

## 3. Its Title and Message

*The book "Elpis Israel" is unique amongst the vast array of uninspired religious works which abound in the libraries of the world. It contains more than a quarter million words, yet the manuscript was completed in about four months!*

*In 1848 Brother John Thomas travelled from the United States to Great Britain to undertake a series of speaking appointments, which made strenuous demands upon his physical and mental resources. Completing a five-month tour took him from Edinburgh to London.*

*Whilst in Edinburgh, a committee of fourteen was formed to procure subscribers who would support the production of such a book as was proposed. Thus the work had been planned before Brother Thomas departed from Scotland.*

*Upon arrival in London, he had urgent need of rest — yet before him was the somewhat daunting task of writing "Elpis Israel" within a relatively short period of time. However, with an application of his wisdom as a medical practitioner, combined with a little plain common sense and advice from friends, he recognised the value of a rejuvenated mind and body before commencing his work. Two or three weeks spent in restoring a degree of physical health and sharpness of mind produced the desired result.*

*Early in 1849 he commenced work, and upon its completion a few months later, a further tour was undertaken. Returning to London and perusing the original manuscript, the Doctor felt it could be greatly improved. Characteristically he promptly set about the task of completely rewriting the entire work.*

### **An Appropriate Title**

The book could have been given any one of many idealistic, descriptive titles. "God's Way for Man's Salvation" ... "The Divine Plan for Human Redemption" ... "From Death to Life" — are a few possible titles for such a work that the author might have considered. But his choice was not similar to those suggested.

The Greek word *elpis* occurs 53 times in the N.T. Once it is rendered "faith;" on every other occasion it appears as "hope." Used in many impressive ways, it is invariably with a common theme:

ELPIS ISRAEL  
an Exposition of the  
KINGDOM OF GOD

with reference to  
THE TIME OF THE END  
and THE AGE TO COME

By JOHN THOMAS, M.D.

"For the hope of Israel I am bound with this Chain."—Paul

*Fourteenth Edition—Revised*

“My flesh shall rest in *hope* ... The *hope* and resurrection of the dead ... (I) have *hope* toward God ... The *hope* of the promise made of God unto our fathers ... Rejoice in *hope* of the glory of God ... We are saved by *hope* ... Now abideth, faith, *hope*, charity ... Seeing then that we have such *hope* ... Called in one *hope* of your calling ... Christ in you, the *hope* of glory ... Jesus Christ, which is our *hope* ... Looking for that blessed *hope* ... The *hope* of eternal life ... The *hope* set before us ... The *hope* that is in you ...”

Possibly many such passages were in the mind of Brother Thomas as he carefully deliberated upon a suitable title for his book. However there is no doubt that the verse from which he selected the title came from the lips of Paul when he appeared before the chief of the Jews after his arrival at Rome: “For this cause therefore have I called for you to see you and to speak with you; because that for *the hope of Israel* I am bound with this chain” (Acts 28:20). Brother Thomas recognised the significance of such a verse as the basis for a title to grace the message he had to convey to men and women.

He declared: “Here, then, is a book peculiarly adapted to the times. It will show the people what the gospel is — what is the obedience it requires — and enable them to discern the times; that the Lord may not come upon them at unawares, and take them unprepared. It is a book, not for these times only, but for all the years preceding ‘the times of the end,’ and thence to the epoch of the restoration of the kingdom and throne of David. It is named *ELPIS ISRAEL*, or *Israel’s Hope*: for the kingdom of which it treats is that which, ... said Paul, ‘I am bound with this chain.’ *Elpis Israel’s* subject-matter is national, not sectarian. It

treats of a nation, and of its civil and ecclesiastical institutions in a past and future age. It is designed to enlighten both Jews and Gentiles in Israel’s Hope, that by conforming to the proclamation of their king, they may be prepared for the administration of its affairs in concert with him, when all nations shall be as politically subject to his dominion, as Hindostan and Britain are to Queen Victoria’s. It is designed to show men how they may attain to eternal life in this theocracy, and obtain a crown which shall never fade away. To accomplish this, the reader must, in justice to himself and the truth, study it with the Bible at his right hand, for he will find but few pages in which frequent reference is not made to its authority, and without which nothing can or ought to be determined” (Author’s Preface pp. 17-18).

#### A Book for All Time

*Elpis Israel* was not only “a book peculiarly adapted to the times” of Brother Thomas. It remains a book for “all the years” which must pass until the Lord returns. Despite its critics (and, this century, they have mostly come from within the Body) it has stood the test of time.

The words of the *Author’s Preface* quoted above, show that Brother Thomas understood the “hope” of true believers to be entirely Israelitish in character. In the book he demonstrates that “the gospel,” “the hope of Israel,” and “the hope of the promises made unto the fathers” are synonymous terms. He declares that the gospel that was preached to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, was the same “gospel of the kingdom” taught by the Lord Jesus Christ. It is those principles that must still form the basis for saving truth today.

### A Vision of the Kingdom Vital

Christadelphians have become enmeshed in spiritual difficulties when they have lost sight of the Scriptural concept of "the hope (*elpis*) of the coming restoration of the kingdom of Israel" (Matt. 19:28, Luke 1:30-33; Acts 1:6-7). It is distressing to witness continuing attempts by some within the Body to deflect the attention of Christ's brethren from the awesome and inspiring vision of the kingdom, to a Sunday "church-going" type of philosophy. One of the most unintentional denunciations recorded against Christadelphians by an observer was written by Bryan R. Wilson, in his book *Sects and Society* (William Heinemann Ltd., published 1961). Mr. Wilson wrote of the Body: "The advent is still awaited with eagerness, but with less direct confidence than marked the early period... Informally, there has been a shift of emphasis from the kingdom to the cross, from polemical exegesis to devotional activity..." (p.335).

He notes the development of a marked preference for religious services related to the present existence rather than the earlier vigour of contending earnestly for "the hope" against adversaries of the Truth.

One wonders how Mr. Wilson would describe the present situation, now a quarter of a century later! He would probably employ even stronger terms, for the "shift" of which he wrote is now even more evident. This change of direction has done nothing to strengthen the Body, but rather has greatly weakened it.

### The Israelitish Hope

Why has the Christadelphian Body, in large measure, moved from (as one writer put it) "a fiercely

adventist body" to a type of Sunday-morning, church-going body of religionists?

Because, whilst professing an undertaking of those things concerning "the Name of Jesus Christ" there is lacking an equal appreciation of "the things concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts 8:12). The vision of the "kingdom of God" which is "the hope of Israel" as the ultimate expectation of the gospel's fulfilment, is sadly missing in areas of the Brotherhood.

The reason for this?

A disregard or lack of respect for the pioneer writings, particularly *Elpis Israel*.

"As a whole," wrote Brother Thomas, "the truth is defined as 'the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ.' This phrase covers the entire ground upon which the 'one faith' and the 'one hope' of the gospel are based: so that if a man believe only the 'things of the kingdom' his faith is defective in the 'things of the name': or, if his belief be confined to the 'things of the name,' it is deficient in the 'things of the kingdom.' There can be no separation of them recognised in a 'like precious faith' to that of the apostles. They believed and taught all these things; God hath joined them together, and no man need expect His favor who separates them, or abolishes the necessity of believing the things He has revealed for faith." To this might be added the Author's further uncompromising statement, that any gospel which is not the Truth in its purity "is both useless and injurious" (p.189).

### Signs Related to the Kingdom

It is characteristic of Brother Thomas' concept of the Truth that in the opening paragraph of his *Preface* he makes immediate reference to the

signs of the times: "The year 1848 ... wonderful year ..." The next paragraph speaks of "the 'testimony of God' which testifies the continuance of 'the times of the Gentiles' until Nebuchadnezzar's image be broken to pieces upon the mountains of Israel."

It was as though, in all his considerations of Scripture, Brother Thomas felt the gentle breeze of the "times of refreshing" which would usher in the Kingdom, blowing reassuringly around him. With the eye of faith, he saw the Kingdom as an impending reality: Christ on earth again; the dead in Christ raised from the grave; the subjugation of all nations under Christ's rule; the tribes of Israel restored; the Temple an awesome reality upon the hill of Zion; the immortalised saints ruling with Christ over a world at peace.

The "things of the Name" and the "things of the Kingdom" were the realities of faith which inspired the pioneering brethren to wholeheart-

ed dedication and earnest zeal in the cause of Christ and in service to their God. It is these things — particularly the reality of the restored Kingdom on earth — which should be urgently revived within the Brotherhood in these present times of crisis and trial.

Let the "hope of Israel" burn brightly within the hearts of true disciples of Christ, and they will find a strength and comfort from the "great and precious promises" of Yahweh that will see them through the difficulties and testing times of life. Whilst the world remains "aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise," the Lord's true followers will take courage from the knowledge that they are "Christ's", and therefore "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (2 Pet. 1:4; Eph. 2:12; Gal. 3:29).

"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you *the Kingdom*" (Luke 12:32).

John Ullman.

We have not seen with our eyes or heard with our own ears the things referred to by Jesus; but we have seen through the eyes and heard through the ears of the disciples, in believing their testimony, and in this consists the blessedness. It is in fact, pre-eminently, the work that God has required of men — that they believe on him whom He hath sent, always taking it for granted that such belief ripens into love and obedience; for a belief that does not lead to works, is unfruitful and not accepted. Christ's summary of the matter is contained in the words, "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and do it".

While we are in the flesh, the natural mind is ever with us, spontaneously generating its own godless maxims, principles and feelings. Unless we oppose to these the constant antidote of Scripture reading, the natural mind will obtain the ascendant, even after we have known the way of righteousness. The mind is weak, the memory of divine things treacherous. If we are earnestly bent on working out our own salvation, we shall be earnestly devoted to the practice of daily devoting a portion of time to those things which have been written aforetime for our learning and profit. The neglect of this will ensure the decay of the best spiritual health that was ever enjoyed. This lesson cannot be too strongly insisted upon. Nothing should be allowed to interfere with it. It is our health — our life — our salvation. Give in to the likes of the natural man in this matter, and it will at last be your death. Give place to the demands of the Spirit in this matter, and it will be at last to your great peace and joy. R.Roberts