

The Kingdom of God & The Hope of Israel

"What was the hope of Israel about? The answer to this question is easy ... I cannot do better than to state what he (Paul) did, in the words of Luke who says that 'he expounded and testified to them the kingdom of God persuading them concerning Jesus both out of the Law of Moses and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.' Now who can be so dim of vision as not to perceive that the subject-matter of the hope of Israel is the kingdom of God? And observe, that in giving his thoughts of the national hope, the apostle's persuasions turned upon things concerning Jesus. The kingdom of God and Jesus were the subjects of Paul's testimony when he preached 'the hope of Israel', or 'the hope of the promises made of God unto the fathers'." — Elpis Israel, p.225.

In expounding "the kingdom of God" Brother Thomas showed that the phrase is synonymous with "the hope of Israel" and "the promises made unto the fathers." It is this conception of the kingdom of God which makes Christadelphian belief upon this subject so significant. To lose sight of the Israelitish nature of our hope, is to forfeit the clear and unvarnished truth concerning the kingdom, as understood by our pioneer brethren. Yet sources outside the Brotherhood have noted over the past 25 years a move away from our original "fiercely adventist" hope of the coming kingdom of God, towards a more "devotional" type of religion. This is a polite way of saying that Christadelphians, in some measure and in some quarters, are no longer moved by a dedicated zeal for the glorious hopes and aspirations associated with the coming kingdom of God. Instead, many have come to terms with their

worldly environment, preferring a form of religious worship more suited to a "Sunday morning church-going", than remaining a movement which renounces the present world and all for which it stands.

There is a danger of losing a sense of proper perspective concerning the reality of the coming kingdom.

Need for a Clear Vision

To what extent is the Brotherhood aware of the significance of the signs of the times? With what degree of enthusiasm is the Body watching and waiting for the coming of the Lord?

We are saved "by *hope* (Gk. *elpis*): but hope that is seen is not hope" (Rom. 8:24). Without an awareness of "the *hope* of Israel" there is no protection against a passive conformity to the present system of things. Present-day worship of Yahweh must become faith-building in preparation for eternal salvation in the kingdom. For, "where there is

no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18).

Elpis Israel has over 450 pages (1942 ed.) with more than a quarter million words. It was named to define its contents, for it expounds the *hope* which God has set before mankind: described Biblically, and in words which Brother Thomas believed to be definitive, as "the hope of Israel". Throughout the exposition this theme dominates. Thus, its final words are most appropriate: "The purpose of God in the foundation of the earth will be accomplished; and 'the headstone of the creation will be brought forth with shoutings, crying, Grace grace unto it'."

Uniformity in Beginning and Ending

These concluding words, taken from the prophecy of Zechariah, have been paraphrased by inclusion of the word "creation." In presenting his final thoughts to his readers, Brother Thomas claimed that the Lord Jesus Christ, as Son of God, and as the one through whom "all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Yahweh", will be seen in all the world as "the headstone of the creation". Not, notice, the "cornerstone" from which point a building was commenced, but, rather, the "headstone" — the last, complementing, stone to be fitted into place to complete the edifice. In this Zechariah takes his thought from Psalm 118:22, which is then carried forward into the Acts: "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner" (ch. 4:11). The Psalm follows with the words, "This is Yahweh's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes!" And the verse which follows in Acts 4:12 is similar in concept: "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other

name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved ..."

As Brother Thomas penned the closing words of *Elpis Israel*, his mind must have filled with the glorious prospect envisaged in these awesome words.

Now compare the opening words of the first chapter with those recorded in the penultimate paragraph at its conclusion. "Revolving upon its own axis, and describing an ample circuit through the boundless fields of space, is a planet of the solar system bearing upon its surface a population of over a thousand millions subject to sin, disease, and death ..." (p. 1). In his final words, he wrote: "The separation between God and man began with the transgression of the first Adam: it continues till the end of the 7,000 years, when sin and death are utterly eradicated, and harmony again established in this orb of His glorious universe. Earth will have been delivered from moral and physical evil ..."

It is evident that Brother Thomas, in penning *Elpis Israel*, was guided in his reasoning by an overall concept of the entirety of the Divine purpose.

The Divine Purpose of the Ages

The comprehensiveness of *Elpis Israel* may be summarised in an extract from the *Herald of the Kingdom* published in April 1855, more than five years after *Elpis Israel*: "Men were not ushered into being for the purpose of being saved or lost. God-manifestation, not human salvation, was the grand purpose of the Eternal Spirit. The salvation of a multitude is incidental to the manifestation, but it was not the end proposed. The Eternal Spirit intended to enthroned Himself on the earth, and in so doing, to develop a Divine family from among men,

every one of whom shall be spirit because born of the Spirit; and that this family shall be large enough to fill the earth, when perfected, to the entire exclusion of flesh and blood".

Understandably, the title page of the book gives a precise outline of its contents: "*Elpis Israel — an exposition of the KINGDOM OF GOD, with reference to THE TIME OF THE END and THE AGE TO COME.*" This brief explanation is amplified in the Author's Preface to the first edition: "The nature of the work is indicated on the title page. It is a work showing what the Bible teaches as a whole, and not the elaboration of a new or fantastical theological theory, or the new vamping of an old one. It demonstrates the great subject of the Scriptures, namely: 'the kingdom of God and of His anointed', without which they would be as a nut whose kernel had perished. It is a book for all classes, lay and clerical, without respect of persons, for all are concluded under sin, being all ignorant of 'the gospel of the kingdom'."

Again, the Author stresses "the hope (*elpis*) of Israel." He addressed himself to a subject — one might well say, *the* subject of his life, now that he had discovered *the* Truth — but with only one major objective in view: the enlightenment of his fellow-men, to the glory of God. But his attitude in this regard, so often revealed within the pages of his book, should not be misunderstood. Never did he look down upon his fellows from the lofty heights of self-importance. He did not attempt to set himself up as a founder of a new religion, seeking the respect and veneration due to a most important personage. This was not the Doctor's style, nor his ambition. He desired that "the reader may be able to acquit him (the author) of being

a trader in religion." He would reveal details concerning "spiritual merchants" and therefore had no wish to be numbered among them. He declined to be identified with "the wealthy and thriving firm" of traders in religion who had calculat- ingly lined their own pockets with wealth and materialistic gain result- ing from their pious activities.

The Grand Objective: Win Christ!

The yardstick provided by the Lord Jesus must be measured against the claim of John Thomas: "by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:20). The remainder of his life testified to the fact that he neither sought nor received personal gain nor any element of prosperity from his labours in the service of Christ. On the contrary, he showed many times that he was prepared to "suffer the loss of all things" that he might "win Christ".

He recognised the ills of the world, and their origin. "Alas", he exclaimed, "they know not how to remedy the evil! They do not perceive that the fault is in their systems, which have made them what they are, and which they are pledged to support on pain of suffering the loss of all things".

Thus, John Thomas made his appeal to perishing humanity. Yet he made it clear that the propositions he set forth were not the result of his own philosophical findings. *Elpis Israel*, he stated, was "designed to show men how they may attain to eternal life in this theocracy (the kingdom of the future age), and obtain a crown which shall never fade away. To accomplish this, the reader must, in justice to himself and the truth, study it (*Elpis Israel*) with the Bible at his right hand, for he will find but few pages in which frequent reference is not made to its au-

thority, and without which nothing can or ought to be determined."

These words challenge the reader to adopt an attitude of fairness. Bro. Thomas asked nothing more than that. His reference to the authority of the Bible, and the Bible alone, as being the corroborative source, "without which nothing *can* or *ought* to be determined" became the unchanging maxim upon which he reasoned all his Biblical exegesis.

The Only Source of Light

Such a conviction is often expressed in *Elpis Israel*. Upon the subject of the absolute necessity of men's minds receiving "illumination" from God, Bro. Thomas wrote: "There is no obtaining of this commodity except through the scriptures of truth ... Search the scriptures with the teachableness of a little child, and thy labour will not be in vain. Cast away to the owls and to the bats the traditions of men ..." (p.5).

"Illumination" may be received into submissive minds because "God is *light*" (1 John 1:5). Thus the proverb says: "through *knowledge* shall the just be delivered" (Prov. 11:9).

Strong words? Certainly. Uncompromising words? Absolutely. Challenging words, condemnatory of the pious platitudes and doctrinal aberrations of the clergy? Assuredly.

And rightly so. These words of wise counsel were intended to counter the folly of falling under the spell of the darkened minds of christendom's theologians.

The Doctor's work was never intended to replace nor add to the holy oracles of the Scriptures. He urged his readers to give total loyalty to the Word of God, and should they

discover discrepancies between his words and those of Scripture, they should discard John Thomas and cling tenaciously only to the teaching of God's Word.

Take Up the Challenge

He urged his readers to take up the challenge of the search with a positive attitude. "Let them (those who receive the Truth in its beauty, power and purity) put on the whole armour of God, and go forth among the people with the two-edged sword of the Spirit, and do battle for the Truth ..."

This is the disposition needed today.

"And may God Almighty bless their honest endeavours to know and understand His truth, which is intrinsically invincible, and needs only to come into contact with 'good and honest hearts' to become triumphantly defiant of all the wiles and 'power of the enemy'. May the spirit of the truth enter into them, and lead them into its liberty and fraternity: that at the coming of the Son of Man in celestial majesty and power, they may share with him in his joy, and inherit the kingdom with eternal glory."

In these present evil times, as the hopes and aspirations of Brother Thomas draw nearer with every passing day, let us renew our zeal and dedication to "the hope of Israel," that we, with God's blessing, may "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17) J. Ullman

* All quotations in the above article, unless otherwise stated, are to be found in the Author's Preface to the original edition of *Elpis Israel*.

Our "wisdom" is derived from a source which is accessible to every man who will renounce sectarianism and its traditions, and with childlike docility study the Scriptures in the light of grammar, history and unsophisticated reason, which is unadulterated common sense.

J.Thomas