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## A God That Hideth Himself

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Mar-Apr 1948, Vol. 26-2.*

*"Verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour" (Isa. 45:15).*

It is as though the Prophet was suddenly overawed and struck with amazement at what he was being made to prophesy! In the midst of his ministry something of its wonder broke upon himself and he interjected this ejaculation.

Leaving, for the present, much of what this might imply as to prophecy as prediction and its vindication, we will stay with the exclamation itself. That statement is one in principle with several instances in the Scriptures. Looking at the present context we see that it is Israel's release from captivity, and return to the Land to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple, which is contemplated. No doubt there had been much speculation and discussing as to how the prophecies of their return would be fulfilled. Seventy years had been determined and made known as the duration of their captivity. The Gentile powers were in undoubted ascendancy and there seemed very little prospect or possibility of Israel's regaining their national power and glory amongst the nations. The state of things in their own country - the destroyed Temple, the burnt city, the land overrun with wild beasts, the enemy emissaries installed - and the disintegration among the people themselves in exile, made the outlook one fraught with seemingly insuperable problems, and it might well have led to complete bafflement and even despair.

Then the Prophet is made to foretell that it would all come about - this restoration - at the hands or by the will of the Gentile power itself; that the Sovereign Spirit of God would come down upon one who - *as yet* - was not in the position to do it, and probably whose name was not yet known at all. Babylon was not yet overthrown: the Babylonian Empire was not yet destroyed; Daniel's prophecies were not yet fulfilled. But the one who would do it was mentioned by name and the details of his

conquest are given in this forty-fifth chapter of Isaiah's prophecies. (Read it fragment by fragment.) And then, even although this man would be in ignorance of God, he would be constrained and compelled by God like an Anointed one to fulfil the Scriptures, release the people, provide the means, and generally facilitate the restoration.

As the Prophet sees it all in his "vision" ("the vision of Isaiah," 1:1, *one* vision including everything) he is overwhelmed with wonder. All the problems are solved, the questions answered, the "mountains" levelled! Who would have thought of *that*? Who would have dreamed such a thing? Oh, how deep are God's ways, beneath our imagination, *hidden* from our most intense speculations. 'Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour.'

There have been several other great and outstanding instances of the mystery of God's ways in fulfilling His major purposes. All the race had gone from Him and become involved in Godlessness and idolatry. It was universal. How would God meet His own need? Well, He moved to put His hand on one man, and out of that one man He made a nation. In sovereign grace He made that nation His mystery, His secret, among the nations. Israel was God's mystery, God's hidden way. There was always something mysterious about Israel. Paul, in contemplating this method of God and finding it rise up with such overwhelming power, did just what Isaiah did. While writing it down he just interjected a loud and resounding ejaculation:-

*"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past tracing out!"* (Rom. 11:33; A.S.V.).

He might well have added, "Thou art a God that hidest Thyself." Who would ever have thought of the Incarnation, and that, not in glory, but in humiliation unto offending every expectation of man? Who would have thought of the Cross for God Incarnate as the method and means of solving the greatest problem ever known in this universe? Who would have suspected that it was all embodied in that Man of Nazareth, "the carpenter's son" as they called Him? There was the greatest mystery of God! Did it work? Has it proved to be *the way*, the *only way*, and the transcendently successful way?

And what is true as to *the mystery of Israel*, and *the mystery of Christ*, is also true as to *the mystery of the Church*. There is a hiddenness about the true Church. No natural eye can discern it. No natural mind can explain it. Reduce it to human sense and description and you have lost it, you have got hold of the wrong thing. "God's wisdom (is) in a mystery," says Paul. Try to commend the Church to the world without faith and you have stripped your Church of its secret power! Unless men come right up against inscrutable God Who overwhelms them, that which claims to be His dwelling-place is an empty shell.

And we would remind you that what is true in these great epochs of sovereign progress down the ages, these interventions and advents in the history of this world's spiritual life, is true in the life of each one of His true people. Such will be constantly confronted with the how? of impossible situations, in order that they may be compelled to repeated exclamations in the presence of His *simple* solutions -

"Verily Thou art a God That hidest Thyself."

"Deep in unfathomable mines

Of never-failing skill,

He treasures up His bright designs,

And works His sovereign will."

"I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that it is I, the Lord, Who call thee by thy name, even the God of Israel" (Isa. 45:3; ASV.).