

Triumph

Let me repeat the final paragraph of the previous chapter.

What a pessimistic book this is, to be sure! Well... yes and no. All is not gloom and despair. Far from it. We know the narrative must end in TRIUMPH. It will. Glorious triumph!

For a start, significant straws have been in the wind. Have you missed them?

Take Israel. As we have seen, throughout the days of the old covenant, right from Sinai, Israel played fast and loose with their covenant, kicking over the traces with regard to the law. Spiritually speaking, Israel showed her propensity to be a serial adulteress. So much so, both kingdoms eventually went into captivity under the wrath of God. There were a few bright spots – in Judah – but the reality is that the history of Israel reveals a dreadful catalogue of unfaithfulness and disobedience, one which culminated in the Jews' by-and-large rejection of the Messiah when he appeared among them, even though they had long expected him, and were (supposedly) looking forward to his coming.

And yet all this – all of it – was foreknown – indeed, prophesied – by God. He did not condone it – far from it – but none of it caught him unawares (if I might use such a phrase about the omniscient and omnipotent God).

Of all the many passages I could choose to justify my claim, let me take just one.¹

Consider the prophet Hosea. In order to bring Israel's adultery home to the prophet, he called Hosea to live out – in his own life and experience of suffering under his tumultuous marriage to Gomer – the terrible pain of the breakdown of trust which God had had to endure from his old-covenant people:

¹ For more, see my *Christ*.

Triumph

Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land [that is, Israel] commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD (Hos. 1:2).

Worse, in naming the three offspring of the marriage, God pronounced a devastating judgment upon Israel for their unfaithfulness:

Call [the first child's] name 'Jezreel', for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel...

Call [the second child's] name 'No Mercy', for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all...

Call [the third child's] name 'Not My People', for you are not my people, and I am not your God (Hos. 1:4-9).

Devastating is it not? Tragic! It was a tragedy of the first water.

But in his wrath, God would remember mercy (Hab. 3:2), as he announced through Hosea:

Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them: 'You are not my people', it shall be said to them: 'Children of the living God'. And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

Say to your brothers: 'You are my people', and to your sisters: 'You have received mercy'...

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me 'My Husband', and no longer will you call me 'My Baal'. For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground.

Triumph

And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.

And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD, I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth, and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer 'Jezreel', and I will show her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on 'No Mercy', and I will say to 'Not My People': 'You are my people'; and he shall say: 'You are my God'...

The children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days (Hos. 1:10 – 3:5).

And that is the merest sample of such prophecies, as I will show. To what do these prophecies refer? The restoration of Israel – that is, Judah – after exile? A miraculous conversion of most (if not all) the Jews leading to a world-wide awakening among Gentiles (postmillennialism) towards the end of this present age? A millennial, Jewish kingdom after Christ's return, lasting a 1000 years, with Christ as king reigning in Jerusalem, but ending in disaster?² Or what?

Certainly, the restoration of Judah after exile must come into the picture. Of that, there is no question. The prophets were, first and foremost, preaching to their own generation of pre-exile Jews. But that return cannot possibly exhaust the sweeping nature of the prophecies.³ Some believers expect a revived Israel with a Jewish kingdom, with Christ as king,

² It is only fair to point out that some postmillennialists see a disastrous time after the glorious kingdom, and all before Christ's return. Dennis M. Swanson: 'Even postmillenarian Charles Hodge taught a rebellion at the end of the thousand years to be quelled by the personal return of Christ!' (Dennis M. Swanson: 'The Millennial Position of Spurgeon').

³ Nor does it explain similar prophecies issue by post-exile prophets – Zech. 14:16-21; Mal. 3:1-4, for instance.

Triumph

centred on Jerusalem, lasting for 1000 years – the millennium.⁴ I don't share this opinion. In saying that, let me immediately add that in rejecting this 1000 year view – and, incidentally, rejecting postmillennialism (with its massive, world-wide conversion of Jews leading to a super-church kingdom before Christ returns) – I am not saying that those who hold such views are insincere, or that they do not treat the Bible seriously, and so on.⁵ What is more, if I am mistaken, if either of these systems does prove correct (and one of them, at least, must be wrong), I will rejoice as much as any millennialist in the conversion of Jews in whatever form the earthly kingdom might take. But that is not how I view the prophecies.

I know those who hold one of the millennial views can quote:

...the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29).

But so can I. Indeed, and so do I! With the apostolic statement I wholeheartedly concur, but if it is taken to mean that God's purposes and promises concerning an everlasting covenant with Israel are certain to be fulfilled in an earthly, 1000 year kingdom, or if Romans 9 – 11 is taken to mean a world-wide revival through the conversion of the majority – if not all – the

⁴ Based on a literal interpretation of 'Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years' (Rev. 20:1-2).

⁵ But those who write on prophetic matters do not always deal fairly with opponents whose views they want to destroy, or with 'big-names' they want to corral for their view. For exposure of the way Iain Murray and Peter Masters tried to garner C.H.Spurgeon as a postmillennialist or an amillennialist respectively, see Swanson who drew heavily on C.W.H.Griffiths' 'Spurgeon's Eschatology'. The fact is, although Spurgeon was (in the main, fundamentally, broadly speaking) a fairly-standard premillennialist (my vagueness is deliberate), to consult him on prophecy is about as sensible as calling in a chameleon to advise on a colour scheme for a new kitchen.

Triumph

Jews, then I disagree.⁶ Not only do I find insuperable problems with both views, I also see a far greater fulfilment than either. And that fulfilment will soundly demonstrate that God's promises are beyond recall.

Take what I might call the literal interpretation leading to a 1000-year Jewish kingdom. I will be brief. This view does not seem to me to take sufficient account of the undoubted truth that God always intended the old covenant with Israel (including, of course, the shadows of the Mosaic covenant – temple, priesthood, sacrifices, sabbath, land, and so on) to be temporary (Gal. 3:23-26),⁷ that the old covenant was fulfilled and rendered obsolete in the person and work of Christ (Heb 8:13):

Let no one pass judgment on you [that is, impose on you – see Colossians 2:8] in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ (Col. 2:16-17)...

...and that 'all the promises of God find their "Yes" in him' (2 Cor. 1:20). As Paul put it:

Christ became a servant to the circumcised [that is, to the Jews] to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy (Rom. 15:8-9).

In Romans 15, Paul was speaking of the gospel. In other words, it seems to me, the relevant old-covenant promises (prophecies) are spiritually fulfilled in Christ in the new covenant, and especially, I would add, in his return in glory to set up his *everlasting* kingdom. As we have seen:

The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever (Dan. 2:44).

⁶ As for the latter, see my *Romans 11*.

⁷ See my *Three*.

Triumph

And, as I will argue,⁸ this will occur at Christ's return in the bringing in of the everlasting kingdom.

I mention the old-covenant shadows because the prophecies in question do not hold back on predicting a glorious future-prosperity involving these shadows. Consider this:

Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of booths. And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them. And if the family of Egypt does not go up and present themselves, then on them there shall be no rain; there shall be the plague with which the LORD afflicts the nations that do not go up to keep the feast of booths. This shall be the punishment to Egypt and the punishment to all the nations that do not go up to keep the feast of booths.

And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses: 'Holy to the LORD'. And the pots in the house of the LORD shall be as the bowls before the altar. And every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holy to the LORD of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them and boil the meat of the sacrifice in them. And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day (Zech. 14:16-21).

[The messenger of the covenant] will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years (Mal. 3:3-4).

And that is the merest sample.

We have to decide: were the prophets predicting that the temple, the sacrifices, the priesthood, the feasts, and all the rest, would be reinstated with renewed vigour? Or should we view their prophecies – though, naturally, issued in old-covenant

⁸ See Appendix 1.

Triumph

language – as speaking of the new covenant? Peter, it seems to me, has given us the answer:

Concerning this salvation [that is, the salvation accomplished through Christ in the new covenant; see the context – DG], the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look (1 Pet. 1:10-12).

Paul set out the overarching principle that governs everything in this matter:

It is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual (1 Cor. 15:46).

So it is here: there was a natural Israel with its covenant – the old covenant – and its earthly kingdom, and that came first, before the second, new, covenant for the spiritual Israel. But just as the second covenant, the superior covenant, the better covenant, the more excellent covenant, the new covenant,⁹ superseded the old covenant, so Christ superseded Moses and David, and the spiritual Israel superseded the old, natural Israel. Through Christ, in Christ, the new-covenant priesthood, sacrifice, sabbath, temple, altar, whatever, superseded the old-covenant shadows. And in it all, God was fulfilling, is fulfilling and will fulfil his eternal purpose. The Jewish kingdom has vanished. The shadows have gone, never to be reinstated. What an insult it would be to Christ to reinstate any of them! What remains, what God has established, is the *ekklēsia* leading to the coming eternal kingdom of all the elect at the time of Christ's return:

Since all these [created] things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and

⁹ All these are scriptural terms (Heb. 7:19,22; 8:6; 9:15,23, and so on).

Triumph

godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:11-13).

The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:19-23)

Take the major prophecy of the new covenant itself (a passage just preceding, and in the context of, Jeremiah 31:35-36; see also Jer. 33:20-22):

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another: "Know the LORD", because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sin no more' (Jer. 31:31-34).

And consider these prophecies:

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths'. For out of Zion shall go forth

Triumph

the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3).

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:6-9).

'For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

They shall not labour in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain', says the LORD (Isa. 65:17-25).

They [that is, Israel and Judah] shall serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them (Jer. 30:9).

In those days and in that time, declares the LORD, the people of Israel and the people of Judah shall come together, weeping as they come, and they shall seek the LORD their God. They shall ask the way to Zion, with faces turned toward it, saying:

Triumph

‘Come, let us join ourselves to the LORD in an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten’ (Jer. 50:4-5).

I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken. I will make with them a covenant of peace... (Ezek. 34:23-25).

Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days (Hos. 3:5).

No doubt these prophecies have some bearing on the return of Judah from exile in Babylon. But in that return, no king was reinstated – certainly not David. I see here a prediction of Christ and his kingdom. Do not miss the references to ‘the latter days’. We are talking about our present age – from Pentecost until and culminating in Christ’s return.¹⁰ And the culmination will be the new heavens and the new earth where only righteousness dwells. Triumph! God’s triumph!

And, leaving aside all clues, we have the New Testament’s use of the prophecies. Consider the writer of Hebrews:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another: “Know the LORD”, because they will all know me,

¹⁰ With the ubiquitous talk of ‘heaven when you die’ in countless funeral sermons, hymns and sympathy cards, many believers are losing sight of the biblical hope of Christ’s return, the resurrection, and eternal life in the new heavens and new *earth*. See my *Undervalued*. See my ‘Waiting For Jesus’ on my sermonaudio.com page, and on YouTube.

Triumph

from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sin no more' (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:7-13; 10:1-18).

Whatever is made of that quotation of the prophet, full cognisance must be taken of the writer's categorical assertion:

In speaking of a new covenant, he [that is, God through the prophet] makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:13).

And 'what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away' does not mean that the old covenant and Israel will be reinstated and active for a 1000 years after Christ's return!

Take the meeting in Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15:

And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking, James replied: 'Brothers, listen to me. Simeon [Peter] has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written...'.¹

James then quoted Amos:

'In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name', declares the LORD who does this (Amos. 9:11-12)...

...saying that God's saving of Gentiles was a fulfilment of this prophecy: 'Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God' (Acts 15:12-19).

Then we have Paul's use of the prophecies:

What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory – even us whom he has called, not from

Triumph

the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? As indeed he says in Hosea: ‘Those who were not my people I will call “my people”, and her who was not beloved I will call “beloved”. And in the very place where it was said to them: “You are not my people”, there they will be called “sons of the living God”’ (Rom. 9:22-26).

Paul was explicit: it is the calling of Jews and Gentiles to Christ under the gospel in the day of the new covenant that is the fulfilment of the prophecy in Hosea. Despite Israel’s gross and repeated adultery, God would fulfil his eternal purpose in forming and preserving Israel; namely, the sending of his Son, the Messiah, to redeem the elect, whether Jew or Gentile, and the gathering of them through the gospel in the new covenant. Triumph! Paul applied Hosea 1:10 and 2:23 to the calling of the Gentiles (Rom. 9:24-26), yet Hosea 1:8-11 itself speaks only of the children of Israel. The context of Hosea 1 is the defection and consequent judgment of the people of Israel, and God’s surprising mercy to them despite their departure from him, despite their betrayal of their covenant. The same applies to Hosea 2:23. The word ‘Gentiles’ does not appear in Hosea, except in Hosea 8:8, and this has no connection whatsoever with their salvation. There is no explicit reference in Hosea to the calling of the Gentiles. *But Paul set out the radically startling, new-covenant meaning of the words recorded by the prophet.*

And that is the very point I wish to make. And that is why I hope I may be forgiven for what some might consider an unnecessary and painful digression into the interpretation of prophecy. Accepting that there is a spectrum of views – premillennialism, postmillennialism, amillennialism, and seemingly endless nuances in each – I hope we can agree on the overriding point I have been trying to make: the prophecies, promises, hopes – God’s eternal plan – for Israel in the old covenant have all been – or all will be – fulfilled in Christ. That is, despite Israel’s miserable performance under the old covenant, nothing – nothing – could thwart the working out of God’s purpose. And the same goes for the new covenant. That – and that alone – has been my purpose in my ‘digression’.

Triumph

Surely, whether or not we think there will be a world-wide conversion of Jews and Gentiles, or a 1000 year Jewish kingdom,¹¹ it is the second coming of Christ,¹² and the establishment of the eternal kingdom that is God's ultimate purpose. As Paul put it:

But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when [Christ] delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death... When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:20-28).

Despite Israel's apostasy and failure, in due time – at God's appointed time – Christ did appear. He did come. And he was born an Israelite (Gal. 4:4). He did finish the work laid upon him by the Father (John 19:30). How many times Matthew recorded that such and such happened – often with Christ being totally passive – ‘that it might be fulfilled which was spoken’ by the prophet, or spoken by God through the prophet (Matt. 1:22; 2:15,23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:35)!

And all this happened – I say it again – despite Israel's appalling record of unfaithfulness. God still accomplished his purpose in forming them into a nation; namely, the sending of his Son – the Messiah – to save sinners; that is, to save his elect (Matt. 1:21; 1 Tim. 1:15; Tit. 2:11; 3:4; Heb. 9:26). Nothing – not even Israel's apostasy – could thwart God. This is not to

¹¹ I see nothing in the post-Pentecost Scriptures to tell me this is what believers should be expecting. Rather: ‘[Believers] eagerly wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Cor. 1:7). ‘Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself’ (Phil. 3:20-21).

¹² Some believers think there is more than one second coming. In their case, I am referring to the final second coming.

Triumph

excuse the apostasy, but to show the sovereignty of God in action. He had determined the time, the place and the purpose of his Son's appearance (Gal. 4:4). And Christ fully accomplished all his Father's will (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38-40; 12:28; Heb. 10:5-10); as he said:

I always do the things that are pleasing to [the Father]... I keep his word... I have kept my Father's commandments (John 8:29,55; 15:10).

And all – all – was accomplished according to the Father's strict timetable.

Paul spelled it out:

At the right time Christ died for the ungodly (Rom. 5:6).

When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons (Gal. 4:4-5).

How did Christ open his ministry? With this amazing announcement:

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand (Mark 1:15).

And Paul went for the big picture, speaking of:

...the mystery of his [that is, God's] will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan *for the fullness of time*, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth (Eph. 1:9-10).

The apostle laid out the fundamental principle: 'It is not as though the word of God has failed', he declared.¹³ And when he said that he was not whistling in the dark. Oh no! He had reasons – and what solid reasons they were – for his dogmatic and confident assertion. He knew how strange it would sound,

¹³ And, as he explained, this is why Paul wrote Rom. 9 – 11. He nowhere stated that in these chapters he was setting out God's prophetic purpose of a world-wide conversion of Jews. See my *Romans 11*.

Triumph

contrary to all appearance, that even with his confident assertion about God's will, he was still pressed down by the weight of the tremendous burden of wanting to see the conversion of as many of his fellow-Jews as possible; consequently, he declared: 'I am speaking the truth in Christ – I am not lying':

I am speaking the truth in Christ – I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit – that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen (Rom. 9:1-5).

Having made clear his longing for the conversion of his fellow-Jews (see also Romans 10:1 and remembering their privileged position under the old covenant), the apostle plunged into his argument – seeking, by his burning logic, and the warmth of his passion, to persuade as many fellow-Jews as possible to call upon Christ (Rom. 9:1 – 11:36).

What was his argument? Just this:

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named'. This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring (Rom. 9:6-8).

And so on, and on. Piling on scriptural argument after scriptural argument, the apostle built his cast-iron case. God's eternal purpose is never thwarted. It was not thwarted – even by Israel's adultery – in the old covenant. And despite the history of the past 2000 years, God is still fulfilling his purpose in the new covenant. He is saving his elect – from among the Jews as well as Gentiles:

Triumph

God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory – even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles... As indeed he says in Hosea: ‘Those who were not my people I will call “my people”, and her who was not beloved I will call “beloved”. And in the very place where it was said to them: “You are not my people”, there they will be called “sons of the living God”’ (Rom. 9:22-26).

And that is not the end of it:

And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: ‘Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, for the LORD will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay’. And as Isaiah predicted: ‘If the LORD of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah’ (Rom. 9:27-29).

What was the driving force behind – within – Paul? It was the logic of God’s word – God’s unchanging and unchangeable purpose. Listen to the apostle’s eagerness pulsating in his words; feel the power, the warmth, the fire, the emotion of his all-consuming passion for the conversion of Jews. Even after 2000 years, it still flies hot off the page:

I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow-Jews jealous, and thus save some of them (Rom. 11:13-14).

And this all fitted in with what he intended to say about the amazing, staggering, will of God – how it is certain of fulfilment despite the adulterous behaviour of his professed people during both covenants:

Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come

Triumph

in. And in this way all Israel [that is, all the elect in Israel – DG]¹⁴ will be saved (Rom. 11:25-26).

And, this of course, is only through Christ, his first appearance, death and resurrection:

As it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob’; and ‘this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins’ (Rom. 11:26-27).

Paul came to the climax:

As regards the gospel, they [the Jews] are enemies for your [the Gentiles’] sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all (Rom. 11:28-32).

He concluded his argument in the only way possible:

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ‘For who has known the mind of the LORD, or who has been his counsellor?’ ‘Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?’ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen (Rom. 11:33-36).¹⁵

Not even the devil – the arch enemy of all that is good, God’s relentless foe – encouraging and using sin, even sin in God’s covenant-people (Israel, and now believers), can prevent God accomplishing his purpose and sustaining his glory – without him being, in the slightest, tainted with the sin, or compromising human responsibility. And this is true, not just for Israel, not just for the *ekklēsia*, but for all the history of all mankind. And that includes Adam and his fall. What amazing

¹⁴ See my *Romans 11*.

¹⁵ For more on all this, see my *Romans 11*.

Triumph

consequences have come through Christ to the world from that dreadful act!¹⁶

As Isaac Watts put it:

*In [Christ] the tribes of Adam boast
More blessings than their father lost.*

Such is the glorious will of God! Without excusing Adam – or any of his descendants – God makes even sin to fulfil his eternal purpose. That’s Triumph!

Consider Isaiah 53. After delineating the sufferings of the Messiah, the prophet came to this:

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors (Isa. 53:10-12).

Out of disaster, God brought good – and what good! Triumph!

Thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine... Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made’ (Isa. 43:1-7).

O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant; I formed you; you are my servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me... For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel. Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you (Isa. 44:21-24).

My salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory (Isa. 46: 13).

¹⁶ See Appendix 6.

Triumph

So much for the old covenant; now for the new:

We [believers] are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10).

Why?

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen (Eph. 3:20-21).

Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance' (Isa. 45:22-23).

As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God (Rom. 14:11).

Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:5-11).

And this, I stress, is the very heart of the new covenant. Despite the calamitous rise of Christendom and the immense damage it has caused – and continues to cause – during 'these latter days', God is still gathering his elect. Nothing – nothing – can thwart God's purpose in Christ. As he himself declared:

I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice (John 10:16; see also John 11:52).

The elect (both Jew and Gentile; here, particularly the latter) must be saved; they will be saved; that is, they will hear, and

Triumph

hear effectively, Christ's call in the gospel, they will listen to it, they will be persuaded, they will turn from their sin, they will come to Christ, they will be brought to trust him, listen to all he has to say, and act upon it in obedience.

Of course, even the elect – who, by nature, as all men, are dead in sin (Eph. 2:13) – cannot believe unless, by God the Father's grace and power, the Spirit regenerates them (John 1:11-13; 3:3-8):

You refuse to come to me that you may have life (John 5:40).

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets: 'And they will all be taught by God'. Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me (John 6:44-45).

And Christ was explicit in his assurance:

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out (John 6:37).

How well all this is illustrated by God's clarion demand that Pharaoh had to release the Israelites:

Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'Let my people go' (Ex. 5:1)...

...and by Christ's authoritative command at the grave of Lazarus:

[Jesus] cried out with a loud voice: 'Lazarus, come out'. The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them: 'Unbind him, and let him go' (John 11:43-44).

As Paul later explained:

We know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy

Triumph

Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:4-10).

And, as he said to the Ephesian believers:

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the uncircumcision' by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands – remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both [elect Jews and elect Gentiles] one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow-citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (Eph. 2:11-22).

When Paul addressed the Galatians about their conversion, he put it this way:

Now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God (Gal. 4:9).

John brought out the full meaning:

Triumph

...this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins... We love [in general; him – God – in particular] because he first loved us (1 John 4:10,19).

In short, as Christ said:

I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18).

As I said in the previous chapter, I see in Matthew 16:18 Christ's categorical assurance that the devil and all the hosts of hell will not be able to withstand God's saving call in the gospel. The elect will hear, they will heed the word, and the elect will be saved.

That's Triumph!

Not only that. God is still gathering his elect by the power of Christ through the Spirit in the gospel, yes, but that is not the whole story: this age will culminate in Christ's return in glory. Paul can assert that we – he and all believers:

...[are] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ (Tit. 2:13).

For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory'. 'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:52-58).

Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the

Triumph

Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:14-18).

...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfil every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:7-12).

And then:

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out: 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure' – for the fine line is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me: 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb'. And he said to me: 'These are the true words of God'...

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike

Triumph

down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead: 'Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great'. And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur. And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh (Rev. 19:6-21).

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

And if that is not Triumph, what is?

In other words, despite all Israel's sin and failure, God still worked out his ultimate purpose in the old covenant, and – despite the *ekklēsia* becoming so enmeshed in Christendom – he will do the same in the new: in both covenants, God shows his triumphant power in and through Christ by his Spirit. This, I repeat, does not excuse Israel's sin in the days of the old covenant; nor does it excuse the *ekklēsia*'s apostasy in the

Triumph

new.¹⁷ But it does mean, as Paul put it: ‘It is not as though the word of God has failed’. And that was a deliberate *litotes* – understatement – if ever there was one.

And that is why my book, though it describes dreadful apostasy, still sounds the triumphant note. Indeed, it virtually ends on that note of Triumph.¹⁸

Here it is:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works (Tit. 2:11-14).

And:

Our [speaking of believers] citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await [that is, eagerly await, look for] a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself (Phil. 3:20-21).

John’s closing words to the last book of the Bible could not be more apposite.

The assurance:

Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end... Surely I am coming soon (Rev. 22:12-13,20).

The response:

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen (Rev. 22:20-21).¹⁹

¹⁷ See Rev. 2 & 3.

¹⁸ I say ‘virtually’ because, although ‘Triumph’ is the zenith, I want to bring my book to a conclusion by the chapter ‘Responsibilities’.

Triumph

* * *

One thing remains to be considered: in light of scriptural teaching on ‘these last days’ – the present calamity of the apostasy of the *ekklēsia*, and God’s final triumph – what should we do?

¹⁹ See my ‘Waiting For Jesus’ on my sermonaudio.com page, and on YouTube.