

THE CONSOLATION OF ISRAEL

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The nations of the world were in great darkness, and God chose the nation of Israel to shine as a light in that darkness. (Isaiah 49:6; Acts 13:47) However, Israel was also a nation of darkness, and became to other nations, not a cause of praising God, but of blaspheming Him. They were a rebellious people, and because of their rebellion, and after many warnings from the prophets, God sent the Assyrians to conquer the people in the northern kingdom of Israel, and to carry them away into captivity. Afterward, the prophets warned the people of the southern kingdom of Judah that God would send the Babylonians to do the same to them. However, Isaiah the prophet also told the people that at a future time God would forgive and restore them. This prophecy should console the people. He said, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.” (Isaiah 40:1, 2) God had many generations before revealed His glory to Moses and said to Him:

The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth *generation*. (Exodus 34:6, 7)

Isaiah said that God would reveal His glory also to the children of Israel. He would send the Christ, who would restore the fallen kingdom of David. Isaiah said:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counseller, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of *his* government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. (Isaiah 40:6, 7)

Although the children of Israel were rebellious, there were always among them some who were faithful. As God told Elijah the prophet, “Yet I have left *me* seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.” (1 Kings 19:18) Faithful Israelites looked for the Christ to come, who would restore the fallen kingdom of David, and Simeon was one of those faithful Israelites. Saint Luke writes that he “*was* just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.” (Luke 2:25) When Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary, in obedience to the law, brought the Child to the temple in Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord. The Holy Spirit moved Simeon to go to the temple, and there He recognized the Christ Child. He took the child in His arms, and praised God, and said:

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:

For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. (Luke 2:29-32)

Simeon was a faithful servant of the Lord eagerly looking for the coming of the Christ. The Holy Spirit told him that he would not die before he saw His coming. When He did see Him, he knew that the Lord was releasing him from his service in this life, and it was time for him to pass on the next. He died, however, having seen with his eyes what he had always believed in, and had always hoped for: the One who would bring salvation, the Christ.

Salvation was the glory of Israel. It was through them that the Christ would come, a descendant of Abraham, and a descendant of David. They had the oracles of God. (Romans 3:2) It was to them that He would come. (Matthew 15:24; John 1:11; 4:22) But salvation is not for Israel alone; it is for all nations, and it was through the children of Israel that the nations would first hear of the blessed Savior. (Isaiah 49:6; Acts 13:47) This Savior, this Christ, is the crowning glory of the nation of Israel, and He brings enlightenment to every nation that sits in darkness.

There are dark places in the world. China is one of the darkest. There the state pretends to be God, striving sanctify its people. It has developed a social credit system which, by mass surveillance, monitors the behavior of the people, and credits or debits their social accounts. The state rewards and punishes accordingly, allowing them or forbidding them to take commercial flights, to work in the best employment, to send their children to the best schools, and so on. There the state acts as God, and punishes those who do not submit, especially Christians. Yet, there is light in China. By some estimates there are in China more than one-hundred million Christians, and the state cannot stop them from believing, nor prevent them from spreading the Word, as Pastor Wang Yi has recently demonstrated. There is much darkness in other parts of the world, but also much light there, because Christ is the true light who has come into the world, and He is gradually dispelling all the darkness.

Now unto the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. *Amen.*