

The Puritan Hope

In 1974, in a small junk shop in a small town in the south of England, amongst a large pile of pulp novels, I came across of a book that would change my life. The book was Iain Murray's *The Puritan Hope*, subtitled 'A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy'. The subject of Murray's book was of interest to me but, because I strongly suspected that the Puritan view of prophecy was one I was unlikely to share, the book immediately became an addition to my 'To-Read-One-Day List'.

Back then, as a 23 year-old Pentecostal pastor, I knew everything there was to know about the End Times. I had J Dwight Pentecost's mammoth *Things to Come* and I'd read *The Late Great Planet Earth* at least twice! After the 1973 Yom Kippur War I had taught an entire series on 'Israel and the Nations in Prophecy' at my church mid-week Bible study. What could men who lived almost half a millennium before the re-establishment of the state of Israel contribute to my understanding of *The Millennium* and the Lord's coming? After all, was I not part of the actual generation that saw the fig tree 'putteth forth its leaves' in 1948? Was I not part of the generation that was seeing the book of Revelation unfold before its very eyes? So it took a decade for me to get round to reading Murray's book.

Until the mid-1980s, my view of the future was somewhat pessimistic. The world was going to get darker and darker but, just as the last light was about to go out on human history, the Lord would return and put the world to rights. Discovering the Puritan vision of the future transformed me into an optimist. It made me believe that there were better days ahead. The Puritans dramatically increased my confidence in the gospel as the *power* of God to save all who believe. Not least, it inspired in me a confidence that Jewish in which I'd been involved for a little more than a year was the most crucial and strategic of all mission work.

For that reason, I'm grateful to have been invited to present a paper on 'the Puritan Hope' here in Jerusalem at the International Conference of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism.

Before looking at the 'Puritan Hope' as such, it will be helpful to try to understand the Puritan mind. I once saw a cartoon of a severe figure seated on a low three-legged stool situated in the centre of a room devoid of furniture, carpets or heating, reading an enormous volume of sermons on the book of Job. The caption read: 'Chris the Calvinist only lived for pleasure.'

The drawing perfectly summed up the common view of the Puritans as legalistic and joyless with an aversion to pleasure of any and every kind. However, although the Puritans of the seventeenth century were serious people they were not joyless. They were in the main Calvinist and men of immense learning and godliness. The Puritans

were a race of spiritual giants who through prayer, preaching and practical godliness transformed the spiritual landscape of England, Scotland and America.

Calvin and the Jews

The Puritan age in England lasted a about a hundred year from around 1560 to 1660, the year in which most Puritans were ejected from the Church of England after the Act of Uniformity was passed by the English parliament. During their century of influence the Puritans brought to life a church that, in spite of the Reformation, had been largely in a state of slumber not only with regard to the practicality of Christian doctrine in general but also of unfulfilled prophecy in particular. Even though history had cast the Jewish people aside and judged them to be abandoned by God, the Puritans rediscovered a biblical vision of the nation of Israel and of a day when the people would turn to and follow their Messiah.

Unlike some of his followers today, the Genevan Reformer John Calvin did not believe the Jewish nation had been fully or finally rejected by God. In his comments on Isaiah 59:20 ('A Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression') Calvin has this to say: 'Paul quotes this passage, (Romans 11:26) in order to show that there is still some remaining hope among the Jews; although from their unconquerable obstinacy it might be inferred that they were altogether cast off and doomed to eternal death. But because God is continually mindful of his covenant, and "his gifts and calling are without repentance," (Romans 11:29) Paul justly concludes that it is impossible that there shall not at length be some remnant that come to Christ, and obtain that salvation which he has procured. Thus the Jews must at length be collected along with the Gentiles, that out of both "there may be one fold" under Christ. (John 10:16) It is of the deliverance from Babylon, however, that the Prophet treats. This is undoubtedly true; but we have said that he likewise includes the kingdom of Christ, and spiritual redemption, to which this prediction relates. Hence we have said that Paul infers that he could not be the redeemer of the world, without belonging to some Jews, whose fathers he had chosen, and to whom this promise was directly addressed.'

In his comments on Romans 11:26, although Calvin understands 'all Israel' to be the Church consisting of Jews and Gentiles, he nevertheless recognises Israel's special place in the affections of God: 'When the Gentiles shall come in, the Jews also shall return from their defection to the obedience of faith; and thus shall be completed the salvation of the whole Israel of God, which must be gathered from both; and yet in such a way that the Jews shall obtain the first place, being as it were the first-born in God's family... God distinctly claims for himself a certain seed, so that his redemption may be effectual in his elect and peculiar nation.'

The English Puritans, however, went far beyond Calvin in their understanding of the future of the Jewish people. Among them there was a widespread conviction that there would not simply be some Jews saved throughout history; the nation as a whole would be saved. 'From the first quarter of the seventeenth century,' says Ian Murray, 'belief in a future conversion of the Jews became commonplace among the English Puritans.'

Paul's teaching in Romans 11:12 ('Now if [Israel's] trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!') became foundational to the Puritan hope of a future mass ingathering of the Jewish people into Messiah's kingdom, followed by an even greater gathering from the nations. Mission both to Jews and to the Gentiles, therefore, was very much encouraged.

Though neither Luther nor Calvin saw a future for the general conversion of the Jews promised in Scripture, some of their contemporaries, notably Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr, did. The probability is strong, says Murray, that 'Martyr's careful exposition of the eleventh chapter of Romans in his *Commentary upon Romans* prepared the way for a general adoption among the English of a belief in the future conversion of the Jews.'

The Hope in England

Peter Martyr (1499 -1562) – born Pietro Martire Vermigli in Italy – interpreted the phrase 'fullness of the Gentiles' in Romans 11:25 to mean that Messiah's kingdom among the Gentiles would have reached its fullest development, indeed its consummation, by the time Israel is called. The national salvation of Israel, Martyr believed, will stir and 'confirm' the churches, a view similar to that espoused four centuries later by Dr D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his monumental series of studies in Romans. 'When the Gentiles in the church see the Jews coming in also, they shall be lifted up to the heavens of delight and glory and wonder and amazement. If, even as things are now, with just some of them, an occasional one here and there, being saved – if that has led to so much blessing for us, when they come in as a nation and as a body, it will be so wonderful that we will scarcely be able to contain it, we will be lost in wonder, love and praise. The church will be glorying, she will be triumphant, she will be filled with this 'joy unspeakable and full of glory.'

Martyr's student at Cambridge, Hugh Broughton (1549-1612), was so influenced by his tutor's teaching that he became the first Englishman to propose going as a missionary to the Jews in the Middle East and the first to propose translating the New Testament into Hebrew for the sake of the Jewish people. Broughton's learning became so well known that in 1599 the Chief Rabbi of Constantinople invited him to become a public teacher in the city!

The Geneva Bible, with its extensive marginal notes, was the Puritan 'Scofield Bible' of the 16th and 17th centuries. It was produced in 1560 in Geneva by English and Scottish Puritan refugees who had fled there to escape persecution, and the marginal notes greatly influenced the thinking of English and Scots Christians, not least by its view of the Jewish nation. The Geneva Bible's note on Romans 11:25, for example, is extremely positive: 'The blindness of the Jews is neither so universal that the Lord has no elect in that nation, neither will it be continual: for there will be a time in which they also (as the prophets have foretold) will effectually embrace that which they now so stubbornly for the most part reject and refuse.'

The hope of a national and spiritual restoration of the Jewish nation became enshrined in *The Westminster Larger Catechism*. Question 191 of the Catechism, which was compiled in 1648, asks what is meant by the second petition of the Lord's Prayer: 'Thy kingdom come.' The answer given is: 'In the second petition... acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan, we pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, *the Jews called*, the fullness of the Gentiles brought in...'

The Westminster *Directory of Public Worship*, which served as a guide for how ministers should order church services, provides an insight into the thinking of the ministers and elders who shaped it. They deemed the salvation of the Jewish people to be of such great importance that they encouraged prayer to be made every Sabbath 'for the conversion of the Jews, [and for] the fullness of the Gentiles.' The petition reflected a deep awareness Paul's teaching in Romans 11 of the turning of the Jewish nation to their Messiah and the consequent blessing to the nations that would follow Israel's salvation.

For William Perkins (1558-1602), sometimes called the Father of Puritanism, the salvation of the Jewish nation was the logical consequence of God's promise to Abram in Genesis 12:1-3: 'The Lord saith, All the nations shall be blessed in Abraham: Hence I gather that the nation of the Jews shall be called, and converted to the participation of this blessing: when, and how, God knows: but that it shall be done before the end of the world we know.'

Richard Sibbes (1577-1635), in his famous book *The Bruised Reed*, encouraged Christians to hope for a great future for Israel. 'The Jews are not yet come in under Christ's banner,' says Sibbes, 'but God who has persuaded Japheth to come into the tents of Shem (Gen. 9:27) will persuade Shem to come into the tents of Japheth. The 'fullness of the Gentiles' has not yet come in (Rom. 11:25), but Christ, who has the uttermost parts of the earth given to him for his possession (Psa. 2:8), will gather all the sheep his Father has given him into one fold, that there may be one sheepfold and one shepherd (John 10:16). The faithful Jews rejoiced to think of the calling of the Gentiles and why should we not rejoice to think of the calling of the Jews?'

The famed Bible commentator Matthew Henry (1662-1714), in his comments on Romans 11, says of the casting off of Jewish unbelievers, 'Another thing that qualified this doctrine of the Jews' rejection is that, though for the present they are cast off, yet the rejection is not final; but, when the fullness of time is come, they will be taken in again. They are not cast off for ever, but mercy is remembered in the midst of wrath.'

In his massive seven-volume commentary on Hebrews, the prince of Puritans, John Owen (1616-1683), expressed his belief that there would be not only a spiritual restoration of the Jewish people but also a national restoration to their ancient homeland: 'There are many promises on record in the Scripture concerning their gathering together, their return to God by the Messiah, with the great peace and glory that shall ensue thereupon... *Return they shall to their own land, to enjoy it for a quiet and everlasting possession*, their adversaries being destroyed; filled they shall be also with the light and knowledge of the will and worship of God, so as to be a guide and blessing to the residue of the Gentiles who shall seek after the Lord; and, it may be, be entrusted with great empire and rule in the world.'

The Hope in America

The hope of Israel's redemption treasured by the English Puritans was shared also by some of the greatest theological minds in America. Increase Mather (1639-1723), father of the better-known Cotton Mather (1663-1728) and a major figure in the early history of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, declared, 'I know not any Scripture containing a more pregnant and illustrious testimony and demonstration of the Israelites' future vocation (calling), this being the chief object of Paul, to make this known to the Gentiles in Romans 11.'

In the opinion of Lee Fiedman, Increase Mather's son Cotton Mather 'personally embodied the spirit of the Puritan towards the Jew.' 'The ambition to be the means of converting a Jew to Christianity,' says Fiedman, was 'near an obsession on the part of Cotton Mather.'

'For years Mather had prayed and dreamed of a chance to convert a Jew. His Diary is filled with expressions of this desire on his part so strongly stated that it is almost incomprehensible to-day. Thus, his prayer of July 18, 1690 concretely voiced his desire: "This day, from the dust, where I lay prostrate, before the Lord, I lifted up my cries: For the conversion of the Jewish Nation, and for my own having the happiness, at some time or other, to baptize a Jew, that should by my ministry, bee [*sic*] brought home unto the Lord."

In *A History of the Work of Redemption*, the 17th century New England Puritan Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) expressed his conviction that before the return of Messiah, 'the

Jews in all their dispersions shall cast away their old infidelity, and shall have their hearts wonderfully changed, and abhor themselves for their past unbelief and obstinacy. They shall flow together to the blessed Jesus, penitently, humbly, and joyfully owning him as their glorious King and only Saviour, and shall with all their hearts, as with one heart and voice, declare his praises unto other nations. Nothing is more certainly foretold than this national conversion of the Jews, in Rom. xi.'

Princeton College Principal Charles Hodge (1797 -1878), an heir of the Puritans and possibly America's greatest 19th century theologian, understood the Paul to be saying in Romans 11:24 ('...how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.')

that 'the future restoration of the Jews is, in itself, a more probable event than the introduction of the Gentiles into the church of God.'

In his *Systematic Theology*, Hodge wrote: 'The second great event, which, *according to the common faith of the Church*, is to precede the second advent of Christ, is the national conversion of the Jews... God had made a covenant with Abraham that his posterity should be his people; and "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." Therefore, although broken off from the olive-tree for the present, they were to be grafted in again.'

'As the rejection of the Jews was not total, so neither is it final. First, God did not design to cast away his people entirely, but by their rejection, in the first place, to facilitate the progress of the gospel among the Gentiles, and ultimately to make the conversion of the Gentiles the means of converting the Jews... Because if the rejection of the Jews has been a source of blessing, much more will their restoration be the means of good...The restoration of the Jews to the privileges of God's people is included in the ancient predictions and promises made respecting them...'

The Hope continued

It is common to hear Amillenarians and Postmillenarians denounced as supersessionists and devoid of any love for the Jewish people or hope for the future of Israel. That is probably why I was not in a hurry to read Ian Murray's book. The majority of the Puritans were what we would regard today as Postmillennial. And yet most of them had a greater vision for the salvation of Israel and the nations than some of the most die-hard Premillenarians around today.

Some years ago, I had just concluded a presentation about the gospel ministry of Christian Witness to Israel when a troubled-looking lady approached me. 'I think you're working against the purposes of God,' she announced. If the mission for which I worked succeeded in 'getting all the Jews saved,' she said, they wouldn't go through the Great Tribulation. I could live with that, I told her. Thinking I was a little dense, she quoted a

number of Bible verses relating to the unprecedented horrors the Jewish people were destined to endure at some future Tribulation period. She remained perturbed when I repeated that I had no problem with the Jewish nation escaping a holocaust far greater than the one they endured during the Nazi era. Finally, I pointed out that any interpretation of prophecy which excludes any ethnic group from the commission to proclaim the gospel to every creature had to be wrong. She still didn't get it.

Throughout the centuries until the present there have been heirs of the Puritans who have continued to hold to the hope of Israel's future redemption. In the 19th century, the great Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon preached twice for The British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel amongst the Jews (now Christian Witness to Israel). In one of his earliest recorded sermons, Spurgeon declared, 'I think we do not attach sufficient importance to the restoration of the Jews. We do not think enough of it. But certainly, if there is anything promised in the Bible it is this.'

In another sermon he proclaimed, 'The day shall yet come when the Jews, who were the first apostles to the Gentiles, the first missionaries to us who were afar off, shall be gathered in again... Matchless benefits to the world are bound up with the restoration of Israel; their gathering in shall be as life from the dead.'

The Spurgeon Archive website features an extensive article by Dennis Swain that examines Spurgeon's views on Israel. The article – *Charles H. Spurgeon and the Nation of Israel: A Non-Dispensational Perspective on a Literal National Restoration* – reveals that Spurgeon consistently and clearly taught the following:

- Israel as a nation will come to faith in Christ.
- Israel will have a national or geo-political identity.
- The political system will be a monarchy: 'a king shall reign'.
- Israel will be in the Promised Land.
- The borders will correspond to the promises given to Abraham and David.
- Israel will hold a special place among the nations in the millennial kingdom.
- Israel remains spiritually part of the church.
- There will be a national prosperity that will be the admiration of the world.
- OT prophecies of Israel's future should not be handled in a non-literal fashion

In the preface to his 1968 book *The Restoration of Israel*, Postmillennarian Erroll Hulse wrote: 'The territorial restoration of the ancient land of Israel to the Jewish people... has involved a series of events which even non-religious people describe as miraculous... these events form the prelude to a much greater miracle – the conversion of the Jewish people to New Testament Christianity.'

Vern Poythress, an Amillenarian, believes 'Jesus will return bodily to the world, that all people will be judged, and that the earth itself will be renewed, Jesus will reign over the

nations and usher in an era of great peace and prosperity. Faithful Jews will possess the land of Palestine [*sic!*], as well as the entirety of the renewed earth. ('Currents within Amillennialism'. www.frame-poythress.org).

Not all Amillennarians and Postmillennarians hold such positive future hopes—geographical and/or spiritual – for Israel but these quotations demonstrate that a non-millennarian theology does not necessarily exclude the Jewish nation from future blessing. Iain Murray's *The Puritan Hope* presents abundant evidence that among the seventeenth century Postmillennialist Puritans there was a widespread belief in the return of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland, after which they would turn to their Messiah.

In his systematic theology, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*, Amillennarian Michael Horton draws a connection between prophecy and Jewish mission. 'In my view,' says Horton, 'Amillennialism provides the most satisfying account of the passages adduced by pre- and postmillennialists... I do not believe that the New Testament teaches that the church is a replacement for Israel but rather that Gentiles have been grafted onto the vine of the true Israel, from which the original nucleus of new covenant disciples emerged. Salvation has come to the world through the Jews; Jesus was sent to the Jews; the gospel was first brought to the Jews, and the kingdom grew from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. In the end, it will be brought full circle, from the ends of the earth back to Jerusalem again.'

Though Premillennialism, sees a great future for Israel and the nations in the Millennium, it tends toward pessimism about the future prior to the Millennium. English Bible teacher David Pawson defines 'apocalyptic' writings (of which Daniel and Revelation are the best known examples) as a genre about the world becoming progressively worse and then suddenly getting better, by which Pawson means we can expect no progress in the world until Jesus changes everything for the better by returning to inaugurate the Millennial Kingdom. But if, as Amillennarian Keith Mathison argues, eschatology and the gospel can't be separated, should we not hold to an eschatology of victory rather than one in which the Church has to circle the wagons and hold off the 'Injuns' until the heavenly cavalry arrives?

'Postmillennialism,' says missiologist Thomas Schirrmacher, 'was the mother of Anglo-Saxon missions... As Jesus was not expected to return immediately, missions made considerable long-term investments in health, education systems, including Christian universities, and political involvement: the campaign against slavery, William Carey's fight against the caste system, missionary opposition to the burning of widows, and protection of indigenous people,'

The encouragement of the Hope

What is the future of our planet? Is the Israel 'experiment' doomed to end in a nuclear conflagration initiated by Iran? Will radical Islam conquer the world and the Church be reduced to a spiritual underground movement resisting a kind of fascist religious Skynet and its ISIS terminators? Is evangelicalism destined to drown in a tsunami of aggressive relativistic, politically-correct, postmodern, Christophobic sewage or, at best, be reduced to a minuscule minority group ignored as an irrelevance by the perishing masses? Is the pessimism of much twenty-first century prophetic thinking correct? Will the Church end in disarray, and powerlessness?

The Puritan Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) was confident of a different end-of-history scenario when he wrote, 'There will come a time when the generality, of mankind, both Jew and Gentile, shall come to Jesus Christ. He hath had but little takings of the world yet, but he will have before he hath done.'

Above, I referred to a lady who believed that those who evangelise the Jewish people are opposing the purposes of God. Though none of us (I hope) shares that lady's opinion, how does our understanding of the Last Things influence our mission agenda? Does our understanding of the Kingdom motivate us not only to evangelise but also to *confident* evangelism and mission? Does our understanding of Israel's make us confident of success? Does it get us up out of bed in the morning? Does the hope of success inspire our prayers? If we believe that when telling Jewish people about Jesus we are flogging a proverbial dead horse, we will lack the motivate us to reach Jewish people with the message of Messiah? Are we gripped by the truth of 1 Corinthians 15:25, as were the Puritans: '*He must reign* until he has put all his enemies under his feet'?

Can those of us engaged in ministry to the Jewish people say, as did William Carey (1761-1834) the founder of the Baptist Missionary Society, 'We are neither working at uncertainty nor afraid for the result... *He must reign, till Satan has not an inch of territory*'?

Does our view of the End Times inspire us to believe that Messiah will 'see of the travail of his soul *and be satisfied*' (Isaiah 53:11)?

The conviction of John Owen, who believed the Jewish people would return to their ancient homeland after which they would come to faith in their Messiah has been vindicated by the history of the last 67 years. When the Jewish state in which we are meeting became a reality in May 1948, there were some twelve Jewish believers in the land. Twenty years later, in 1968, there were about fifty Jewish believers. In 1988 it was estimated that there were less than 500. Today, no one can say with any degree of certainty how many Messianic Jews there are in Israel: 12,000? 15,000? 20,000? Who

knows? One thing is certain: at a time when far too many evangelicals are confidently asserting that God has turned his back on the Jewish people and are supporting the Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions movement, God is confirming the Puritan hope.

The Puritans longed to see the things we see. John Owen, Jonathan Edwards and Cotton Mather would leap for Joy if they were alive today. In the light of what we have heard of the Puritan hope today, how does our future hope compare with theirs? If I was a gambling man I would be prepared to bet that even if you don't share the Puritan hope, you wish it was true.

Is our view of the future pessimistic or do we, as William Carey, see the future 'as bright as the promises of God?'

May it be so! *Amen!*

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