

## CIRCUMCISION IS OF THE HEART

ONE of the cardinal objectives in publishing this series of articles is to recapitulate fundamental elements of the **One True Faith**, restating those intrinsic essentialities which constitute the saving message of the divine revelation to mankind.

There is wisdom in following this practice. It is true that individual members of the Body have varying capacities in absorbing knowledge of the Truth. It is not, however, the depth of profundity in understanding that is of major importance. What is essential is that the comprehension of every believer should be correct and sound. For this reason it is both prudent and circumspect to regularly reconsider the fundamentals of the apostolic faith.

The promises made to Abraham should be prominent in such considerations.

In times when Israel became lax in their awareness of their responsibilities to Yahweh they were exhorted: "Consider your ways!" (Hag. 1:5). This is best done by frequently recalling the basic elements of the Faith; to be assured that steps are set aright, that sound doctrine is being maintained, and that there is no straying from the path which leads to the kingdom. Such insight is demonstrated in Bro. Thomas' constant references to the Abrahamic promises in the pages of *Elpis Israel*.

His observant regard for Abraham's place in the unfolding of God's purpose, and his consistent studies of the Word made him aware that "the hope" held out to mankind in the Scriptures was, in actuality, "the hope of Israel" (Rom. 8:24; Acts 28:20). This led him, inevitably, to a closer examination of the facts revealed in the Word concerning this remarkable man of faith, Abraham.

The reader of *Elpis Israel* will therefore appreciate why the author saw fit to provide more than thirty pages of exposition—some 15,000 words—upon the subject of

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.  
(The hope of Israel is based on the chain...)

*None but circumcised persons can inherit the promises. This may startle; but it is strictly true. It will, however, be remembered that true circumcision is of the heart; and everyone who would inherit with faithful Abraham must be circumcised of heart likewise. When he was circumcised of heart his faith in God was imputed to him for remission of sins that were past... Now, a man believing what Abraham believed, with the same effect on his disposition and life, is also circumcised of heart, when, in putting on Christ, he is 'circumcised with the circumcision made without hands by the circumcision of Christ.'*

—*Elpis Israel*,  
p. 250.

### *"The Promises To Abraham."*

As he recognized more fully the extent of ignorance which prevailed in popular christianity concerning the promises to Abraham, the more he was able to discern the necessity for his readers to apprehend that these promises provided the key to the understanding of "the gospel." The churches have much to say concerning their conception of "the gospel," whilst remaining dangerously unenlightened upon the subject. Teachers who are oblivious to the meaning of "the glad tidings" are merely "blind leaders of the blind."

#### **The Law — A Sentence of Death**

In the section, "*The token of the Covenant*," Bro. Thomas shows that the Jewish nation cannot profit from their ritual of circumcision. They associate circumcision with the law, and are "therefore bound to keep the whole law"—which is an impossibility (p. 248). Not only so, but failure to comply with such an ideal, once embraced as the means of attaining to salvation, offers only condemnation. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them" (Deu. 27:26). These words are cited by Paul to show that "no man is justified by the law in the sight of God" (Gal. 3:10-11).

So long as they continue to trust in the law "they are under sentence of death, and of eternal exclusion from all inheritance in Canaan and the world. They may possibly believe in the promise made to Abraham, that God will give the land to him and the Christ; but they deny that Jesus is the person named in the covenant, which is tantamount to rejecting the covenant itself."

A most telling point is made by Brother Thomas when he points out that even during the kingdom age the law regarding tenancy of the land will still apply to natural Israel. Quoting a

most interesting passage in Eze. 46:16-18, he shows that "the servants" of the Prince—that is, the rejuvenated nation of Israel—will have to "surrender" territorial gifts "at the year of liberty," as was required during the Mosaic dispensation. On the other hand, "the sons" of the Prince—the immortalized saints—will possess their inheritance "for ever" (p. 249).

"The national tenancy of Canaan under the law" was only ever upon a "leasehold" basis. No "freehold" estates could be held. The justification for this is not complicated. The Abrahamic promise covenanted the land "for an everlasting possession." The inheritance was to be "for ever." And at no time in history has this ever become a reality, for the simple reason that the promise still remains unfulfilled.

Brother Thomas points out: "in Solomon's days, when the nation was at its zenith under the law, the land was jointly possessed by Israel, the Tyrians, and the remains of the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites, etc." Thus, "at no time of their occupation did Israel possess all the land from the Euphrates to the Nile, as promised in the covenant." It is a historical and biblical fact that "Israel have only possessed a part of it [the land] for a limited and turbulent period."

#### **A Lesson to be Learned**

In respect to this matter, the people of Israel will learn a compelling lesson during the Messianic era. It is God's purpose that "all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Yahweh" (Num. 14:21), and although this objective will, in measure, be fulfilled during the kingdom age, it cannot be totally consummated whilst the earth remains inhabited by humankind constituted of sin-prone Adamic nature. Together with all mortal peoples of the earth, Israel will have to determine, as believers do

today, that they must strive to overcome the evil propensities of the flesh through the application of God-manifestation in their lives, to become fit vessels to bear the fulness of the divine glory at the end of the millennium, and to live for ever as manifestations of the One Eternal Spirit (1Cor. 15:25-28; Rev. 21:1).

Circumcision, as the "token of the covenant," though no longer binding on believers under Christ's dispensation, has not lost its typical significance. Brother Thomas states: "*None but circumcised persons can inherit the promises.*" And then adds: "This may startle; but it is strictly true" (p. 250). The reader need seek no further than the writings of Moses to prove that this comment is accurate. Knowing full well that circumcision, in its origin, was not of the law but "of the fathers" (Jn. 7:22), Moses was enabled to show the true import of the ritual. "Circumcise therefore," he told his people, "*the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked*" (Deu. 10:16).

The historical setting of these words adds power to their meaning. When Moses uttered this commanding admonition, the people of Israel were in the wilderness awaiting the time of their extrication therefrom. In the meantime, what were they to do? They were to walk faithfully in accord with Yahweh's instructions. "Yahweh thy Elohim *led thee* these forty years in the wilderness, to *humble thee*, and to *prove thee*, to know *what was in thine heart...* Consider *in thine heart*, that as a man chasteneth his son, so Yahweh thy Elohim chasteneth thee. Therefore, thou shalt *keep the commandments of Yahweh thy Elohim, to walk in His ways*, and to fear Him. For Yahweh thy Elohim bringeth thee into a good land" (Deu. 8:2,5-7). They were to understand that their only hope for continued

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sustenance in the wilderness and eventual deliverance from its deadly environment rested in Yahweh their God, and that they were totally dependent upon His grace and mercy in these as in all other matters.

#### **Need for Humble Self-examination**

Should this knowledge not have caused them to look *inwardly* upon themselves, and repudiate the flesh, exercising faith in the benevolent compassion of their God alone?

Paul quotes from Deu. 10:16 when he makes the firm attestation: "He is a Jew which is one *inwardly*: and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter." A true "Jew," irrespective of racial descent, is one who is enlightened in the Truth and who has been mentally and morally transformed by its power operating within him. The "spirit" of which Paul speaks is the spirit of repentance, faith, dedication, love, self-denial, hope, faithfulness.

His reference to the "letter" (Gr. *gramma*, "that which is traced or drawn; that which is written") is an allusion to the strict academic concept of religion, as distinct from the *moral* principles which the Truth requires as an inner mental state, together with an outward manifestation of what is known and believed.

This understanding concerning circumcision is then taken further by Paul. He says of those who have indeed been circumcised in heart: "Whose praise is not of men, but of God"—or, "A Jew like that may not be praised by man, but he will be praised by God" (Rom.

2:28,29, JB. cp. Wey., NIV., NASB, etc). As the above statement is taken from Deu. 10:16, so Paul here moves on to v. 21 of the same chapter. The word "Jew" is a diminutive of *Judah*, and the name means "praise." His point is beyond dispute. A true spiritual Jew is one who receives "praise" from God. Not from men.

**"What Advantage then  
Hath the Jew?"**

It proved a monumental calamity that Israel, nationally, failed to recognize the greatness of the blessings that were held out to them. No doubt, with a heavy heart, Paul wrote: "What advantage then hath the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision?" The Judaizer would have thought that he could trap Paul with the question; that the apostle would be forced to answer: "None whatever!" But he was wrong, for Paul answered: Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:1-2).

What does the apostle mean by this? Simply, that as possessors and custodians of the law, the Jewish nation should have correctly understood, particularly through their leaders, its teaching and significance. The same principle was taught by Christ: "To whom *much is given, of him much will be required*" (Lk. 12:48). Paul effectively turned the question back upon the Judaizer. If they did not understand the vital teaching of the law—including a comprehension of the spiritual significance of circumcision—who was at fault? At whose feet was the blame for such unenlightenment to be laid? They had failed to discern that the advantage they enjoyed above all other nations was their possession of the Holy Oracles, which were able to give them spiritual light and understanding.

To the Jewish nation had been "committed the oracles of God." To

have the Word of God "committed" to them involved vigilance as to how, and in what manner, such a responsibility was to be discharged. From the days of Abraham, by word of mouth, and from the times of Moses through the written Word, Israel had been subject to divine education and discipline. Now, Paul's implied question was: What had those advantages produced? The nation had accepted gladly the honor of their people becoming the possessors of "the oracles of God"—but what of the demands which those oracles made upon them?

Boasting in their circumcision as the grounds upon which they were entitled to some inalienable right as recipients of the divine pleasure, they failed to grasp the reality that eternal salvation is an individual matter and that Yahweh is the sole judge as to who shall be deemed worthy of such an everlasting blessing. Did not the law teach them: "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Exo. 33:19)? Disciples of Christ have been similarly informed: "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8).

Driven by a spirit of nationalism, all his hopes inflexibly fixed upon the law, the Judaizer failed to see the real "advantage" which Yahweh had extended to the Jewish people. With their misapplication of the ideals which could have been accomplished through the law, the only hope the Jew had in the law was that he might be saved thereby. And since he could not keep the law, his position remained hopeless so long as he continued in a state of ignorance concerning the one true faith.

**Only Yahweh Can Look upon  
the Heart**

This highlights the great tragedy in

Judaism. Jews lacking in true understanding, despite the teaching of Moses, wore their circumcision like a badge of honor. A purely formal, ceremonial, religious life is based upon the element of pride. When outward show is the dominant feature of religious life, the only questions that are of concern to the individual are: "What do *men* think of me? Do they see me as the deeply religious person I really am? Do they observe, and admire, my *outward show* of religious activities?" Self-esteem is a human weakness that does not allow for reflection upon the reality that Yahweh *looketh on the heart*" (1Sam. 16:7).

The One Eternal Spirit is able to do what man cannot: "Thou understandest *my thought* afar off... Hell and destruction are before Yahweh: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?" (Psa. 139:2; Pro. 15:11).

It is Yahweh who must approve the thoughts and intents of a person's inner being and the fruits produced therefrom. Outward appearance, no matter how impressive to the eyes of men, will avail nothing without true spiritual circumcision. But a truly dedicated, religious life, motivated *from within*, will be crowned with divine approval.

Identification with the mind and motivation of Abraham is the key. Brother Thomas says: "A man believing what Abraham believed, with the same effect on his disposition and life, is also circumcised of heart, when, *in putting on Christ*, he is 'circumcised with the circumcision made without hands by the circumcision of Christ,' performed on the eighth day according to the law. In putting on Christ, his faith is counted to him for righteousness as Abraham's was." (p. 250). The key word in the last sentence is "*faith*." This relates not merely to what is believed at the time of baptism, but is

indispensably associated with the way of life which *follows* baptism.

It was necessary for Abraham to demonstrate his faith in a clearly visible manner. His "faith" was not simply what he believed, but *what he did because of what he believed*. This is nothing more nor less than faith in action. It is not theoretical faith, but a state of mind manifested in a way of life.

Due to the false teaching of apostate christendom, these truths remain largely unknown to the world. To believe that "infant-rhantism," or the sprinkling of babes, will ensure that their "immortal souls" will enjoy eternal bliss beyond the skies, is to propound a dogma of spiritual malfeasance. Such ungodly doctrines nullify utterly the biblical teaching concerning the promises to Abraham, leaving the believer of such creeds in a hopeless state.

True believers must always appreciate that as circumcision was ineffective whilst treated merely as a religious ritual, so baptism must be seen not solely as a symbolic sacrificial death, but as the introduction into a "newness of life." Day by day the disciple of Christ must strive to follow his steps, manifesting a life motivated by godly principles. May true believers demonstrate clearly that their faith is sound, and that their faith is manifested in a way of life that will be found acceptable to Abraham's God.

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— John Ullman.