

THE GLORY OF ISRAEL

By

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“for mine eyes have seen thy salvation...and the glory of thy people Israel.” This was the statement of Simeon, a devout man of God and descendant of Jacob.

What had he seen? Conquering armies in battle dress, marching in triumph over their neighbors? Had he seen rising skyscrapers on the Judean horizon, signaling the increase in commerce and wealth?

It was none of this. Simeon, who had lived through national uprisings and reprisals, who knew the history of the twelve tribes and the prophecies concerning them, was looking at the infant Jesus. Long had he awaited the Messiah, “looking for the consolation of Israel,” and now, in his last days, he looks to the Father and prays, “now let thy servant depart, Lord, according to thy word, in peace. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou has prepared before the face of all people; a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel” (Luke 2:29–32).

We have come a long way since Baby Jesus. Not all religious leaders and evangelists are enhanced and content with the glory God displayed in His Son. Instead there is a constant clamor for glory of a worldly and temporal nature — the glory of war, of acquisition of land and the increase of governmental power. This is the glory seen in the present publicity of the nation of Israel and the prophetic preaching that says that the Jew’s return to the land of Palestine (by terrorism and massacre, as in 1948) signifies fulfillment of their role in God’s design.

RECORD OF GLORY. The true glory of Israel has never been in this direction, but rather in God’s own presence and in His own works.

At the Red Sea He said, “Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.” Ever afterwards they were to sing of that glorious day when the Lord defeated their enemies and went with them through the sea to freedom.

Across the wilderness for 40 years their glory was that of God represented by a pillar of fire at night and a cloud by day. Their glory was the presence of the Lord, and their idolatry and disobedience came between them and Jehovah. It was said, “The glory departed from Israel”(I Sam. 4:21).

Until the time of Solomon, all through the reign of David, which is a type of Christ’s present reign over His Kingdom, God’s glory was manifested above the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies. Later on, under Solomon’s reign, the elaborate temple was built, which became the pride of Israel. It was pride in the work of their own hands, pride in the gold and finely hewn stones, pride shared by the citizens regardless of their indifference to the justice and mercy of God. Amos prophesied of the rebuilding of the tabernacle. When the Gentiles were first baptized into Christ and received into the church, James pointed out that this was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Amos concerning the rebuilding of the tabernacle. “Brethren, hearken unto me; Simeon (Peter) has rehearsed how first God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written; ‘After these things I will return and I will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen; and I will build

again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up; that the residue of men may seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called'." (Acts 15:13–18).

The establishment of the church, including people of all nations, is the rebuilding of the tabernacle, where the glory of the Lord shines forth. Therefore, the glory of Israel could not be that of sovereignty of one nation.

One reason the zealous Pharisees turned against Jesus with such vicious cruelty was the fact that He insisted that Gentiles (the nations) were to share in His Kingdom. Paul aroused their ire by the same proclamation. All preachment that upholds the idea of a national fulfilling of the ancient prophecies of Israel's glory fails, because people from "every tribe, tongue and nation" are included in the glorious Kingdom of the Lord.

The glory of Israel had nothing to do with their national solidarity, their wealth, prowess or moral integrity. Again and again they proved to be treacherous and unreliable, as seen in the trickery of Jacob, the lechery of Judah and the continued practice of idolatry by all twelve tribes. God branded them as stiff-necked, rebellious and full of abominations. The glory of ancient Israel was always the presence of the Lord. "I will be the glory in the midst of her," declared God in Zechariah 2:5.

REVELATION OF GLORY. In that portion of Isaiah made famous by Handel's "Messiah," which speaks of comfort to Israel by the coming of Christ who "will feed his flock like a shepherd," there is the bold announcement, "and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it" (Isa. 40:5). At the birth of Jesus the angels declared "Glory to God in the Highest" and Simeon said "Mine eyes have seen...the glory of thy people Israel."

Simeon saw in this child something more than the marvel of a new personality coming into the world. He was unimpressed with the prestige and honor that are attributed to one because of rank and fortune. He was impressed by the purpose of God, that His creatures should be cleansed from sin in order to inherit life and immortality. Here before him, at last, was the One Who alone could make this possible, thus bringing God's purpose to fulfillment and glory.

The world — the keeper of the Inn, the celebrated religious leaders, the mighty Herod, the average man on the street — could well enough see glory in their own achievements, in the power of the state, in wealth, in their own persons; so they both gave and received glory one of another, a practice soundly condemned by the Lord Himself (Matt. 6:2), John 12:43, John 5:44). But they saw nothing of glory in Jesus.

Such is the case even to this day. Announce the preaching of the precious Word of God, and the worship of the Lord Jesus Christ and you will hardly make a ripple in the sea of life around you. But announce that someone is going to speak on our national heritage, that he will be flanked by celebrities from the movie world and that a band will be there to glorify his presence, and you will get a crowd.

The church often falls into the blindness of ancient Israel, who forsook the glory of God's presence in the humble tabernacle to glorify their own creation of a great temple. It is a sad commentary on the spiritual discernment of so many today who bemoan the fact that their neighbor's church is larger and more sophisticated. They heap glory on the big crowd and the crowd-pleasers, forgetting that the glory of God's people is Christ, and that where two or three are gathered in His name there He is in their midst.

The sum of glory is Jesus. He prayed, before his death and resurrection, "The hour is come: glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee" (John 11:7:1). The apostle

John writes, “And we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father.” Peter announced that on the Day of Pentecost the great miracle of wind and tongues (foreign language miraculously understood) was evidence that Jesus had been raised up and “by the right hand of God exalted” (Acts 2:33). Later, after the healing of a lame man, Peter explained that it was because “The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His Servant Jesus...and by faith in His name has His name made this man strong...” (Acts 3:13–16).

Paul simply says, “He that glories, let him glory in the Lord” (I Cor. 1:31). The glory of the people of God is in Jesus the One who reveals God in the flesh (John 14:9), the One who redeems us from sin and alienation from God, who justifies us before God that we might not suffer the final death, and the One who abides with us, sustains us, intercedes for us, and will come to raise us and transform us to His own image.

Christ is eternal. He was always glorious, and speaks of the glory He had with the Father before appearing in the world (John 17:5). When old Simeon took the child, Jesus, into his arms and declared that he now had seen the glory of Israel, he was speaking of Christ as the glory of Israel, past, present and future.

HOPE OF GLORY. The glory of the Lord is revealed in Jesus that we might have knowledge of the eternal purpose of God for our own lives. Paul wrote, “if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him” (Rom. 8:17). This he clarifies by explaining that when Jesus appears again He will refashion our humble bodies, “that (they) might be conformed to the body of his glory” (Phil. 3:21). John further explains that “we shall be like Him” (I John 3:3).

This is not only God’s ultimate purpose, as expressed from the beginning, but it is our only hope. If we are not among those who are raised up and created anew in His image, glorified with Him, and like Him, then we shall be in that vast group that must perish for having failed to believe and enter into the fellowship with Him. The true meaning of a resurrection to glory was unknown before Jesus became man, suffered, died and was Himself raised in the body to glory. Paul wrote that this mystery was hid for ages, but now is revealed to the saints “to whom God was pleased to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). Obviously that glory is not in our own accomplishments nor in our ancestry, nor in the beauty and value of our surroundings. Rather it is in the fact of being “like Him,” made at last in the image of our glorious Lord.

Like Simeon we have been blessed to see the day of Christ, and to know His glory. He is the glory of the church, of the home, of the individual, of creation, and of all that exists.

How much would be gained if after 2,000 years of the Christian experience, we could see Jesus as did Simeon. But we are too far into materialism and humanism to see the glory. We look to the future all right, but too often it is with hopes for the temporal pleasures and things that feed our pride, instead of an eye for the eternal values. Simeon saw the fulfillment of prophecy, the realization of what in the Old Testament were only types and shadows, and the revelation of God’s eternal purpose in Jesus. This, he affirmed, is the glory of Israel.

Christ is the glory of His people, Israel. He always was, and always will be. Those who glorify not Christ are not of Israel.

What a day for Christians to glorify the Lord; to lift eyes from the sordid mess surrounding man to the sublime glory of Jesus; to turn hearts from sorrowing over self's sickness to rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God. Let every song glorify Him. Let every day's labor bring Him glory. To God be the glory!

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