

*Seventh Letter.*

THE EXPECTATION OF THE JEWS.

"Not only was the expectation of a remarkable personage universally prevalent among the Jews at the time of the appearance of Christ, but the phraseology was already in use which designated what he was to be and accomplish. There was at the time of Christ a Messianic phraseology derived from different parts of the Old Testament, which embodied and expressed all their anticipations. Whatever inspiration accompanied the first composition of the prophecies, there was evidently none in their interpretation. This much was certain, that there was to be a Messiah, there was to be a new dispensation. No one knew precisely what he was to be. Imagination, of course, was set to work, and each one for himself formed his own, and made whatever passage of the Old Testament he choose to be descriptive of his person and office. Not only the imagination, but the passions were concerned in the formation of their expectations. The pious thought of him as a religious reformer, and the new state of things to be a condition of higher religious perfection. The rabbis interpreted concerning the days of the Messiah such passages as this from the 31st chapter of Jeremiah, 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it on their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every

man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they all shall know me, from the least of them even unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.' This seems to have been the expectation entertained by the Samaritans, if the woman with whom Christ talked at the well of Jacob is to be considered as speaking the sentiments of the nation.

"The universal expectation seems to have been that he was to be a prophet like unto Moses, but greater. In accordance with this sentiment Peter, in one of his first discourses after the resurrection of Jesus, cites the promise of Moses to the Israelites just before his death, as applicable to Christ. 'A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren like unto me, him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul which shall not hear the prophet shall be destroyed from among the people.' These were the sentiments of those who had seen the miracle of feeding the five thousand with a few loaves and fishes, bearing so strong a resemblance to the feeding of the Israelites in the desert. Then those men when they had seen the miracle which Jesus did, said : 'This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.'

"Another and much larger class gave the Messianic prophecies a more worldly meaning. The great personage whose coming they shortly expected was to be a king, but greater than any who had sat upon the Jewish throne. It was with this expectation evidently that his disciples followed him through his whole ministry. And even after his resurrection they seem for awhile to have entertained the same hopes. One of the first questions which they asked him after he rose was: 'Wilt thou at this time restore the

kingdom to Israel?' And at the last supper they disputed 'which of them should be the greatest,' that is, who should be highest in office in the new kingdom that he was about to set up. It was with this idea that he was hailed by the multitude into Jerusalem with the shout, 'Hosanna to the son of David.' This was the idea which Nathaniel meant to express when he said, on receiving the evidence that he was a prophet: ' Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the king of Israel.' That it was his temporal character to which Nathaniel here referred we have sufficient evidence in the information which first directed his attention to Jesus. 'We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' The part of the Old Testament from which this title and expectation were taken was principally the second Psalm. The person described in this poem is represented as exalted by God to be a king on Mount Zion in Judea. The surrounding heathen are represented as being enraged. But God has nevertheless determined that he shall reign; and as a king sets his son upon his throne while he yet lives, so has God, as Supreme King of Israel, exalted this person to share His authority, and pledges His own power to support his throne.

"One idea of the kingdom of the Messiah, derived from this Psalm, was that he was not only to reign over the Jews, but destroy all other nations. 'Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing. The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak to them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree, the

Lord hath said unto me. Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.' This Psalm was interpreted by the Jews almost universally of the Messiah, and the more readily as the title Anointed is translated in the Septuagint Christos so that it there reads, 'Against the Lord and against His Christ.' The Messiah, therefore, was to reign on Mount Zion, one of the mountains on which Jerusalem was built, and reign over the Jews and by God's assistance subdue the heathen by war and conquest, break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces as a potter's vessel. Such was the kingdom which the great majority of the Jews expected their Messiah to set up.

"The phrase, 'kingdom of heaven,' is taken from the second chapter of the Book of Daniel. After foretelling that there should arise four great monarchies, the Babylonian, the Persian, the Grecian, and the Roman, the last of which should be a kingdom of iron, he goes on to say, 'And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces, and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.' In another passage: 'I saw in the night a vision, and behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given unto him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.'

"From this last passage was probably derived the opinion once held, that the Messiah should never die. Jesus said on a certain occasion: 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.' The people answered him, ' We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth forever; and how sayest thou the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man ?' The new dispensation under the figure of a kingdom was the subject of the commencing petition of one of the chief prayers recited in their synagogues, from Sabbath to Sabbath, and has been so for ages. There was a time specified in the Book of Daniel of seventy weeks, which was to intervene between the building of the second temple and the times of the Messiah, which, interpreting according to the prophetic style, a day for a year, would bring the period of his appearance somewhere near the time when John the Baptist began to preach.

"So prevalent had this expectation become that it had spread beyond the holy land. Tacitus, a historian who wrote in Italy, records the fact that among many 'there was a persuasion that in the ancient books of the priesthood it was written that at this precise time the East should become mighty, and that those issuing from Judea should rule the world.' Suetonius, another Latin historian, writes 'that in the East an ancient and constant opinion prevailed that it was fated there should issue at this time from Judea those who should obtain universal dominion.'

"This confident expectation of the Jews had already caused no little political disturbance. It was this proud anticipation of universal conquest which made them so restive under the government of the Romans. That they who were destined to reign over the world and whose King Messiah was to have the heathen for his inheritance, the

uttermost parts of the earth for his possession, who was to break with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel should be in vassalage to a foreign power, was more than they could bear. Josephus relates that about the time of the birth of Christ, when Cyrenius was sent to take a census of Judea, Judas, a native of Gamala in Galilee, rose up and resisted the Roman commissioner, and raised a great rebellion. He is mentioned likewise by Gamaliel in his speech before the Jewish Sanhedrim, when the apostles were brought before them for preaching Jesus as the Messiah, immediately after his ascension. 'After this man, rose up Judas of Galilee, in the days of taxing, and drew away much people after him; he also perished, and all, as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.' Josephus speaks generally of the troubles of those times, without specifying their causes. And now Judea was full of robberies, and as the several companies of the seditious would light upon anyone to head them he was created a king immediately, in order to do mischief to the public.

"This was exactly the state of the country during the ministry of Jesus, and it explains his caution in proclaiming himself the Messiah, and his withdrawal as soon as a multitude collected about him and manifested any tendency to sedition or disturbance. It is recorded of him, that, after the miracle of feeding the five thousand, and the declaration made concerning him, 'This of a truth is that prophet which should come into the world,' When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, and make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.' In another instance, likewise, when he had healed the man at the pool of Bethesda, 'And he that was healed wist not who it was; for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place.'

"Such being the expectation of the Jews, as we learn from profane history, a man of singular habits and appearance began to preach in a retired part of Judea, where there were but few large towns: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' This man was of the sacerdotal tribe, and had been consecrated to God from his infancy by the vow of the Nazarite. His habits and dress were those of a hermit, his food such as he could pick up in the fields and woods. He was literally the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.' He professed to have been moved by divine impulse to proclaim the immediate approach of the Messiah. A man of such singular appearance, bearing such an important message, produced a great sensation, and excited the strongest curiosity. Crowds from all parts of Judea flocked together to see and hear him. Some thought that he was the Messiah. His fame soon reached Jerusalem, and the Jewish authorities sent a deputation of priests and Levites to inquire who he was. He told them that he was not the Messiah, but was sent to introduce him. 'I came to point him out to Israel.' Here was undoubtedly stated the true reason why he was raised up by Divine Providence to prepare the Jewish mind for the great message from God which they were about to receive, to shape their ideas from the crude mass of traditions which had existed among them into some resemblance to the dispensation that the Messiah was about to establish. 'There was a man sent from God whose name was John. The same came for a witness, that all men through him might believe. He was not the Light, but was sent to bear witness of the Light.'

"The effect of his preaching was precisely what was intended. He produced a strong impression upon the public mind, and, though he wrought no miracle, all men held him