee, O God, let all the people praise Thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us: and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him."

Here, then, the simple truth shines before us. It is when God shall have mercy upon Israel — when He shall cause His light to shine upon Zion — then will His way be known upon earth, His saving health among all nations. It is through *Israel*, not through the professing Church, that God will yet bless the nations.

That the "us" of the foregoing psalm refers to Israel, no intelligent reader of Scripture needs to be told. Indeed, as we all know, the great burden of the Psalms, the Prophets, and the entire Old Testament, is Israel. There is not a syllable about the Church in the Old Testament. Types and shadows there are in which — now that we have the light of the New Testament — we can see the truth of the Church prefigured. But without that light no one could, by any possibility, find the truth of the Church in Old Testament Scripture. That great mystery was, as the inspired apostle tells us, "*hid*" — not in the Scriptures (for whatever is contained in the Scriptures is no longer hid, but revealed) but it was "hid in God;" and was not, and could not, be revealed until Christ, being rejected by Israel, was crucified and raised from the dead.

So long as the testimony to Israel was pending, the doctrine of the Church could not be unfolded. Hence, although at the day of Pentecost we have the *beginning of the Church*, yet it was not until Israel had rejected the testimony of the Holy Ghost in Stephen that a special witness was called out in the person of Paul, to whom *the doctrine of the Church* was committed. We must distinguish between the fact and the doctrine; indeed it is not until we reach the last chapter of the Acts that the curtain finally drops upon Israel; and Paul, the prisoner at Rome, fully unfolds the grand mystery of the Church which from ages and generations had been hid in God, but was now made manifest. Let the reader ponder Romans 16: 25-26; Ephesians 3: 1-11; Colossians 1: 24-27.

We cannot attempt to go fully into this glorious subject here; indeed, to refer to it at all is a digression from our present line. But we deem it needful just to say thus much, in order that the reader may fully see that Psalm 67 refers to Israel; and, seeing this, the whole truth will flow into his soul, that the conversion of the nations stands connected with Israel, and not with the Church. It is through Israel, and not through the Church, that God will yet bless the nations. It is His eternal purpose that the seed of Abraham, His friend, shall yet be pre-eminent in the earth, and that all nations shall be blessed in and through them. "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold, *out of all languages of the nations*, even shall take hold of *the skirt of him that is a Jew*, saying, We will go *with you*; for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech. 8: 23).

It would be an easy and a delightful task to prove from the New Testament, that, previous to the restoration and blessing of Israel, and therefore previous to the conversion of the nations, the true

Church of God, the body of Christ, shall have been taken up to be for ever with the Lord, in the full and ineffable communion of the Father's house; so that the Church will not be God's agency in the conversion of the Jews as a nation, any more than in that of the Gentiles. But we do not desire at this time to do more than establish the two points above stated.