

Fullness of the Gentiles

by Sir Robert Anderson

The sermon explores the concept of the fullness of the Gentiles and its relation to Israel's blindness, the second advent, and the reign of grace.

Scripture: Psalm 90:4, Daniel 9:24, Luke 21:22, Acts 1:11, Romans 11:25, Galatians 3:28, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 2 Peter 3:13

Topics: "Israel And Gentiles", "Second Advent"

Description

Sir Robert Anderson preaches about the main stream of prophecy running through Hebrew history, emphasizing the significance of the Abrahamic race in the Old Testament and the restoration of God's normal order of dealings with men. He discusses the blindness of Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, highlighting the promises and prophecies in favor of the nation that are yet to be realized. The sermon delves into the complexities of the fulfillment of promises to Judah in light of the present dispensation and the distinctiveness of blessings for Jews and Gentiles. Sir Robert Anderson also explores the multiple manifestations of Christ's second advent and the importance of understanding unfulfilled prophecy for believers.

Transcript

THE main stream of prophecy runs in the channel of Hebrew history. This indeed is true of all revelation. Eleven chapters of the Bible suffice to cover the two thousand years before the call of Abraham, and the rest of the old Testament relates to the Abrahamic race. If for a while the light of revelation rested on Babylon or Susa, it was because Jerusalem was desolate, and Judah was in exile. For a time the Gentile has now gained the foremost place in blessing upon earth; but this is entirely anomalous, and the normal order of God's dealings with men is again to be restored. "Blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written."^[1]

1. Romans 11:25, 26. The coming in of the fullness of the Gentiles must not be confounded with the fulfillment of the times of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24). The one refers to spiritual blessing, the other to earthly power. Jerusalem is not to be the capital of a free nation, independent of Gentile power, until the true Son of David comes to claim the scepter.

The Scriptures teem with promises and prophecies in favor of that nation, not a tithe of which have yet been realized. And while the impassioned poetry in which so many of the old prophecies are couched is made a pretext for treating them as hyperbolic descriptions of the blessings of the Gospel, no such plea

can be urged respecting the Epistle to the Romans. Writing to Gentiles, the Apostle of the Gentiles there reasons the matter out in presence of the facts of the Gentile dispensation. The natural branches of the race of Israel have been broken off from the olive tree of earthly privilege and blessing, and, "contrary to nature," the wild olive branches of Gentile blood have been substituted for them. But in spite of the warning of the Apostle, we Gentiles have become "wise in our own conceits," forgetting that the olive tree whose "root and fatness" we partake of, is essentially Hebrew, for "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

The minds of most men are in bondage to the commonplace facts of their experience. The prophecies of a restored Israel seem to many as incredible as predictions of the present triumphs of electricity and steam would have appeared to our ancestors a century ago. While affecting independence in judging thus, the mind is only giving proof of its own impotence or ignorance. Moreover, the position which the Jews have held for eighteen centuries is a phenomenon which itself disposes of every seeming presumption against the fulfillment of these prophecies.

It is not a question of how a false religion like that of Mahomet can maintain an unbroken front in presence of a true faith; the problem is very different. Not only in a former age, but in the early days of the present dispensation, the Jews enjoyed a preference in blessing, which practically amounted almost to a monopoly of Divine favor. In its infancy the Christian Church was essentially Jewish. The Jews within its pale were reckoned by thousands, the Gentiles by tens. And yet that same people afterwards became, and for eighteen centuries have continued to be, more dead to the influence of the Gospel than any other class of people upon earth. How can "this mystery," as the Apostle terms it, be accounted for, save as Scripture explains it, namely, that the era of special grace to Israel closed with the period historically within the Acts of the Apostles, and that since that crisis of their history "blindness in part is happened" to them?

But this very word, the truth of which is so clearly proved by public facts, goes on to declare that this judicial hardening is to continue only "until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in"; and the inspired Apostle adds, "And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant unto them." [2]

2. Romans 11:25, 26. Not every Israelite, but Israel as a nation (Alford, Gr. Test., in loco).

But, it may with reason be demanded, does not this imply merely that Israel shall be brought within the blessings of the Gospel, not that the Jews shall be blessed on a principle which is entirely inconsistent with the Gospel? Christianity, as a system, assumes the fact that in a former age the Jews enjoyed a peculiar place in blessing:

"Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy." (Romans 15:8, 9)

But the Jews have lost their vantage-ground through sin, and they now stand upon the common level of ruined humanity. The Cross has broken down "the middle wall" which separated them from Gentiles. It has leveled all distinctions. As to guilt "there is no difference, for all have sinned"; as to mercy "there is no difference, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call on Him." How then, if there be no difference, can God give blessing on a principle which implies that there is a difference? In a word, the fulfillment of the promises to Judah is absolutely inconsistent with the distinctive truths of the present dispensation.

This question is one of immense importance, and claims the most earnest consideration. Nor is it enough to urge that the eleventh chapter of Romans itself supposes that in this age the Gentile has an advantage, though not a priority, and, therefore, Israel may enjoy the like privilege hereafter. It is part of the same revelation, that although grace stoops to the Gentile just where he is, it does not confirm him in his position as a Gentile, but lifts him out of it and denationalizes him; for in the Church of this dispensation "there is neither Jew nor Gentile." [3] Judah's promises, on the contrary, imply that blessing will reach the Jew as a Jew, not only recognizing his national position, but confirming him therein.

3. Galatians 3:28. Contrast these with the Lord's words in John 4:22, "Salvation is of the Jews."

The conclusion, therefore, is inevitable, that before God can act thus, the special proclamation of grace in the present dispensation must have ceased, and a new principle of dealing with mankind must have been inaugurated.

But here the difficulties only seem to multiply and grow. For, it may be asked, does not the dispensation run its course until the return of Christ to earth? How then can Jews be found at His coming in a place of blessing nationally, akin to that which they held in a bygone age? All will admit that Scripture seems to teach that such will be the case. [4] The question still remains whether this be really intended. Does Scripture speak of any crisis in relation to the earth, to intervene before "the day when the Son of man shall be revealed"?

4. In proof of this, appeal may be made to these very prophecies of Daniel; and later prophecies testify to it still more plainly, notably the book of Zechariah.

No one who diligently seeks the answer to this inquiry can fail to be impressed by the fact that at first sight some confusion seems to mark the statements of Scripture with respect to it. Certain passages testify that Christ will return to earth, and stand once more on that same Olivet on which His feet last rested ere He ascended to His Father; (Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:11, 12) and others tell us as plainly that He will come, not to earth, but to the air above us, and call His people up to meet Him and be with Him. (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17) These Scriptures again most clearly prove that it is His believing people who shall be "caught up," (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17; 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52) leaving the world to run its course to its destined doom; while other Scriptures as unequivocally teach that it is not His people but the wicked who are to be weeded out, leaving the righteous "to shine forth in the kingdom of their Father." (Matthew 13:40-43) And the confusion apparently increases when we notice that Holy Writ seems sometimes to represent the righteous who are to be thus blessed as Jews, sometimes as Christians of a dispensation in which the Jew is cast off by God.

These difficulties admit of only one solution, a solution as satisfactory as it is simple; namely, that what we term the second advent of Christ is not a single event, but includes several distinct manifestations. At the first of these He will call up to Himself the righteous dead, together with His own people then living upon earth. With this event this special "day of grace" will cease, and God will again revert to "the covenants" and "the promises," and that people to whom the covenants and promises belong (Romans 9:4) will once more become the center of Divine action toward mankind.

Everything that God has promised is within the range of the believer's hope; [5] but this is its near horizon. All things wait on its accomplishment. Before the return of Christ to earth, many a page of prophecy has yet to be fulfilled, but not a line of Scripture bars the realization of this the Church's special hope of His coming to take His people to Himself. Here, then, is the great crisis which will put a term to the reign of

grace, and usher in the destined woes of earth's fiercest trial - "the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled." (Luke 21:22)

5. "We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth" (2 Peter 3:13). Long ages of time and events innumerable must intervene before the realization of this hope, and yet the believer is looking for it.

To object that a truth of this magnitude would have been stated with more dogmatic clearness is to forget the distinction between doctrinal teaching and prophetic utterance. The truth of the second advent belongs to prophecy, and the statements of Scripture respecting it are marked by precisely the same characteristics as marked the Old Testament prophecies of Messiah.[6]

6. For an admirable treatise on these characteristics of prophecy, see Hengstenberg's Christology, Kregel Publications.

"The sufferings of Christ and the glories which should follow" were foretold in such a way that a superficial reader of the old Scriptures would have failed to discover that there were to be two advents of Messiah. And even the careful student, if unversed in the general scheme of prophecy, might have supposed that the two advents, though morally distinct, should be intimately connected in time. So is it with the future. Some regard the second advent as a single event; by others its true character is recognized, but they fail to mark the interval which must separate its first from its final stage. An intelligent apprehension of the truth respecting it is essential to the right understanding of unfulfilled prophecy.

But having thus clearly fixed these principal landmarks to guide us in the study, we cannot too strongly deprecate the attempt to fill up the interval with greater precision than Scripture warrants. There are definite events to be fulfilled, but no one may dogmatize respecting the time or manner of their fulfillment. No Christian who estimates aright the appalling weight of suffering and sin which each day that passes adds to the awful sum of this world's sorrow and guilt, can fail to long that the end may indeed be near; but let him not forget the great principle that "the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation," (2 Peter 3:15) nor yet the language of the Psalm, "A thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night." (Psalm 90:4) There is much in Scripture which seems to justify the hope that the consummation will not be long delayed; but, on the other hand, there is not a little to suggest the thought that before these final scenes shall be enacted, civilization will have returned to its old home in the east, and, perchance, a restored Babylon shall have become the center of human progress and of apostate religion.[7]

7. Isaiah 13 appears to connect the final fall of Babylon with the great day that is coming (comp. Vers. 1, 9, 10, 19.); and in Jeremiah 1 the same event is connected with the future restoration and union of the two houses of Israel (ver. 20). I make the suggestion, however, merely as a caveat against the idea that we have certainly reached the last days of the dispensation. If the history of Christendom should run on for another thousand years, the delay would not discredit the truth of a single statement in Holy Writ.

To maintain that long ages have yet to run their course would be as unwarrantable as are the predictions so confidently made that all things shall be fulfilled within the current century. It is only in so far as prophecy is within the seventy weeks of Daniel that it comes within the range of chronology at all, and Daniel's vision primarily relates to Judah and Jerusalem.[8]

8. No one of Daniel's visions, indeed, has a wider scope. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel treat of Israel (or the ten tribes); but Daniel deals only with Judah.

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