

A good confession

Our Lord Jesus Christ gave an excellent confession before Pontius Pilate. Does that not sound familiar? It takes us to the First Epistle to Timothy. From this letter it is clear that Timothy had had a very sound upbringing by a Jewish mother and grandmother, was well read in the Scriptures, and that Paul had high hopes of him. He had left him in charge of the young ecclesia at Ephesus, and the letter was being written to encourage him in that responsibility. So Paul exhorts him to give good practical advice about behaviour expected of brethren and sisters. He warns of apostasy; he gives him personal advice about holding to the faith. In the second letter, written perhaps several years later, the same matters are dealt with but the tone is much more urgent, as though Timothy were really failing in personal faith, confirming the fears at the back of Paul's mind in the earlier letter.

In the context of this first letter, Paul wrote: "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses" (6:12). "A good profession before many witnesses" is an interesting phrase. What occasion was Paul referring to? Was it Timothy's baptism, as reported to Paul? Was it some event before Paul met Timothy in which he had demonstrated his faith in public in the face of opposition or persecution? Was this the reason we read in Acts 16:2: "[he] was well reported of by

the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium"? Was it perhaps the occasion of his submitting to circumcision? Or was it possibly some other public occasion when, as elder at the ecclesia in Ephesus, he had defended his faith in Christ against Judaistic or Gentile opposition? We do not know.

What is further interesting is that the AV translators got it wrong in 1 Timothy 6:12. The Greek text says quite clearly, not a good profession, but *the* good profession, and more recent translations confirm this. Moreover, the phrase is repeated precisely the same in the next verse: "I give thee charge in the sight of God, Who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession" (v. 13). Again, 'confession' is the same word as 'profession', and it is *the* and not a profession. What is being referred to is Christ's confession before Pontius Pilate. It is not any old confession, but that particular one, one made in public before many witnesses, and it is being held up to us as well as to Timothy as *the* model for us to follow.

How wise, understanding, sympathetic and loving toward us was our Saviour when he stood in all the suffering, the agony of mind and body, and answered for us before Pontius Pilate. In our taking of the emblems let us pray for the mind that was in Christ Jesus to be in us, that we may learn to give Christlike answers to each other and to all men.



Principles, Preaching and Problems

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God's purpose with Israel

5. Israel not replaced by the Church (Part 1)

Stephen Green

HAS ISRAEL been replaced by the Gentile Church as the centre of God's interest and salvation, and as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy?

It is a very widespread view in the Christian religious world that, because national Israel rejected Christ when he came, they have themselves been rejected, and their special place in the prophecies of the Old Testament has been

taken by Christian believers, mainly Gentiles, who are frequently designated as 'spiritual Israel'. There is therefore no longer a national place for Israel in the purpose of God.

This view requires the terms of Old Testament prophecy to be reinterpreted in a very non-literal manner, which is often difficult to sustain in detail. A major effect is that the national structure contained in God's promises to Israel,

whereby Israel are to be a nation leading others and be blessed above the blessing of other nations, and whereby other nations are to receive their blessing through Israel, is written off. However, it is difficult if not impossible to find any 'spiritual' replacement for this structure if these prophecies are interpreted of the Church, since we are clearly taught that individual believers are "all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). In matters of salvation through Christ, national and other differences are irrelevant.

It is too much for one article to cover this important misunderstanding of the Christian world at the desired level of detail, so the topic has been split into two. This part deals with terminology, considers some basic reasons why this view is wrong, and answers arguments that have been used to promote the idea. The next article will look at some related themes and consider crucial verses in Romans.

Present-day terminology

A terminology has developed over recent decades that largely seems to have passed Christadelphians by. Thus those few Christians who do not hold the view described above will often call it Supersessionism or Replacement Theology, while the much larger number of those who do hold this view will call a believer in the 1,000-year Kingdom of Israel, with Christ reigning as King, a Dispensationalist.¹ Although human terminology is not in itself of great importance, we are instructed to be "ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15), and to this end it is helpful to be aware of current language and the ideas involved.²

Supersessionism is not a recent view. It may even go back to the early days of Christian apostasy in Rome (*cf.* Rom. 11:18). Certainly, since their inception Christadelphians have had to contend with it, and have maintained a mainly literal rather than a 'spiritual' interpretation of prophecy, and given national Israel a full place in prophetic fulfilment. This is not to say that all members of this people have a place in God's purpose, as the following New Testament passages make clear:

"Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are

not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed" (Rom. 9:6-8). *The seed of Israel, as a whole, is distinguished from the chosen seed.*

"Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved" (v. 27). *Of the whole nation only a remnant is of eternal interest to God.*

"Behold Israel after the flesh" (1 Cor. 10:18). *The whole nation of Israel.*

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:15,16). *Gentile believers and the faithful remnant of Israel are put together.*

". . . that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus . . ." (Eph. 2:12,13). *Unbelieving Gentiles are alien from Israel, but believing Gentiles are "fellow-citizens with the saints" (v. 19) of national Israel.*

Selecting a people

It is clear from these passages that there is a selective operation going on, until the chosen seed is complete. It is not that there are two separate and clearly distinct Israels—a natural and a spiritual. Rather, there is one chosen family of Israel, all members of which are subject to Divine trial during their natural lives. Some are

1. Strictly speaking, the world dispensations or periods in the history of salvation recognised by a typical Dispensationalist are many more than just one. Seven is the number recognised by Scofield: (1) Innocence, between Creation and the Fall; (2) Conscience, between the Fall and Noah's Flood; (3) Human Government, from the Flood to the call of Abraham; (4) Promise, from Abraham to Moses; (5) Law, from Moses to the death of Christ; (6) The Church, from the resurrection to the present; (7) The Millennium. See 'Dispensationalism' in various theological dictionaries and reference books. The term is usually applied to certain groups of evangelical Christians.
2. The fact that Christadelphians in general appear not to be aware of current terminology perhaps indicates a rather limited preaching contact with the main body of evangelical Christians today. This is worrying in view of our responsibility as witnesses of Jesus (Rev. 20:4).

rejected by God due to their lack of faith in Him, and pruned from the olive tree (Rom. 11:17,20), while others are kept because of their tried faith, to receive the promises at Christ's return. Gentiles who believe are associated with (grafted into) the Israel olive tree through Christ, but thereafter remain subject to a similar trial depending on whether they continue to show faith during the remainder of their natural lives (v. 22). For individual Jews today to be reinstated in their olive tree they need to believe the gospel and obey its demands.

Those who are presently of "the stock of Israel" (Phil. 3:5), that is, "Israel after the flesh", are mostly in unbelief, and, unless they believe and repent, will not form part of the seed of Abraham who inherit the promise (Gal. 3:28,29). The stock is not rejected, but the unbelieving descendants from that stock are.

The history of Abraham's descendants shows many examples of choice of one and rejection of another. Using the examples Paul lines up in Romans 9 and 11, we have Isaac chosen as the stock but not Ishmael, and Jacob but not Esau; we have 7,000 out of all Israel faithful to Yahweh in the days of Elijah, but not the main body of Israel or the royal house; in New Testament times it was the Jewish and Gentile believers who were chosen and, dying faithful, remained part of "the Israel of God".

At the future coming of Christ to rule in the earth a dramatic change occurs, because he comes to claim his throne and exercise his right as King of Israel (Ezek. 21:27). By this time those responsible will have been judged. Faithful believers, whether Jew or Gentile, alive or dead, will have been glorified in immortality. The subjects of the new Kingdom will be mortal nations who are ignorant of salvation in Christ and of God's plan for the Kingdom to be restored. They need teaching. As the King of Israel, Messiah naturally goes first to the stock of Israel, the nation according to the flesh. He will teach them, and restore the Kingdom to them, that is, to those who then accept him, since others will not survive. The teaching of other nations in the earth follows. In this way he gives primacy to Israel above other nations, as the prophecies predicted, but does not prevent other nations benefiting from worship of the true God through facilities provided in Israel (Mic. 4:1-8).

The mortal, that is, the natural, nation of Israel will no doubt remain until the judgement at the end of Christ's reign over the nations, after

which he passes control to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24-26). An important part of Christ's work with Israel at the commencement of and during his reign is to cause the natural to *become* spiritual, rather than to be replaced by the spiritual (v. 28).

Reasons why Supersessionism is wrong

Five basic arguments against Supersessionism are:

- 1 **The argument from Divine constancy.** A basic Bible teaching about God is His unchanging nature and His faithfulness: "For I am the LORD, I change not". This is the reason why the sons of Jacob are not consumed and replaced by the Gentile Church: "therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6). If this was the case in the days of Malachi, it must logically be true still. There are solemn oaths He has sworn. Man is easily distracted from fulfilling his own promises, but God is not. His predictions, promises and oaths concerning Israel's restoration will be fulfilled.
- 2 **The Scriptures make no statement about a permanent replacement of Israel.** The rejected sons and daughters of Israel only need to be replaced by Gentiles while they refuse to hear God. When the Gentiles refuse to hear—a situation we seem to be rapidly approaching—then Israel will listen. There is no clear New Testament statement that natural Israel has been for ever superseded. In fact the opposite is the case, as we shall see when we consider Romans 11 in the next article.
- 3 **Old Testament prophecy is made meaningless by Replacement Theology.** Ezekiel 37:21-23 is one example of this. If we change 'Israel' to read 'the Gentile Church' then this passage accuses the Gentile Church of the same sins as Israel, and therefore provides no more reason for her final salvation than for Israel herself.
- 4 **The New Testament view of Old Testament prophecy.** The New Testament views Bible prophecy as something that can be relied upon and is not of "private interpretation" (Rom. 3:1-4; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21). Supersessionism is an imposed interpretation, not a natural understanding of the text. Christ confirms the literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy about Israel (Mt. 23:38,39).

5 There is no defined time when Jewish opportunity failed. Paul first took the gospel to Israel *at each place* he preached; they already had knowledge of many basic truths. However, some things had only been revealed “darkly”, and Christ came to cast a fuller light on things having life or death significance, but they refused this light. In Acts 13:17-26, after reviewing interventions God made in Israel’s history (an account which contains examples of increased revelation but does not replace or destroy previous revelation), Paul introduces the new benefits of Christ’s revelation. There is no demonstration of the end of a Jewish opportunity overall, though Jews did have to change their hearts to become acceptable. This is shown when Paul moves to Iconium and immediately goes to the Jewish synagogue (Acts 14).

In contrast, the Supersessionist argues:

- 1 Israel’s part in the salvation of the world is now finished;
- 2 Old Testament promises should be reinterpreted to fit into changed historical contexts;
- 3 New Testament teaching on the restoration of Israel is missing.

We shall now look for answers to these arguments.

Israel’s part in the salvation of the world

It is true that the Old Testament calling of Israel and of their fathers was not solely for their own salvation, but for the blessing of all nations. This is made explicit in the promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 22:18; cf. Gal. 3:8). It is also shown by the mention of the Gentiles in blessings foretold for Israel by many of the prophets.

Sometimes, however, the Supersessionist draws false implications from this fact, saying that God’s commitment to Israel only extends as far as Israel being a means of satisfying His commitment to humanity at large. And so the patriarchal and the national and territorial phases of the Old Testament period are seen purely as a temporary stage toward the development of an international and global people of God.

This is untrue, first because the patriarchs who received the promises are personally to benefit from them according to the wording of the promises, and in their natural life never received that benefit, necessitating their resurrection and restoration to their full status among the people of Israel (Mal. 4:5,6; Mt. 8:11; Heb. 11:13,16). Secondly, the references of the prophets to Gentile

participation in the promised blessings does not eliminate the need for Israel to provide overall supporting operations at the command of their King when the time of his reign comes (Mic. 4:2,8).

The Israelite basis of the blessing continues. Israel form a kernel to God’s work. The fact that many of Israel were rejected does not prevent God’s purpose with the nation being fulfilled. In the midst of Israel’s rejection of the gospel preaching, Paul was able to say of them: “who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom. 9:4,5). There were still the few then; there were the faithful of earlier eras; there will be the faithful of the Kingdom era.

By God’s arrangement of using the nation of Israel there is no need for repeated independent revelations of His purpose to different nations, because He has used Israel as the key for all. From Abraham to Christ provision had been made for all humanity by their interaction with Israel. From Christ’s first coming until beyond the destruction of Jerusalem this was so again. At his second coming it will be so once more. True faith recognises the position of Israel and the right of God to choose His own medium.

Promise and prediction

Another deceptive argument is that which claims there is an essential difference between promise and prediction, and that a promise can be given extra freedom to be interpreted to fit with developments in the historical context.

One Supersessionist writer has said: “There is an immense difference between prediction and promise. Promise presupposes, initiates or sustains personal relationship and involves personal commitment (prediction need not). Thus the fulfilment of a promise may, in the event, take a quite different form from the material terms in which it was made, yet still be a true fulfilment inasmuch as its purpose was bound up with the relationship, not the objective form of words used”.³

3. C. Wright in *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*, edited by P. W. L. Walker, second edition, 1994, pp. 4,5.

By this argument, taken far enough, it is possible to destroy God's promises so that they become like human ones, and can be made to mean whatever is convenient to the interpreter. And so the true value of prophecy/promise is lost; it is converted into a vague assertion that God will continue to take an interest in man. In the New Testament we find no consistent reinterpretation of the Old that destroys or cancels the literal interpretation of its prophecy.

Another writer of the same name, arguing somewhat similarly, appears to misunderstand Christ's manner of confirming the promises at his first coming: ". . . the many Old Testament promises of restoration . . . have all come true in the Messiah (2 Cor. 1:20)".⁴

He misunderstands 2 Corinthians 1:20: "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us". This needs to be taken with such passages as Romans 15:8: "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers". The New Testament is not saying that the Old Testament promises have been completed in Christ's death and resurrection, but rather that their future fulfilment has been made possible through these key events, and thus God's promises have received confirmation (see also Galatians 3:15,17 and Hebrews 6:16,17).

When encountering those who deny the future restoration of Israel, the instinctive reaction of Christadelphians and others who believe in it is to point to the prophecies which have not yet been fulfilled. These prophecies of God need a fulfilment.

The same writer complains that this argument takes away from the completeness of Christ's achievement in his death and resurrection. He sees Jesus's death as drawing together into one the death of Israel in her desolation, and Jesus's rising again as the beginning of the 'real' restoration of Israel. Thus Christ in resurrection replaces Israel in restoration.⁵

But this is wrong. Of course the work of Christ is not yet complete! This is clear both in ourselves and in the world about us. Even in Mr Wright's interpretation the work is incomplete until the Church is completed. The true Christian hope in our days is the coming again of Jesus, when he completes his work in the earth as bringer of peace and righteousness (Acts 3:19-21; 1 Pet. 1:13; 2 Pet. 3:13), and creates life and immortality in his saints. The restoration of Is-

rael is a part of that work, in which Christ will himself be involved.

The 'sparsity' of New Testament comment on Israel's restoration

This argument is expressed by a further writer in an extreme form:

"Surely NO ONE will say that there is a single solitary verse anywhere in the **entire NEW TESTAMENT** which teaches a future restoration of the Jews to Palestine, nor of their conversion to Christ **after His second coming**. Surely if such things are to happen, they would be of such great importance that they would have found a place in the writings of the New Testament at some point in all its pages. But such is not the case! Not a single New Testament writer says anything about a future restoration of Israel to the Land, let alone anything about a future conversion of all the Jews at the second coming of Christ".⁶

Direct teaching of a future restoration may be rare, but it is certainly not absent from the New Testament, while indirect teaching is plentiful. The request that it should appear on every page seems over-demanding. Even God's coming Kingdom on earth (or any other major teaching) is not mentioned on every page of a normal printed Bible, and the mortal nation of Israel which serves as part of the subjects of that Kingdom for a thousand years must be subordinate to the Kingdom itself, and therefore mentioned less.

This argument from lack of comment can be put on its head. If the seemingly clear teaching of the Old Testament has been misunderstood by the Jews on some point, then we would expect it to have been put right by Christ and his apostles. This happens on other matters, like the non-necessity for keeping of the Law by the Gentiles. But the prophetic idea of Israel taking a leading status in the earth is never denied, although Christ clearly had opportunity to correct his apostles on this point if it had been necessary. A suitable opportunity might have been when they asked him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put

4. T. Wright, *ibid.*, p. 73.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

6. J. L. Bray, *Israel in Bible Prophecy*, 1983 (reprinted 1995), pp. 29-30. Emphasis as in original.

in His own power” (Acts 1:6,7). ‘It is all to do with times and seasons’, he appears to be saying, but we find no denial of the restoration.

One of the writers quoted above offers an alternative meaning to these verses: “Jesus’ answer is usually taken as a ‘not yet’: ‘it is not for you to know times or seasons’. Yet Luke surely intended us to read it as a ‘yes, but not in that way’: ‘You will receive power, when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses . . . to the end of the world’”.⁷ An obvious response to Mr Wright’s suggestion is, If Jesus meant that, why did he not say it? There would be no need to mention the times and seasons, because the witnessing work was due to start shortly and the time they were to wait had already been defined (vv. 4,5). “The times or the seasons” which they were not allowed to know must refer to something else and to a very much longer period. We conclude therefore that they related to the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel.

New Testament teaching of a future restoration

The following shows the various kinds of New Testament passage that support a future restoration:

- 1 Every time the title “Christ” is used in the New Testament it is a reference to the Old Testament concept of a messiah (Dan. 9:24-27; Ps. 2:2), who would be an anointed of the Lord, better even than the best who had yet appeared, and who would reign as God’s King over Israel and also over the world. The meaning of the word ‘Christ’ is nowhere explained otherwise in either Testament.
- 2 There are New Testament passages which are quite explicit about restoration and future changes in Israel.⁸
- 3 Many New Testament passages confirm that Christ is King of Israel, an active and visible function which he has clearly not yet assumed.⁹
- 4 Other New Testament passages continue hopes from the Old.¹⁰
- 5 A number of New Testament passages refer to the literal Jerusalem in a sense which implies its future in God’s purpose (Mt. 5:35; 23:37-39; Lk. 13:34,35; 19:11,12; 21:24).
- 6 Of all the many references to ‘Israel’ in the New Testament, the vast majority can only refer to the literal nation of Israel and not to a separate ‘spiritual nation’ which might re-

place it in the prophecies. Although Gentiles are offered ‘light’ and opportunity to be associated with Israel, the core of a literal Israel is never discarded by New Testament teaching.¹¹ This is general evidence for the restoration of natural Israel.

The idea which some have that Old Testament prophecies need repetition in the New Testament before we can accept their authority is an unfair demand on the New Testament, in spite of the contrasting names man has given these two parts of the Divine Scriptures. As mentioned earlier, the New Testament confirms the promises of the Old by showing the major steps God took toward their fulfilment in Christ, not simply by showing which ones God had completed. It also reveals many things that were previously hidden but are still future, such as how God would provide the salvation, immortality and resurrection promised in the Old Testament. Paul makes clear that the revelation of the gospel to the Gentiles is by a combination of two things, “the preaching of Jesus Christ” and “the Scriptures of the prophets” (Rom. 16:25,26). We lose an important half of the key to God’s secrets if we ignore the literal teaching of Old Testament prophets.

In conclusion, we note that the present-day common view amongst ‘Christians’ that God no

7. T. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

8. Paul prays that Israel might be saved (Rom. 10:1). If he knew that they could not be saved, would he have prayed for it? Israel are blinded “until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in” (11:25). This is a passage to be examined in detail in the next article.
9. Matthew 2:6; 19:28; 27:42 (he still remains to be manifested to the world as the King of Israel); Luke 1:33,71,74,75; 19:12; 22:30; John 1:49; 12:13; Acts 2:30,36; 3:19-21 (speaking of times still future); 7:13,14,35-37 (use of the types of Joseph and Moses as evidence that Christ will be recognised by his brethren only at his second coming).
10. Acts 28:20 (“the hope of Israel” links Paul’s hope to that of Israel past); Romans 11:26; Hebrews 8:8,10 (a prophecy from Jeremiah is applied to natural Israel, but still awaits fulfilment).
11. A paper by Alexander McCaul, “New Testament Evidence of the Restoration of the Jews to the Land of Israel”, was published in Brother Thomas’s *Herald of the Kingdom and Age to Come*, 1856, pp. 217-25. This paper contains detailed Scriptural evidence to support the idea that the New Testament references to the words ‘Israel’ and ‘Gentiles’ preserve the Old Testament sense of these terms, so that ‘Israel’ refers to the literal nation, and Gentile believers are called ‘Gentiles’.

longer has special interest in Israel, or that her place has been taken by the Christian, largely Gentile, Church is unsupported by the Word of God, and in establishing this we have largely concentrated upon the New rather than Old Testament for the sake of 'Christian' predisposition. As Christadelphians we may well feel that we could do more to ensure that God's purpose with

Israel the nation, a key part of the coming Kingdom, is brought to the attention of those who think they know the Bible, as well as of those who do not.

In the next article we plan, God willing, to complete this theme by considering passages that appear to teach Israel's 'casting away', and by including some thoughts on Romans 11.

[\(To be continued\)](#)



Exposition

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The Exodus

A commentary on Exodus 1-15

E. Moses and Pharaoh: first encounters—Exodus 5-6 (Part 3)

Mark Vincent

The format of the commentary

The narrative has been broken down into several **major sections**, of a chapter or two each; some of these will be covered in one month, others will take longer. An **Introduction** is provided for each of these major sections, which sets out the major events and themes dealt with in those chapters.

Each major section is broken into **subsections** or **episodes** (these are typically between five and twenty verses each). For each the **AV text** is followed by a **Comment**, which draws out the major lessons and items of interest from the text. The AV text also contains **Footnotes**, in which additional 'one-off' points are made for those wanting to work through Exodus more slowly.

Introduction

At the end of Exodus 5 Moses has laid before God the apparent failure of his first encounter with Pharaoh. Why has God sent him? Why doesn't God get on and redeem His people, if that is what He so wishes to do? Moses' questions could not be clearer. Now God is about to answer.

God's reassurance to Moses

- 6:1 Then the LORD said unto Moses, Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh: for with a strong hand¹ shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive² them out of his land.
- 6:2 And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the LORD:
- 6:3 And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty,³ but by My name JEHOVAH was I not known to them.⁴
- 6:4 And I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers.⁵
- 6:5 And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered My covenant.
- 6:6 Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid⁶ you out of their bondage, and I will redeem⁷ you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: