



Reviews

EDITOR: John Nicholls, 17 Upper Trinity Road, Halstead,
Essex, CO9 1EE. Tel. 01787 473089;
e-mail: jgmicholls@classicfm.net

The return from Babylon*

John Nicholls

THE SECOND EXODUS is a revised and enlarged version of a series of articles that appeared in the *Bible Student* magazine in 1971-73. It is in two parts: 1. Isaiah and other prophecies of the return, and 2. Haggai and Zechariah. It is written in a concise style, with several diagrams, tables and maps reinforcing the text. There are subject and Scripture indices at the end of the work, a helpful bibliography, and footnotes at the close of each chapter.

The period 600-500 B.C. is, as the authors remark, extensively covered in Old Testament historical and prophetic books, and it is no mean feat to be able to draw together so much material and interpret it in a coherent way. Yet this is what Brother and Sister Walker have done successfully in their study.

Other writers in the Brotherhood have, of course, expounded these prophecies. Brother C. C. Walker (*Ministry of the Prophets: Isaiah*) and Brother Harry Whittaker (*Isaiah*) have produced expositions of Isaiah. Brother Thomas expounds Haggai and Zechariah in *Eureka* (Vol. 1, pp. 53-85), but his standpoint is, necessarily, the ultimate fulfilment of the prophets' words. Brother John Carter in *Prophets after the Exile* gives a brief but useful historical background to the period, but, like Brother Thomas, concentrates on the final fulfilment of the prophets' words rather than on their primary application to the exiled Jews who had returned to Judea and were hearing the prophets' message. In the introduction to his exposition of Daniel (*Expositor* series) Brother H. P. Mansfield gives a fairly extensive overview of these times, and the interested student may wish to consult this.

Two unique features of the volume currently under review are, firstly, that it concentrates on the impact of the exhortations and visions of Haggai and Zechariah upon their fellow exiles in Judah and Jerusalem, giving the primary fulfilment of their words in those times, and secondly, that the authors are also able to trace a

primary fulfilment of some of the prophecies of Isaiah chapters 40-66, which of course would have been part of the Scriptures available to God's people in this period. Some of these chapters that we rightly quote as prophecies of the ultimate restoration of Israel from its long captivity have also a primary application to the days of the exile, as, for example, the Cyrus prophecies in Isaiah 44 and 45 clearly indicate.

Although the authors deliberately concentrate on prophecy fulfilled in the return from exile in Babylon, they are at pains to point out, and state extensively in their book, that the 'captivity-redemption cycle' occurs three times in the history of the nation of Israel: at the time of the Exodus; at the time of the captivity in Babylon; and in the long exile of the Jews and their return to the land at the time of the end (p. 23). Their thesis is that, if we understand better how the cycle progressed in the past, we shall have a better understanding of what to look for as events unfold before us today in these last times. Their conclusions are both stimulating and thought-provoking.

Isaiah and other prophecies of the return

The first section begins with a prologue, which is an historical survey, taking account of the last kings of Judah, the prophets of the time, and the political situation in the Middle East in those times. Then follows a discussion of the quotation by Paul in Acts 13:40,41 of the words of Habakkuk 1:5. This New Testament quotation exactly

* *The Second Exodus: Isaiah's and Zechariah's prophecies of the return from exile—a pattern for today*, 188 pages, Geoff and Ray Walker. Available at £5 for a single copy, plus postage and packing (£1.35 for a single copy in the UK) from the authors at 44 Colindeep Lane, Sprowston, Norwich, NR7 8EQ, UK; e-mail geoffandray@tesco.com. Can be paid for via local agents in Australia, New Zealand, USA and Canada; please enquire of the authors for details.

illustrates the authors' thesis that prophecy has a primary and an ultimate fulfilment, provided the circumstances are similar. The authors comment:

"Thus prophecies about the judgement brought upon Israel by the Babylonians may also apply to the judgement meted out by the Romans to the Jews in AD 70 and 135, as Paul warned. And the redemption offered by God to the Jews in Babylon stands as a pattern both for the redemption of the Gentiles through the Lord Jesus Christ, and for the eventual redemption of the nation of Israel at the final return of the Lord to Zion.

"Paul is thus able to refer Isaiah 49:6 to the work of the Lord Jesus with the Gentiles (Acts 13:47), and Isaiah 59:20,21 to his work with the Jews (Rom. 11:26). Both of these prophecies occur in the second half of Isaiah's prophecy; and it our belief that *in the first place* both prophecies referred to the redemption of the Jews from Babylon—and that indeed, the whole of Isaiah's prophecy from chapters 40–66 had a first fulfilment in these times" (p. 11).

There follows a most useful discussion of the construction of the prophecy of Isaiah, and then the authors deal with two theories that they believe to be wholly false about the apparent difference of theme between the two sections of Isaiah. Citing the work of the Hebrew scholar Rachel Margalioth, and, more crucially, the Isaiah citations by the Apostle John in John 12:37-40, the authors show that only one Isaiah wrote the whole prophecy. This section ends with the authors showing from each chapter in Isaiah 40–66 that these chapters have reference to the return from exile after the captivity of the Jews in Babylon.

The authors say:

"It would be to these Israelites, the faithful who had seen both the captivity of Northern Israel and the destruction of the Assyrian hosts, that the later prophecies of Isaiah would be given—those who had experience of how God could redeem His people, if only they would remain faithful. And these later prophecies would give them the assurance that, although later generations would become corrupt and judgement must needs fall, yet God would again redeem His people out of captivity . . .

"The faithful Israelite who had heard of the dreadful prophecy given to Hezekiah of a

carrying captive of the nation to Babylon, would hear the first words of Isaiah's next prophecy with joy: 'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God . . .' (Is. 40:1,2)" (pp. 24-5).

The chapter on Cyrus that follows, although at times speculative due to the lack of firm information, is well reasoned, and this reviewer notes that a fairly recent British Museum book¹ agrees in general terms with the authors' conclusion.

Next the authors introduce their reasons, from which the reviewer does not demur, for their suggestion that Zerubbabel, a descendant from David through Jehoiachin, is the primary fulfilment of the servant prophecies in this latter part of Isaiah. His name means 'a shoot out of Babylon', but he was in fact a shoot (branch) out of the stem of Jesse, that is, a descendant of David. In Isaiah the servant prophecies speak of him as an individual and as representing the nation of Israel.

A summary of the broad message of Isaiah chapters 40 to 66 suitably concludes this chapter, and the authors note that, "While it has a perfect future fulfilment in the work of the Lord Jesus, in both his first and his second coming, it seems to us that there is also an earlier outworking in the time of the return from exile, in which Zerubbabel played the part of the servant" (p. 43). This section of the book is concluded by a chapter on how prophecies by Jeremiah, Daniel and Ezekiel also found fulfilment in, and gave encouragement to, the exiles from Babylon. One obvious example is, of course, the Seventy Years Prophecy and the effect it had on the aged Daniel (Dan. 9:2).

Haggai and Zechariah

The second and larger section of the book deals with the prophecy of Haggai and the first eight chapters of Zechariah. These prophecies were both given in the second year of Darius the Persian. The approach is to work through the chapters in Zechariah and to refer to the relevant chapters of Haggai as they connect with Zechariah. The section begins with a very useful historical background culled from both Scriptural and secular sources. A key verse linking the history and the two prophecies is Ezra 5:1.

The prophecies must therefore have been meaningful to the returning Jews, and not purely

1. *The Bible in the British Museum: interpreting the evidence*, T. C. Mitchell (1988).

prophecies whose fulfilment lay many centuries ahead with no relevance to that generation. On this basis, the authors proceed with their exposition. They find links with the book of Deuteronomy and with Isaiah. Just as God revealed Himself as Yahweh, He Who Will Be, at the burning bush, and instructed Moses to tell Israel that Yahweh would release Israel from its bondage in Egypt, so Haggai, God's messenger (1:13) like Moses, and Zechariah declared that Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel, was with them in their release from Babylon and would bless their work of rebuilding the temple.

An interesting little piece (chapter 11) on the twenty-fourth day follows. This day was the one on which Zechariah and Haggai were given prophecies. It was also the day when Daniel saw a vision (Dan. 10:4). The authors suggest that the twenty-one days of mourning and fasting by Daniel (vv. 2,3), on the day-for-a-year principle, could represent the twenty-one years when the building of the temple ceased due to the opposition of the Samaritans, etc., as recorded in Ezra 4. The authors discuss other matters relating to the twenty-fourth day, and conclude that the builders were encouraged. We also in our day are encouraged to see time periods fulfilled. In 1967, when Israel waged the Six-Day War and recaptured Jerusalem in fulfilment of the time periods, many were encouraged to be baptized, and our zeal for the things of God was strengthened.

The visions of Zechariah 1

When we come to the authors' exposition of Zechariah's symbolic visions, which commence in 1:8, those of us familiar with the interpretations given by Brother Thomas and Brother Carter will notice differences. However, it seems to this reviewer that those differences are not substantial, but rather lie in the application by the authors of these visions to the generation which first received them. The visions are capable of having both a primary and a more distant fulfilment, like the literal prophecies in Isaiah already discussed in the first section of the book.

The authors are able to link the symbols with the Exodus and also with the latter chapters of Isaiah, and the exposition of the symbols of the first vision in Zechariah 1 on pages 77-85 deserves to be studied carefully. The exposition of the vision of the man among the myrtle trees, in which the authors consider the Scriptural import of the "good words and comfortable words" (1:13) from the Lord to the angel who spoke with

Zechariah, is, for this reviewer, one of the finest in the book. Besides the more obvious fulfilments, like the opening words of Isaiah 40 and the words of Isaiah 51:3 actually quoted in Zechariah 1:17, they find links with Jeremiah and the Psalms, which, if the exiles also recognised them, would have strengthened their minds and hands to carry on the difficult work of rebuilding the temple in a hostile environment surrounded by those alien to the God of Israel.

Traditionally we link the four horns in Zechariah 1:18 with the four major Gentile powers that have desolated Israel since the overthrow of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. The authors, however, are able to present a convincing case for a more immediate interpretation, the details of which the reader must seek out for him or herself in the book. Similarly, the four carpenters are usually interpreted as the saints in glory, the brethren of the carpenter of Nazareth, who carry out the judgements written in the future, but an interesting, more immediate, application is made consistent with the authors' thesis.

The fact that the same vision can have more than one application should not be a matter to trouble us. We are not the only generation to need strength and encouragement from the Scriptures, and we can rejoice that our brethren, the faithful Israelites rebuilding the temple in those far-off days, received encouragement and exhortation from the visions of Zechariah and the words of Haggai. The glory of the Word of our God should be enhanced in our minds as something which endures for ever, throughout all generations.

Other visions

It is not the place of a reviewer to mention all of the work being reviewed, but rather to give a taste of that work. The vision in chapter 2 of the man with the measuring line receives an interesting exposition, and this is helped by two valuable tables on pages 99 and 110 showing the links with the Exodus and the fulfilment of the prophecies of Isaiah.

A very valuable section is the exposition of Zechariah 3:1,2 (pp. 111-15), which is equated with the words of Jude verse 9. It is often difficult for us to understand the verse in Jude, and it is a favourite verse for Jehovah's Witnesses when advocating their ideas about a personal super-human devil. All should find this exposition of help. Some may find the exposition of Joshua's new clothes controversial, but it is in keeping

with broad Scriptural principles and the authors' thesis, and does not preclude the more distant application to the saving work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The chapter entitled "My Servant the Branch" is, in the reviewer's opinion, well reasoned, and is commended to the reader, as are also the interpretations of the visions of the lampstand, the flying roll and the woman in the ephah. The reviewer has found these latter visions quite difficult to expound, but Brother and Sister Walker's exposition seems to flow in a logical fashion. The reviewer has some reservations about the immediate interpretation of the vision of the mountains of brass, but found the chapter entitled "Make crowns" excellent.

The penultimate chapter has a useful table on the fasts and feasts of Zechariah 7 and 8, and of particular interest is the last section, entitled "The parallel in our own times" (p. 174). The authors suggest, on the basis of their researches into the second exodus, the following general programme for returned Jewry in the land of Israel:

- 1 The work of Elijah to encourage the building of the temple;
- 2 The actual work of temple building under men of the calibre of Zerubbabel and Joshua;
- 3 A further work of Elijah (typified by Zechariah) in teaching Jewry the law of the Lord;
- 4 The exaltation of Jerusalem among the nations and a consequent attraction of Gentile nations (Zech. 8:22,23).

Time alone will decide the correctness or otherwise of these views, but they are worth considering, and looking for the fulfilment of them, as we see the nation of Israel today besieged, be-

wildered and perplexed as to what they can do to find that elusive peace and stability that they look for.

Conclusions

This is the title of the final chapter of this book. It brings us also to the reviewer's conclusions about the work.

- 1 The major conclusion he has come to is, read the book for yourself. It is Scripturally well reasoned, and is in keeping with the Christadelphian practice of trying to understand the impact of the Word of God on the first recipients of that Word.
- 2 The book helps us to understand better the prophecy of Isaiah, particularly how chapters 40-66 have had a preliminary fulfilment. The "small things" (Zech. 4:10) in the days of Haggai and Zechariah can be a help to us as we try to enlarge our minds with the glorious things of the Kingdom of God and its King, our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 3 The captivity-redemption cycle which the authors trace in the Exodus from Egypt, the exile from Babylon, and the partial return of the Jews from all nations today, helps us to understand better how God may be working in His nation today.
- 4 In a way which no other book does in the publications of the Truth, it draws together prophecies of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Daniel, Haggai and Zechariah, together with 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles and Ezra, plus the testimony of secular history.

A book of this scope should not be passed by; it is heartily commended to the reader.

Milestones to the Kingdom 2001

Brother Don Pearce's annual survey of the signs of the times is now available at £2.50 post paid from 'Milestones', 76 High Street, Hillmorton, Rugby, CV21 4EE, UK. Cheques payable to 'Milestones'. This year's edition is 100 pages of interesting material, summarised as follows on the back cover:

"2001 has been a very dramatic year, when men's hearts have been moved with fear at the atrocities unleashed upon an unsuspecting New York. *Milestones 2001* endeavours to set the events of September 11th into a Biblical framework, seeing how the drying up of the river Euphrates over 80 years ago has led to bin-Laden's actions of revenge. To Bible students the many ripples that have flowed out have been very exciting. We also examine the two little horns of Daniel's prophecies, and the merchants of Tarshish and the young lions. In the light of these prophecies and world events, *Milestones* looks at the accelerated acceptance of Russia by the West, and the remarkable coming together of the two halves ('legs') of Europe; Israel's troubled year and the growing involvement of the US and Britain in the M.E.; and Mr Blair's role, working with America. *Milestones 2001* is an invaluable source of material, reminding us of the events of the past year and encouraging us to watch for our Master's return".