The Minor Prophets — Preface.

Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Minor Prophets.

W. Kelly.

Preface.

It seems due to the reader that he should be apprised that the following remarks on the Twelve Minor Prophets were not so formally delivered in the shape of lectures as those which compose the companion volume that appeared in the beginning of this year, on the Five Books of Moses. Lectures indeed the one may be called no less than the other. But in the case of the prophetic books there was an opportunity for questions which led to long digressions. These have been retained in the volume now printed rather in deference to the strong wishes of some who heard them, than in accordance with the feelings of the author, who cannot but acknowledge that they somewhat awkwardly interrupt now and then the course of the observations on the books immediately before the mind. Though this is a defect beyond doubt in a literary point of view, it is trusted that what is here presented to the reader, even in answer to questions diverging from the subject, will be found to promote edification through the grace of the Lord Jesus.

It may be added here that I have availed myself of Dr. Pusey's publication on the earlier of the-Minor Prophets.* His researches, especially on the Hebrew idiom, are entitled to respect; but he is far too much swayed by patristic and mediæval commentators. With his reverence for the Holy Scriptures, with his piety, one entirely sympathizes. I humbly think, however, that he fails as much as anywhere else in a province where he least suspects it. Instead of censuring his church views as too high, I avow that they seem to my mind incalculably lower than what the New Testament teaches us, especially in the development given by the apostle Paul to the mystery he reveals in the Spirit as to Christ and as to the church; for modern high-churchism is but an effort to revive that system of early departure from apostolic doctrine which we find generally in the Fathers so-called. Its essence consists in lowering the Christian and the church, from heavenly relationship in union with the ascended Christ, to a mere earthly elongation, with improvements and fuller light, of the Jewish economy. But this really closed before God in the cross, though not outwardly and finally judged till the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

*The Minor Prophets with a Commentary Explanatory and Practical, and Introductions to the several Books. By the Rev. E B. Pusey, D.D., Regius Professor of Hebrew, and Canon of Christ Church. Parts i -iv., Hosea to Nahum. Oxford: Parker & Co., etc.1860-1871.

The πρῶτον ψεῦδος of this school, ancient or modern, is at bottom the same which underlies their rationalistic adversaries, little as either seem to be aware of it. They both fail in seeing the total ruin and judgment of the first man down to the disappearance of the Jewish system, and the setting up of one new man, wherein is neither Jew nor Greek, in Christ risen from the dead, and glorified at the right hand of God, who, having accomplished eternal redemption, sends down thereon the Holy Ghost both to seal believers individually, and to baptize them into one body — Christ's body, the church of God.

The intelligent Christian reader can hardly overlook that this. is the grand truth which pervades the writings of St. Paul; that up to the cross the trial was being made in every form, whether man as such, no matter how helped by law, ordinance, priesthood, at last even by the mission of Messiah Himself in flesh, could retrieve what was lost; that the result then above all was man's complete and proved inability to remedy the evil, or to hold fast any favours bestowed meanwhile; and that thereon, in the rejection of Christ by the Jew and the Gentile, God effects redemption by His blood, and raises Him up — the beginning, the firstborn from the dead — head of a new creation, and of the church His body. Incarnation presented the person of the Saviour; but it is only in resurrection, after having finished the work given Him to do in His atoning death, that He became head over all things to the church, which is His body. It is no question of reinstating Israel or man: the rejected person and ministry of the Lord demonstrated all flesh to be too far gone for this; for even the incarnate Son of God was refused and put to death, having laboured in vain, as He Himself says in Isaiah 49, and as the Gospels abundantly show.

Hence it became a question of sovereign grace on God's part in Christ as the Second Man risen from the dead and gone into heaven. He is thus the life-giving Spirit who, having won the victory over all temptation, and annulled the power of Satan, and endured the righteous judgment of God due to the first man, is now in resurrection become the head of a new family. "And as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly; and as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." (1 Corinthians 15) Thus, and thus only, grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord, and this founded on the redemption which is in Him.

The more this is weighed, the more will its importance be felt: and the very grave difference between theology in general and the revealed truth of Christianity. I do not speak only of the gross ignorance displayed in the idea of a constant sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ continued in the Eucharist, which obscures as much as is conceivable the truth of God both as to the close of the first man in death and as to the setting up of the Second in resurrection, and thus leaves no room (save by the most glaring inconsistency) for the new creation and the Holy Ghost uniting us to the head in heaven. No thoughtful mind can wonder that the system which let in this error went farther, and deprived all but the clergy of that cup which bears witness to the shed blood of the Redeemer, and to the sins of believers washed away thereby. No wonder that it fell into the notion of concomitancy; and that, to justify its bad practice in this respect, it took refuge in the equally bad principle that in the consecrated bread or body is the blood of Christ. It is thus therefore consistently characterised by its comparatively modern sacrament of non-redemption, as another has well said. For without the shedding of blood is no remission; and if the blood as a doctrine be still in the body, so that the laity eating only the wafer partake of both flesh and blood, it is clearly enough implied that the blood can not be shed. They do not believe that all Christians are priests.

It is remarkable, too, that Puritanism is as deaf to the voice of the revealing Spirit on this head as either of its adversaries; and this in all its forms, Calvinistic at least as much so as Arminian. They both think that the flesh is not so bad that it cannot be acted on for God by Christ using the law of God, and giving it power through the Spirit. The Puritan school trust not to rites or ordinances like the Patristic; but they cling with even greater tenacity to the rule of the moral law. It is evident that on one side or the other it is but a renewal of the old question of the Galatian brethren, who, having been beguiled by an infusion of both, are censured by the indignant apostle as fallen from grace, and summoned earnestly to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ made us free, instead of entangling themselves again in a yoke of bondage. To the dead and risen Christ we now exclusively belong, in order that we may bring forth fruit to God. Even had we been circumcised the eighth day, and were we of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Judah, of the family of David, Hebrew of Hebrews, we ought as Christians to recognize with joy that we have been made dead to the law by the body of Christ in order to our being for another, Him who was raised from the dead. The Puritan scheme, no less than the Patristic, is adulterous according to the emphatic figure of the apostle; for they wed us to both husbands, the law and Christ, instead of owning that we have died to the one, and belong now freely and holily to the other.

Christianity stands in the brightest contrast; and as it treats all who believe as already brought nigh to God, made kings and priests to God even now, so it calls all such to eat of the bread and drink of the cup, and thus to show forth the Lord's death till He come. It tells the baptized, not merely that their sins are forgiven but that they are dead to sin, baptized not to a living Messiah like the disciples in the days of His flesh but to His death, and therefore by it buried with Him to death: so that we know that our old man has been crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be annulled that we should no longer serve sin. For he that has died is freed from sin.

The contrast of this is as complete with Protestants as with Romanists. Not a single creed, article, or service in Christendom sets forth the truth which the apostle shows to be signified in the initiatory institution of Christianity! Not seeing the total ruin of man as such, and still regarding him as in a state of probation like the Jew under law (not as lost), they fail to seize and confess the mighty deliverance which grace has wrought in Christ and gives to those who believe. They ignore Christ's assurance that the believer does not come into judgment, but is passed from death into life; for they assert their faith that He will come to be their Judge. They do not hold that all believers are saints now on earth responsible to walk accordingly, but they pray that God may make them to be numbered with His saints in glory everlasting. They beseech Him to save His people and bless His heritage, as if they were Jews waiting for Messiah's advent, instead of Christians already saved by grace and blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ. Instead of worshipping our God and Father in spirit and truth, with the happy consciousness that they are in Christ, and that the law of the Spirit of life in Him has freed them from the law of sin and death, they cry to God rather out of distance and misery, as tied and bound with the chain of their sins. Hence the habitual tone of what is imagined to be Christian worship is really a poor iteration of the Psalms of David, and by some a wholesale accommodation of the entire collection to their use, instead of drawing near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, as those who have boldness to enter into the holy of holies by the blood of Jesus, and offering continually to God the sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of the lips confessing Jesus' name.

Far from working any deliverance in the present fallen estate of Christendom, Dr. Pusey and his fellows have made no small accession to one of the leading currents of unbelief in our day, which are all flowing fast toward the predicted apostacy. I do not doubt that he and a few others of pious feeling in the party shrank from the growing worldliness, the carnality, and the irreverence of ordinary Protestantism. But how did they seek to remedy the mischief? Not by searching the living word of God, but by a revived study of the Fathers; not by a renunciation of all they found in their own ecclesiastical position or ways condemned by Scripture, but by a vain effort to amend ill by rubrical punctiliousness; not by a deepening entrance into the truth and grace of God revealed in the apostolic writings, but by turning again to the weak and beggarly elements whereunto they desire again to be in bondage — a resuscitation of that Judaising of Christianity against which the blessed apostle of the Gentiles fought all through his ministry so vigorously as to show this to be the true hinge of a faithful or falling church. This system of course tinges deeply Dr. P.'s commentary on the Minor Prophets, and necessarily vitiates its character for those who distinguish the church of God from the Jew no less than the Gentile.

For the consequence of this error is that the proper and distinctive privileges of the Christian and of the church are never enjoyed. A disorganized family is not set right by losing sight of their own relationship; and while conscious in measure of their faults, trying to walk better — not as children, but as servants, with whom they have insensibly confounded themselves. And this confusion I press, not only as a grievous loss to the children of God, but yet more as an unbelieving dishonour done to the incomparable grace wherein we stand; above all to Him whose accomplished redemption is the only key to our blessing, and the righteous ground of reconciliation to God.

Along with ignorance of our own heavenly relationship in union with our glorified head goes the denial of the call of Israel to earthly supremacy. This God reserves for His ancient people. They failed to make it good of old, because they tried to hold it under condition of their own obedience, and so broke down completely — a failure aggravated incalculably by their rejection of the Messiah and of the gospel. But divine mercy has pledged itself to give them repentance and restoration, yea, far more than all they lost, under Messiah returning to reign over the earth and under the new covenant. Meanwhile the Gentile, wise in his own conceit, flatters himself that the branches were broken off that he might be grafted in; he is high-minded, and does not fear, because he sets Mat 16:18, ill-understood, against the plain warning of Romans 11. The Gentile has not continued in God's goodness; and yet he presumes that he shall not be cut off, and that the Jew cannot be grafted in again, in the face of the clearest prediction that blindness in part (for it has never been total) is happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, when all Israel shall be saved, the Deliverer coming out of Zion and turning away ungodliness from Jacob.

Christendom denies these truths; and consequently we see not Romanism only but Protestantism seeking earthly glory and influence: the latter, it is true, willing for it to be the world's slave, the other ever seeking to be the world's mistress. But the church, rejoicing in her own place as the heavenly bride of Christ, was so much the more bound to confess the earthly place of power and dignity in store for converted Israel in the future, instead of coveting it now for herself, and straining after it by force or fraud. If we have Christ's mind in intelligence, we ought to have His mind in moral purpose, who, though divine, emptied Himself, taking a bondman's form, being born in likeness of men; and when found in fashion as a man, humbled Himself, becoming obedient as far as death, yea, death on the cross. We are all Christ's epistle, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God: how are we manifesting Christ?

Those who fail to hold fast and rightly apply these truths are, in my judgment, incapable of soundly expounding the Old Testament, and the Prophets in particular, whatever may be their merits in other respects, which I trust I should not be slow cordially to own and profit by. They are necessarily wrong more or less as to the government of the world no less than as to the church, and even as to salvation. They confound law and grace, heaven and earth, present and future, because they confound Israel with the church which is now called out for spiritual blessing in the heavenlies. The interpretation of the entire Bible is deeply affected by this difference; and so is our spiritual communion and our daily walk and worship. The Saviour remains unchangeable in person (blessed be God.); for He is the same yesterday, today, and for ever; but it would be hard to say what else does not suffer by the common traditional ignoring of revealed truth. And even the Saviour is far more obscurely seen and less enjoyed as the rule.

If this be true, as I am firmly persuaded, no apology is needful to press the importance of that truth which may by grace deliver from such a swamp of error, and help to set the Christian in view of his own proper heritage. The reader of this book will find that I have by grace sought throughout rightly to divide the word of truth, striving diligently to stand approved to God, and not as a workman that has to be ashamed. May the same grace bless the reader abundantly!

INTRODUCTION.

As for the chronological order of the Minor Prophets, it appears to be substantially maintained in the common arrangement, of course leaving room for such an exception as proves the rule. Hosea, for instance, is very properly put first, followed regularly by Joel and Amos. Of these two I cannot but think that as Joel did not begin to prophesy as early as Hosea, so on the other hand the beginning of Amos marks that Joel's testimony was already complete and known. (Compare Joe 3:16 with Amo 1:2.) In the Septuagint the order is Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel; but there need be no hesitation in adhering to the Hebrew arrangement, which puts Hosea first for all Israel, especially Ephraim, Joel next but the first for the narrower range of Jerusalem.

Obadiah seems to have his date the least defined by internal marks. What has been employed to prove a late date is invalid, from forgetting that the prophetic vision presents things future as already seen. For present time with a prophet is when a prophecy is accomplished, not when it is given. I believe he was early, not late. Obadiah naturally brings in Jonah,* who may have been placed exceptionally as already referred to. Jonah is usually set earlier, but there is a good deal tending to show that his visit to Nineveh was under the reign of Pul (=Vul-lush or Iva-lush of the Assyrian monuments), which would reduce the date by more than a half a century, and place Jonah regularly in the order of time among the prophetic books. Then he has such a very peculiar place of witness that it would not at all have suited this glorious constellation of twelve stars if he had been put at their beginning; it would have seemed to give prominence to what was by the way, so to speak. Hence it appears to me that Jonah is ranged, if not chronologically, at least with moral beauty, exactly in the proper place. Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah; but the less yields to the greater. And so they are classed in the Bible. Nahum, with Nineveh as the object of judgment, naturally precedes Habakkuk, who looks at the Chaldee; and Zephaniah is the last of those lesser lights before the captivity of Babylon.

{*Jonah stands alone among the prophets in being sent to the chief city of Assyria, the great Gentile antagonist of Israel while still owned as the people of Jehovah. It is remarkable that, standing thus isolated among the prophets, it is the only one of the Minor Prophets which begins with "and," translated "now" in the Authorized Version.}

First then come the Greater Prophets, each in his own order, — Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, without entering now upon the place assigned to the latter in the Hebrew Canon, which the Jews have variously sought to explain. But if we speak of Greater Prophets, we must beware of the error which would impute to the least an inspiration inferior to the greater. It is a question only of extent and variety in their written testimony. And it is worthy of note, as has been observed, that the three longest were led of God to adopt the language and thoughts of some of the shortest prophecies. It is also to be noted, that four or five of the earlier Minor Prophets preceded even Isaiah.

Then follow the twelve Minor Prophets, beginning again with the earlier and closing with those after the captivity. Thus if Zephaniah followed Isaiah, he is necessarily excluded from such a place, because he is classed with the shorter Prophets. Isaiah naturally and strictly takes the first place among the Greater Prophets, who are put exactly in their chronological order from first to last. And if Ezekiel lived at the same time with Jeremiah, the former was out of the land, while Jeremiah was in it or only swept down with the last remnant into Egypt. Daniel, as is known, lived the latest of the four Greater Prophets. Then we begin the Minor Prophets and go through a similar series, the only one who can be said to be taken out of his order being Jonah for the reason just suggested, though it is not improbable that the chronological place is preserved as well as the moral in the wisdom of God.

Hence any arrangement which places Zephaniah before Habakkuk would seem more than questionable. He appears for several reasons, minute in themselves but not without weight, to have been a trifle later, but substantially there is but little difference. On the whole I consider that the order (as they stand in the Hebrew Bible and English as in other versions) is entitled to respect, and that the Jews were more right than those who put Zephaniah before Habakkuk. It seems to be most probable, to say the least, that, though contemporary, Zephaniah was rather the later of the two. But the difference is only of a few years; if it were after all about half-a-dozen, there is no great matter for contention in it. Unhappily those who toil so keenly for perishable food like this, which profits in nothing those occupied therewith, are apt to overlook or refuse the food that abides to life everlasting.

Then Haggai clearly comes first in order of time among the last, worthily followed by his contemporary Zechariah, as both were by Malachi, who concludes the roll not more certainly in fact than in the tone and character of hid message. The godly from among the Jews are left awaiting Jehovah-Messiah and His immediate forerunner.

Archbishop Usher was certainly a justly valued authority on these matters; but his chronology was, it is understood, adjusted not always for the better by those charged with going over the Authorized Version for the last time less than a hundred years ago. Even Usher's own arrangement has not always commanded the assent of those who believed the scriptures as firmly as himself. We may however come to the conclusion, and, I think, with fair if not always full evidence, that substantially the Greater Prophets and the Lesser are in their chronological order with the single exception of Jonah, if indeed this when fully considered be really one. The three later in the last series, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, were unquestionably post-captivity prophets; as Zephaniah brings us down to the latest point before the captivity. We are perfectly certain of the general epoch of most because they state it themselves so distinctly as to leave scarce any room for that misdirected ingenuity of unbelief which amuses itself and perplexes the simple by incessant efforts to shake all that is received, small or great; but which alas! exerts itself not least when it can hope to shake what most glorifies God and abases man.

As to subject-matter, the following sketch of these twelve prophets may suffice.

HOSEA is divided into two sections. First, he gives us Israel and Judah rejected after the warning of Jezreel, a dim intimation of the call of the Gentiles, and a distinct prediction that Judah and Israel should be restored and even re-united; a pleading and a promise; a sketch of their anomalous state at present, and an assurance of their final blessedness as a nation seeking Jehovah and the true David their King. Next, he sets out the wrongs of Israel, with the expostulations and threats of God; and, finally, their repentance and communion with Him.

JOEL, from the ruin caused by various insects, warns of the northern army and its devastations, partially then, fully in the last days of this age, followed by the day of Jehovah, as a ground on both sides for humiliation before Him; and predicts the outpouring of the Spirit, deliverance in Zion, and the general judgment of the nations.

AMOS rehearses the ways of God not only with Israel, but with the neighbouring nations; then takes up Israel specifically — not on broad grounds of a moral kind only, but of peculiar favour; points out their guilt of refusing His testimony, which should none the less be verified in the judgment of the mass, and in the deliverance of the righteous few, and promises in the end the rearing up again of the fallen tabernacle of David and the renewed blessing of Israel.

OBADIAH, in a singularly vivid strain tinged with pathos yet stern, sets out God's call among the nations against Edom, who, spite of his pride of strength, must come down and be spoiled beyond precedent by treacherous hands, his wisdom and might failing to stave off destruction, because of heartless malice against his brother Jacob; for in truth the day of Jehovah was near on all the nations, but on Zion should be deliverance, and Jacob should inherit the earth, Esau being put down and judged; for the kingdom shall be Jehovah's.

JONAH next shows by his mission to the Gentiles that God reserved His title to pity the worst of the nations when repentant at His word; that effectual service needs the previous lesson of death and resurrection; and that even so he who is most nearly bound up with Him must bow to His grace to others and bless Him, instead of resting in his own privileges to the falsifying of His name.

MICAH judges the people as a whole, Samaria and Jerusalem being prominent, not only for iniquity and idolatry, but for refusal of Jehovah's words. He pronounces the land polluted, and holds out, especially for the heads and princes, the desolation of Zion, but its establishment in the last days by Jehovah, when they are hard pressed in the last siege after having been given up because of their rejection of Christ, who is to be their peace when the Assyrian reappears- in the end, and who is to make the remnant of Jacob a blessing as well as an object of fear in the day when Jehovah cuts off all evil of men or demons. Then he concludes with a final homily on the immutably righteous ways of Jehovah, who could not be put off by rites or sacrifices, but hates and must judge a people so false, yet will perform to the children in the last days the truth to Jacob, the mercy to Abraham, which He sware to their fathers from the days of old.

NAHUM, in contrast with Jonah, declares the vengeance of Jehovah on Nineveh, but does not keep back His goodness to such as trust in Him. Did the Assyrian imagine against Jehovah a counsellor of Belial? Utter destruction should come such as the world never saw before, such as will be seen again when the last Assyrian falls for ever. No storm of lightning or thunder ever burst with such images of judgment like our prophet's scathing denunciation of Nineveh, especially in chapters 2, 3.

HABAKKUK furnishes the exercises of one troubled by the iniquity of the Jews crying for judgment, and then because it is executed by those more wicked than they; who is told to wait for the judgment, but meanwhile to live by faith. He then details the wickednesses of the wicked which ensure his destruction; and, finally, to Jehovah in His holy temple, and all the earth enjoined to keep silence, he pours forth his prayer with a full vision of divine judgment, which at length falls unsparingly, and expresses his joyful trust in God, come or come not what will of His outward blessings meanwhile.

ZEPHANIAH proclaims the utter destruction of the land of Judah and Jerusalem, in the approaching day of Jehovah, for their idolatry, violence, and deceit, when incredulity would save no more than filthy lucre; but he lets the righteous see ("it may be ye shall be hid in the day of Jehovah's anger") that, as it is the day of Jehovah, none should escape, whether around them like the Philistines, Moabites, or Ammonites, or afar off like the Assyrians; least of all she that was filthy and polluted, the oppressing city, clothed with privilege, yet so much the guiltier — Jerusalem! He concludes with the richest comfort to the godly remnant, who are called to wait on Jehovah till He executes His sentence on the assembled kingdoms, delivers His people now poor and meek, rejoices over Zion, rests in His love, and makes them a name and a praise among all people of the earth.

HAGGAI reproves the people for their lack of faith and zeal in building the house of Jehovah, and convicts them of His controversy with them for occupation on behalf of their own houses; comforts them with the assurance of the Spirit's permanency of action with them; declares that the latter glory of the house will be greater than the former when Messiah shakes all the nations, and assures of the overturning of all kingdoms when the heavens are shaken, but of the choice of Zerubbabel as representing Christ in that day, a signet for Jehovah.

ZECHARIAH regards Jerusalem as under the imperial powers, one power ousting another till the due time is come, and after the glory Jehovah dwells in Zion. Jerusalem is pardoned and justified; the sign of wisdom in government is there when He brings forth Messiah the Branch, as well as perfect administrative order; iniquity and idolatry are judged; the powers pass in review; and the Branch is to build the temple, and sit a priest on His throne. In the second part of the book the restoration of Jerusalem is pledged when the question is put as to facts; but they are still under responsibility, though a vision of glory follows. Jehovah assures that He will protect His house; introduces Christ in humiliation, but connects Him also with the day of glory and deliverance, when Judah puts down Javan or Greece, and the houses of Judah and Joseph shall be as though He had not cast them off. Then follow the details of Christ's rejection, and of Antichrist judged; the gathering of all nations against Jerusalem, which is delivered by Jehovah- Messiah, once pierced, now mourned by them; but a fountain is opened in Jerusalem for cleansing. Then false prophets are judged, and Christ's humiliation once more in view, and a remnant spared, and Jerusalem captured in part but delivered by Jehovah, who makes her the holy metropolis of the earth when He reigns and judges all nations.

MALACHI bears to us the burden of the word of Jehovah to Israel: His reproaches fill the prophet's spirit. And no wonder, for the returned remnant had failed completely, as left by Zechariah on the ground of responsibility, whatever long-suffering or active grace from God might do for them. Jacob, though loved, profaned and was weary of His service and holiness; the priests too had corrupted the covenant of Levi, and He had made them to His own grief contemptible. There remained nothing but for Him to send His messenger and come Himself; but who should abide the day of His coming? Yet He owns with tenderness and complacency the remnant that spoke often to one another in His fear, surrounded by the incredulous hypocrisy of the Jews. And those righteous ones should be His in the day that should burn as an oven for all the proud; but for those that feared Him the Sun of righteousness should arise with healing in His wings, and they themselves go forth as calves of the stall treading down the wicked in that day. Finally, he reminds them of the law of Moses, and promises Elijah the prophet before that day to turn the hearts of the people, lest His coming should be only for a curse.

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28 Hosea

Hosea.

Lectures on the Minor Prophets.

W. Kelly.

Hosea 1-3
Hosea 4-14

28 Hosea 1-3

The prophecy of Hosea naturally divides itself into two principal divisions with minor sections. The first consists of Hosea 1, 2, , 3; the second, of the rest of the book. Within these greater divisions, however, we have distinct parts.

The first chapter presents the prophet with his ministry
"in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel." He was therefore a contemporary of Isaiah, who prophesied during the same kings, save that in the case of Hosea only do we hear of the then reigning king of Israel, of whom, rather than Judah, our prophet treats. For the word of Jehovah to him takes into account the condition of Israel as a whole, and particularly uses the dismal condition of Ephraim for the moral good of Judah. This is true of the whole book, which is remarkable for its occupation simply with the Jew, without noticing (as do other prophets) the Gentiles either for judgment or for blessing.

Hosea is, one might say, exclusively devoted to the ancient people of God, with a very slight but remarkable exception in the first chapter; but even it is couched in terms so enigmatical (and this, I believe, with divine intention for a special end), that many have failed to discern the truth contemplated in consequence of not using the light supplied in the New Testament. But there cannot be a more striking example than this very instance affords of the all-importance of using one part of scripture, not to correct indeed — this were impossible and irreverent — but better to understand another. In order to profit by the fuller revelation of the mind of God, we do well to read the earlier communications in the strongest light vouchsafed to us. It is one mind conveyed by one Spirit; and God can give us grace by dependence on Himself to guard us, as far as is consistent with our moral condition, from that narrowness to which we are all too prone, making certain portions of scripture our favourites, so as to interfere with due heed to the rest of the word. Those who indulge in these thoughts cannot be expected to understand the word of God, and, in what they make their one-sided study, are apt to fall into singular and sometimes fatal mistakes. The most precious truths of God, if they are used in an exclusive way, may by the enemy be turned to the support of serious error. Thus there would be danger if there were, for instance, the systematic limiting of the mind to the resurrection or heavenly side of divine truth. Or again, take prophecy; and how withering to the soul when that part of scripture practically becomes a monopoly? Take the church — for it does not matter what — and in it there is no security one whit more. The reason is simple; the secret of power, blessing, security, and communion is found, not in resurrection or heaven, not in prophecy nor in the church, nor in any other conceivable branch of truth, but in Christ, who alone gives the whole truth. Consequently we see that what we all know to be a doctrine and a necessary principle in God's revelation is true also as applied to every detail of practical experience.

In this case, then, the date of Hosea indicates his interest in Israel, and the work that God assigned him in reference to the twelve-tribed nationality of His people, when the ruin of Israel was at hand, and that of Judah was ere long to follow. Brief as his handling of his subject is, there is a remarkable completeness in the prophecy; and the moral element is as prominent in the second part, as the dispensational is in the first. The parenthesis of Gentile empire is quite omitted throughout. He is filled with the afflictions and the guilt of Israel as a whole, and, more than any other of the twelve shorter prophets, breaks forth into passionate and renewed grief over the people. The book accordingly abounds, as none other does so much, in the most abrupt transitions, which therefore make the style of Hosea singularly difficult in some respects, and, it may be added too, far more so to us just because of its intensely Jewish character. Not being Jews, we do not come under their character of relationship; but those who are to be called as Jews by and by will understand it well. They, having that position, and being thus called (though through the sense of the deepest sins on their part, at the same time knowing the yearnings of the Spirit of God over them), will enter into, as I believe they will profit by, that which to us presents difficulty because we are not in the same position.

The first chapter mainly consists of symbolic action, which represents the course of God's purposes. "The beginning of the word of Jehovah by Hosea. And Jehovah said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms* and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from Jehovah." Nothing can be more evident than this declared object. The prophet is commanded to do that which was necessarily most painful in itself, and suggestive of what he as a man of God must have felt to be humbling as well as repulsive. But such was the attitude of Israel to their God, and Jehovah would make the prophet and those who heeded the prophecy to understand in measure what He must feel as to His people. "So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son. And Jehovah said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel. And it shall come to pass at that day, that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." This was the first great blow. Israel was to be smitten in the house of Jehu, the avenger of the blood-guiltiness that had been brought in by the idolatrous Jezebel. Jehu was a rough man, vain and ambitious, suited notwithstanding to deal in his rude fashion with that which had dishonoured Jehovah — a man far enough outside the current of the feelings of the Spirit of God, but none the less employed in an external way to deal with the evident and open evil of Ahab's house and Israel.

{*The very least we can say is that the expression intimated to the prophet what Gomer was going to be. But it must be allowed that the phrase naturally conveys the impression that she had already been guilty of an impure life too common where idolatry reigned. If Salmon begat Boaz of Rahab the harlot, it is not hard to conceive the Lord commanding the prophet to take Gomer to wife as a symbolic parable to Israel. It may be worth noticing that, while in ver. 3 she is said to have borne "him" a son, this is not the phrase, but one more vague, in verses 6 and 8. The mother's character might suffice to stamp itself on the children; but the absence of the pronoun in the case of Lo-ruhamah and Lo-ammi, as contrasted with Jezreel is under the circumstances remarkable.}

Nevertheless this, as it had no root in God, so it had no strength to maintain itself against other evils. Hence, although it suited the policy of Jehu to deal with certain gross idolatries, the political-religious evil that characterized the kingdom of Israel seemed necessary to sustain him against the house of David. Consequently, as he had no conscience as to the sin of Jeroboam, this was judged of Jehovah in due time. God smote not only Jehu's house, but Israel. The kingdom was to pass, though it might linger for a little while afterwards; but it was smitten of God. This is what is represented by Jezreel. God would scatter in due time. The Assyrian broke the power of Israel in the valley of Jezreel (afterwards called Esdraelon), a scene of covetousness and blood from first to last.

Then again we find a daughter appears, whose name was to be called Lo-ruhamah, a name which expresses the absence of pity towards the people. No more mercy was to be shown. Thus the failure of the kingdom of Israel, which soon followed after the dealing with Jehu's house, was not then complete. There would be still more judgment from God; for He says, "I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel." Jezreel was but the beginning of the judgments of God. "I will utterly take them away." It was not therefore the collapse of the kingdom of Jehu only, but Israel as a whole was to be swept from the land, never more to be restored as a separate polity. "But," says He in the very same breath, "I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by Jehovah their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." The Assyrian was allowed to destroy the kingdom of Israel, but was himself checked by divine power when he hoped to carry off Judah.

Thus there was a lengthening of the tranquillity for Judah. They, at least for the time, exhibited fidelity to Jehovah in their measure. Afterwards another child is born — a son; and "then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be to you." It was no longer therefore simply a case of breaking up Israel completely, but Judah now comes into judgment. As long as the royal tribe stood, there was still a nucleus round which all the people might be gathered. As long as the house of David was true in any measure with Judah attached yet far from being true, God could (morally speaking) yet work recovery, or at any rate He could make them, as it were, swell out into a great people. But now, on the proved faithlessness of the innermost circle, God represents the solemn crisis by the birth of the son called Lo-ammi. Yet there is no notice of the Babylonish conqueror. The prophet abruptly passes by the captivity of Judah, and at once goes forward to the glorious reversal of all the sentences of woe. It is the reunion of all the tribes, but not the scanty return under Zerubbabel. A greater is here, even Messiah. Undoubtedly He is chosen, given and appointed to them by God; but it was important also to show that they will yield willing and active subjection. Gathered together, Israel and Judah shall make (or appoint) themselves one head, and shall come (or go) up out of the land: not Babylon or Assyria, or even the earth at large, I think, but rather an expression of their union religiously in the same solemn assemblies and feasts, as we have already seen them one people under one head. It was accomplished neither after the captivity nor when Christ came, but strikingly the reverse. It remains to be fulfilled when He comes to reign over the earth. "For," then indeed, "great [shall be] the day of Jezreel." God shall sow His people in His land, not scatter them out of it. It is the day not of humiliation but of manifested glory. "Yet," says He in His very sentence of judgment on Judah, "the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, in the place where it shall be said unto them, Ye [are] not my people, it shall be said unto them, [Ye are] the sons of the living God."

Observe the remarkable change here. It is the scripture already referred to as the mysterious intimation of the call of the Gentiles in pure grace. This, though distinctly taught in Romans 9, surprises many readers. The reason is because we are apt to regard all as an antithesis in a merely human or limited fashion. If any man of God on the face of the earth had had the writing of the sentence left to himself, had there not been the full power of God which is meant by inspiration in its true and proper sense, it seems quite inconceivable that this sentence could ever have been written. Who would have said it, let him be supposed the best of men, if he loved Israel as a good Jew? Least of all surely Hosea, whose heart was all on fire for the people, both in horror on account of their wickedness and in yearning after their blessedness. But for that reason he of himself would have said, not "Ye are not my people," but Ye shall be made my faithful people. No, this is not what God says, but something quite different. The strong bias so natural even to a good man would have rendered it out of the question to speak as Hosea does. We find it hard to take in, even when written plainly before our eyes, the distinct teaching of God, conveying as it does an unexpected form of thought and an altogether new subject. The Spirit inspired him and can teach us.

This, as hinted before, is the scripture which the apostle Paul employs in Romans 9, as is well known. There he is vindicating, as is plain, the sovereign call of God — the only resource for man where all is ruined. How beautifully this fits in with our prophet is evident. The ruin of Israel was already there; the ruin of Judah was impending. All was doomed. What then can man fall back on? If the people of God on the earth turned out only a mass of ruins on one side or another, what was there to look to? Nothing and none but God, not His law, but His sovereign grace. Accordingly this is exactly what does come in; as indeed the sovereignty of God must always be the help and sustainment and joy of a soul that is thoroughly beaten out of itself when its evil is truly judged before God. But it often takes a long while to break a man down to that point. Hence it is that many feel difficulties about it, unless perhaps on their death-bed. Then at least, if anywhere, man is true. God is true always; but man (I am speaking now only of such as are born of God) then parts company with those visions, or rather fitful shadows, which had disordered and misled him during the activities of life. Then indeed he realizes what he is as well as what God is. Accordingly, if he lose all confidence in himself in every possible way, it is only to enjoy a confidence, never so well known before, in God Himself.

This is precisely what we find here in the reasonings of the apostle Paul. It is naturally offensive to the pride of man's heart, and more particularly to a Jew's. For had they not received magnificent promises from God? It was a great difficulty to them, and it sounds very natural and formidable, how it was possible that the promises of God should — I may not say fail, but — *seem* to fail. But this came from looking simply at themselves with the promises of God. We must remember that the Bible does not contain merely the promises — it largely consists, and particularly the Old Testament, of a divine history of the responsibility of man. We must leave room for both, so as not to let the responsibility of man overthrow the promises of God; but, on the other hand, not to neutralize the responsibility of the one because of the promises of the other.

The tendency of all men is to become what people call either Arminians or Calvinists; and a hard thing it is to hold the balance of truth without wavering to either side. There is nothing, however, too hard for the Lord; and the word of God is the unfailing preservative from either one or the other. I am perfectly persuaded — spite of partisans who think only of their own views, or freethinkers who have no difficulty in allowing that both are there — that neither Arminianism nor Calvinism is in the Bible, and that they are both thoroughly wrong without even the smallest justification. The fact is, that the tendency to either is deeply seated in unrenewed minds — that is, the same man may be an Arminian at one time and a Calvinist at another; and it is likely that, if he has been a violent Arminian one day, he may become a violent Calvinist to-morrow. But the roots of both lie in man and in his onesidedness. The truth of God is in His word as the revelation of Christ by the Spirit, and nowhere else.

So it will be observed in Romans 9 how completely the apostle sets aside the Jewish misuse of the promises of God. By a chain of the most convincing facts and testimonies of the Old Testament urged in this wonderful chapter, he compels the Jew to abandon the flattering conceit of national election, used absolutely and exclusively as was his wont; for really it is a conceit of himself after all. If they hold to the exclusive pretensions of Israel as simply deriving from Abraham in the line of flesh (which was their point), in that case they must accept others to be their companions; for Abraham had more sons than Isaac, and Isaac had another son than Jacob. The ground of flesh therefore is utterly indefensible. A mere lineal descent would have let in the Ishmaelites, for instance; and of them the Jew would not hear. If he pleaded that Ishmael sprang from Hagar, a slave, be it so; but what of Edom, born of the same mother as well as father, of Isaac and Rebecca, twin brother of Jacob himself? Consequently the ground taken was palpably unsound and untenable. We must therefore fall back upon the sole resource for man's evil and ruin — God's sovereignty and gracious call. This was so much the more in point, because there was a time, even in the early history of the chosen people, when nothing less than God could have preserved it and given a ray of hope. It was not the Ishmaelites, not the Edomites, not the Gentiles, but Israel, who made the calf of gold. Had God dealt with them according to what they had been there to Him, must there not have been utter and immediate destruction? It is referred to now because of the moral principles connected with the citation of Hosea in Romans 9; and indeed all these truths appear to me to run together in the mind of the Spirit of God. If therefore we would understand the prophecy, we must follow and receive that which may seem discursively pursued in the New Testament, but which really was before the inspiring Spirit here too.

Consequently we have in the prophet what was true morally from the beginning of their sad history. It was now verging towards the bitter end of Israel, with Judah's ruin in full view. The very fact of prophets being raised up proved that the end was approaching; for prophecy only comes in with departure from God. There is no such form of revelation as prophecy when things run smooth and fair; nor is it then, morally speaking, required. What we have in days of comparative fidelity is the setting forth of privilege and duty; but when the privilege is despised and the duty not done, when God's people are in evident guilt, and judgment must follow, prophecy comes to tell of God's judging the evil, but with mercy and yet better blessing to the obedient remnant. This is true in principle even of the garden of Eden. God did not speak of the Seed of the woman till Adam was fallen; and so when Israel had transgressed like Adam, prophecy shines out. If the ruin were before Moses' eyes, as indeed it was, prophecy was vouchsafed to the lawgiver himself, as we see conspicuously in the end of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, not to speak of the wondrous burst through Balaam's mouth in the close of Numbers. Afterwards, when God had brought in every new form of blessing to kings raised up in grace to sustain the people, yet the ruin was only more decided. Prophecy too assumes a more comprehensive, systematic, and complete shape. A whole host of prophets, one might say, appears at this time; mighty prophetic utterances warned the people when outwardly things seemed strong but all was over before God, who therefore caused the alarm to be sounded with a remarkable and persistent urgency. The trumpet, as it were, was blown for Jehovah all over the land; and thus Hosea, as we know, was the contemporary of Amos, Micah, Isaiah, and perhaps other prophets at this time. There had been one even earlier still, as we may see if we compare the history. There was a peculiar reason for not putting the earliest first in order, which I hope to explain when I arrive at his book.

Already then the ruin was such that God's sovereignty was the only sure ground which could be taken. Hence we have seen that the apostle Paul uses this to point out, not merely the resource of grace for Israel, but that on Israel's failure it was perfectly open to God to go out to the Gentiles. For this is what Paul quotes the passage for in Romans 9 : "That he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us whom he hath called, not of the Jews only." From the moment God falls back on His own sovereignty the ground is as open for a Gentile as for a Jew. God is not sovereign if He may not choose whom He pleases. If He is sovereign, then it is but natural that His sovereignty should display itself where it would be most conspicuous. The call of the Gentiles furnishes this occasion; for if they were worst, as they certainly were utterly degraded, for this very reason they were most fit objects for the exercise of the divine sovereignty in grace. "Even us whom he called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles. As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people which were not my people, and her beloved which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there shall they be called the children of the living God." It is evident that verse 25 the apostle interprets of the future call of Israel, the reinstatement of the people of God on a better footing than ever in sovereign grace; but he also applies verse 26 to the Gentiles.

Thus all is here set out in the most orderly method: "Even us whom he hath called, not of the Jews only" (shown in verse 25), "but also of the Gentiles" (referred to in verse 26). "And it shall come to pass that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there shall they be called the sons of the living God." Consequently sonship is far more characteristic of the call of the Gentile than of the Jew. Thus in the change (not a little one, as I was going to say, but very great indeed), in the avoidance of the expression "people" and the employment of "sons," God with the most admirable propriety, intimates by His prophet that when He was going to work in grace He would work worthily of His name. He would bring Gentiles not merely into the place of Israel, but into a better standing. Granted that they were the vilest of the vile: even so grace could and would raise them into the nearest relationship to God Himself. Then they should be, not a mere substitute for Israel, but "the sons of the living God" — a title never given in its full force to any but the Gentiles who are now being called.

In a vague and general sense, as compared with distant Gentiles, Israel is called son, child, first-born; but this merely as a nation, whereas "sons" is individual. The expression, "In the place . . . . Ye are the sons of the living God," in the latter part of verse 10, is what has been already spoken of as the dim allusion to the call of the Gentiles. but it is so dim that many persons swamp it all together, making it bear on Israel. It might have been viewed as referring to Israel if God had said, "Then they shall be Ammi." He does not, however, say this, but "sons of the living God."

Such is the point of the apostle Paul; and what confirms this as the true interpretation is, that Peter also quotes from our prophet, and indeed was writing to a remnant of Jews only, as the apostle Paul was writing in his own proper place to Gentiles. Peter, however, though he does quote Hosea, omits the words, "They shall be called the sons of the living God." See 1Pe 2:10 : "Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." For his object he quotes from Hosea 2, not from Hosea 1.

This strikingly falls in with what has been already observed, that the first chapter shows not merely the restoration of Israel (perfectly true as this is, and therefore in no way to be combated), but in a mysterious way room left by God for the bringing in of the Gentiles too. By the form of the allusion, which might very easily be overlooked, He proves His perfect knowledge beforehand, and makes a communication to us of the call of the Gentiles in their own proper distinctive relationship as sons of the living God, and not merely His people.

Hence it is that Peter, writing to Christian Jews only gives the latter. Although they had lost their place of people of God through idolatry — and certainly the rejection of the Messiah did not mend matters, but rather confirmed the righteous sentence of God, that the little remnant which had come back were as bad as their fathers, or even worse, for they certainly perpetrated a greater crime in the rejection of their own Messiah, — yet grace is come in, and they who have received the Messiah rejected but glorified, "are now the people of God." But he does not go farther, because he simply takes them up as persons who had by grace entered in faith into the privileges of Israel before Israel. They had received the Messiah; they were the remnant of that people. They who were not a people had become now a people; they who had not obtained mercy have now obtained mercy. But Paul, writing to the Gentiles, avails himself in a most appropriate way of what Peter passes by — not of Hos 2:23, but of Hos 1:10, which intimates the call of Gentiles in yet greater depth of mercy. At the same time he takes care to show that the Jew will require the very same ground of sovereign grace to bring him in by and by as we have for coming in now.

The prophet, it is well to observe, appears to point out Israel's future restoration immediately after in a slightly different phraseology, which I think ought to be noticed. "Then," he says (that is, when God has brought in the Gentiles, as we have seen), "Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land." Their restoration to the land is made evident here, their being joined — not only Judah, but even reprobate Ephraim — into Israel as a whole. "For great shall be the day of Jezreel." The very name of Jezreel, which was before a term of reproach and initiatory judgment, is now turned by the grace of God into a title of infinite mercy, when they shall be indeed the seed of God, not for scattering only but for the rich harvest of blessing that is to characterize the millennial day. Such is the first chapter.

Hosea 2 begins like the end of the first. In the rest of the chapter we have God carrying out a part but not the whole of the wonderful principles that are so compressed in the first chapter. We begin with the message: "Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ruhamah. Plead with your mother." It is a call to those who like Hosea could feel, speak, and act according to the Spirit of Christ, with the courage inspired by the certainty of such relationships, though for the present the state of the people was as far from comforting as could well be conceived, as indeed is plain from the next and following verses. "Brethren" and "sisters" look at the Jews (I think) individually. "Your mother" looks at them corporately as a body. "Plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight." Here then we behold a most painful picture — Jehovah threatening to put Israel to shame, and to have no mercy upon her children, because their mother had behaved shamelessly towards Himself. "For she is not my wife, nor am I her husband." She must put away her scandalous unfaithfulness, "lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day when she was born, and make her as the desert, and cause her to die of thirst. On her children I will have no mercy; for they are lewd children, because their mother hath committed lewdness, their parent hath acted shamefully; for she said, I will follow my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my wine."

Accordingly Jehovah threatens to hedge up her way with thorns. "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and raise a wall, that she may not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now." There was compunction occasionally, a little revival from time to time even in Israel; but the people never really repented or consequently abandoned their course of sin. Their good resolutions were the proof of God's goodness and the fruit of His testimony, but they never effected a thorough repentance of Israel. "For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they made into images of gold." Thus all was perverted to the service, and it was imputed to the favour of false gods. "Therefore," says He, "I will take my corn in its time, and my new wine in its season; and I will recover my wool and my flax designed to cover her nakedness. And I will expose her vileness before her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of my hand." Then He threatens that all her mirth shall cease, "her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn assemblies. And I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees." Even her natural blessings must be cut off which her unbelief made an excuse for the idols she set up. "And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them." All her luxurious and idolatrous sins therefore would come up in remembrance for judgment.

Nevertheless Jehovah remembers mercy, and immediately after announces that He will allure her, and, though leading her into the wilderness, speak soothingly to her. But it should not be the past renewed, the old and sad history of Israel rehearsed once more; for to her He would grant her vineyards thence, the valley of Achor for a door of hope. The very place which of old was a door of judgment under Joshua becomes a door of hope in the prophetic vision. "And she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." Nor shall this freshness of renewed youth fade away as then. "And it shall be at that day, saith Jehovah, that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali," (that is, "husband" in love instead of mere "lord," were it in the best and truest sense of dominion and possession from her mouth); also the many and false lords should no more be remembered by their names. "And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword."

Thus we see that, coincident with the return of Israel to Jehovah, and this flowing out of His grace towards them, there shall follow universal blessedness. God will make all the earth to feel to its own joy the gracious restoration of His long-estranged people. With the beasts of the field, and the fowls of heaven, and the reptiles of the earth, Jehovah declares He will make a covenant for them in that day. It is infatuation to think that all this was fully accomplished at the return from the Babylonish captivity. The result is that even Christians, misled by this miserable error, are drawn away into the rationalistic impiety of counting God's word here mere hyperbole to heighten the effect, as if the Holy Spirit deigned to be a verbal trickster or a prophet were as vain as a litterateur. No; it is a brighter day when the power of God will make a complete clearance from the world of disorder, misrule, man's violence and corruption, as well as reduce to harmless and happy subjection the animal kingdom at large.

On the other hand, it is not the epoch of the Incarnation, as some pious men say; though how they can venture on it is marvellous. "That day" is still future, and awaits the appearing and the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. It its distressing to confound such a prophecy with Peter's vision in order to apply all to the church now. "The bow and the sword and the battle I will break and remove out of the earth or land, and will make them to lie down safely." But, better than all, "I will also betroth thee to myself for ever;" for what is the worth of every other mercy compared with this nearest association with Jehovah Himself? "Yea, I will betroth thee to myself in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies," says He for the third time. "I will betroth thee to myself in faithfulness; and thou shalt know Jehovah."

Then comes a final and still fuller assurance. "And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith Jehovah, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel." What an uninterrupted line of blessing, from the heavens down to every earthly blessing in the land of Israel! Every creature of God shall then reap in full enjoyment the fruits of the restored and consummated union of Jehovah with His ancient people. "And I will sow her unto me in the earth [referring to the name of Jezreel]; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy (or Lo-ruhamah); and I will say to them which were not my people (or Lo-ammi), My people thou; and they shall say, My God."

Alas! the heavens had been severed, necessarily and long severed, from the earth by the sin of man, and Satan had gained power not merely on the earth, but above could claim a seeming title of righteousness as accuser before God; and thus the heavens were turned into brass against His people, whom the same enemy so often deceived, perverting that which ought to have been the constant governing power and symbol of all, that influenced men in relation to God into his mainspring of corruption. For instead of looking up to God in adoration, man adored the heavens and their host rather than God as the highest object of his worship. Such was the earliest form of idolatry. It was there that Satan's power particularly developed itself, in the turning of the highest creatures of God, the most significant parts and signs of His blessing to man, into instruments of the worst corruption. In that day Jehovah will show His power and goodness in destroying and reversing the work of Satan.

Instead therefore of longer hearing his accusation in the heavens who had only sought to dishonour God and involve man in his own ruin, Jehovah will clear the heavens. There will be restored freedom between the Creator and the higher creation, which speaks to Him as it were on behalf of the thirsty earth, Satan being then expelled, and his power and corrupting influence broken, never more to enter there again. Then, as it is said here, "the heavens shall hear the earth, and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil." That is, instead of the old and complete breach between the creation and God, and consequently therefore, through the serpent's wiles, desolation justly inflicted by God because of its fallen head, Satan will be effectually gone and all the effects of his power effaced. For the Second man will establish peace on a righteous ground for ever between God and Israel, and all the creatures of God, from the highest down to the lowest, enter into rest and joy.

Thus there is a total reversal of what Satan had done by sin throughout the universe, but especially in view of Israel; so that the names of the first chapter, which then betokened divine judgment, are now converted into mercy and blessing. "The earth [or land] shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel," as Israel is styled, the seed of God. Lo-ruhamah God calls Ruhamah; and to Lo-ammi He says, "Ammi thou." No doubt there is an allusion in Jezreel to their antecedent dispersion; in no way to anything Israel has been during their days of shame and sorrow, but rather to a fresh sowing of them in the land by Jehovah's grace to His glory. The proper fulfilment of this (whatever be the verification of its principle in the Christian remnant, as we see in 1 Peter 2) awaits the future and manifest kingdom of Jehovah and His Anointed. Then, not in pledge but in fulness, will it be seen by all the world that Hosea has not written in vain: "I will sow her unto me in the earth." It is granted that Jehovah intends to take all the earth under His manifest sway (Psalms 2, Zechariah 14), but a great mistake that "the land" will not have a central place in this vast scheme of earthly blessing. The church will be the *New* Jerusalem, the heavenly metropolis, coming down from God out of heaven, to which she properly belongs as the bride of the Lamb. But the earth is to be blessed, and pre-eminently the land of Israel under Christ's glorious reign; for the divine purpose is to sum up all things in Him in whom we have obtained an inheritance — all things, whether they be things in heaven or things on earth. He, the Son in a way quite unique, is Heir of all in the truest and fullest sense, and the kingdom at His coming will display what faith believes while it is unseen.

Hosea 3 presents a still more concise summary of Israel's past, present, and future, yet with fresh and striking features in this new outline, brief as it is. Even such Jews as acknowledge their own prophets as divinely inspired confess that Hosea in verse 4 describes exactly their present state, as it has also been for many centuries: neither altar of God nor idolatry, no consultation by the true priests or by idols; though they flatter themselves that they still adhere to Jehovah notwithstanding their sins.* How blind to overlook the teaching that they are out of relation to Jehovah, and that it is only after the present long-lasting anomaly in their state that they are to seek their God!

{*Leeser's Twenty-four Books of the Holy Scriptures, page 1242. London edition.}

This chapter winds up, as has been stated, the introductory portion of our prophecy. Hosea is still occupied with the purposes of God. "Then said Jehovah unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress." Again that most distressing contrast; the object of Jehovah's affection, and withal the base and gross return of Israel represented by Gomer, who had been unfaithful to the prophet, as was intimated before the marriage that she would be. The precision of the language, and the purity of God's servant even under so singular an injunction, are equally beautiful. She is called no longer thy wife but "a woman;" but her impurity was after marriage, and so she is justly named an adulteress. He is told to go again, and love her, a woman beloved by a "friend." Conjugal love is not intended; yet was she to be loved, as indeed she had been: there was no excuse for her sin in any failure of his affection. The exhortation was not after the manner of men, nor even of the law which regulated Israel's ordinary ways. It was grace, and "according to the love of Jehovah toward the sons of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons [or cakes] of grapes." For the connection of cakes with idolatry, see Jer 7:18, Jer 44:19. The purchase-money, half in barley, half in money, is that of a female slave; which marks the degradation to which the guilty woman had been reduced; it was of course not a dowry, as she had been married to him already. "And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide [lit. sit] for me many days," said the prophet to her; "thou shalt not commit lewdness, and thou shalt not be to* a man [i.e. neither in sin nor in lawful married life]: so I also toward* thee" — his heart and care here, not "to her" as her husband, but "toward" her in affection as a friend. The bearing of this on Israel is next explained: "for the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without seraphim: afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek their God, and David their king; and shall fear Jehovah and his goodness in the latter days."

{*The authorised version by giving "for me" and "for thee" seems slightly to injure the force by its vague sameness of rendering.}

Here are many important points which we could not have gathered from either the first chapter or the second. We have seen the general position down to the end in Hosea 1; we have had certain details about Israel in Hosea 2; but Hosea 3 furnishes the solemn evidence that the humiliation of Israel was to involve a most marked and peculiar isolation, and that it was not to be a passing visitation but a prolonged state, while grace would bless more than ever in the end. "For the sons of Israel shall abide many days." This could not have been concluded from the language of the preceding chapters. The picture therefore would not have been complete without it. Hence the Spirit of God, true to the divine purpose, gives us enough in these few words to meet the objections of him who might complain that Christianity supposes such an immense time as the period of Israel's blindness and departure from God. The answer is that the Jewish prophet says as much, and thereby the Lord leaves room for all that had to come in meanwhile. Not of course that "many days" would convey the thought of ages as the necessary meaning at first, but that as the time lengthened out, it would be seen that it had been all foreseen and predicted.

But there is more. For they are to remain "without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without a seraphim." Further, they were not to take up idolatrous statues or images, as they had so often done up to the captivity; and as they should be without an ephod, the distinctive priestly apparel, so they should not fall back on tutelary divinities as they used to do for anticipating the future. They should not have a king as before the captivity, nor a prince as the Jews had after their return from Babylon. Israel afterwards had neither; and even the Jews lost what they had not long after Christ came. Again, they were to be "without a sacrifice," their sacred as well as civil polity was at an end; for what is the law without a sacrifice? Thus it is a state of things far more true now since the rejection of the Messiah, than up to that transitional period when Messiah came to them; for, although they had not a king, they had a sort of princely ruler. Certainly in the days of the Lord there was under the authority of the Roman empire a subordinate king or ruler, who might be called prince in a certain sense. They were also to be not only without the worship of the true God, but even without the false gods to which they had formerly been victims. Clearly then this describes the present condition of Israel — the most anomalous spectacle the world has ever seen — a people who go on age after age without any of those elements which are supposed to be essential for keeping a people in existence. For they have lost their king and prince, they have neither God nor an idol. They are not able to present a sacrifice, having nobody that they know to be a priest. Partly since Babylon carried them into captivity, entirely since Titus destroyed Jerusalem, they are literally without those genealogies which the priests must possess and produce in order to prove their title to minister in the holy place. Whatever their pretensions, they can prove nothing, and yet they are upheld by God.

Thus we have here in a single verse of our prophet the most complete picture of their present state found in the word of God — a picture which no Jew can deny to be a likeness of their actual state. The more honest they may be, the more they must acknowledge the living truth of the representation. Now, that God should have no connection with anything on the earth — that He should be effectuating no purpose in a distinct manner for His own glory — would be a monstrous notion, only fit for the wildest Epicurean dreamer, and a practical denial of the living God. Consequently, that God should use this time of the recess of Israel for the bringing in of other counsels is the simplest thing possible, which we can all understand. The Jew by and by will confess that he was inexcusably faithless in his ways and mistaken in his thoughts; he had here at least the negative side of the picture, his own enigmatic state, the people of God not His people, a nation without a government, and, stranger still, with no false god and yet without the true, having neither priest nor sacrifice. The Spirit of God gives the positive side in the New Testament, where we have the call of the Gentiles meanwhile, and within it the gathering of the faithful into the church — Christ's body.

But in addition to all, the last verse furnishes another most distinct disclosure, which none but prejudiced men could overlook, that God has not done with Israel as such. It is not true, therefore, that the sons of Israel are to be merged in Christianity. They are said (ver. 5) afterwards not to turn but to "return," and seek Jehovah their God. This is not a description of becoming members of Christ, or of receiving the new and deeper revelations of the New Testament. They will never as a nation form the heavenly body of Christ, either wholly or in part. They will be saved in God's grace through faith in the Lord Jesus, but rather according to the measure vouchsafed to their fathers than to us now, with the modification of the manifest reign of the Lord. Compare Isaiah 11, Luke 1, Romans 11. Individuals merge in Christianity now of course, and are brought out of their state of Judaism consequently; but here we have a different and future state of things quite distinct in some material respects from anything that was or from anything that is, though there be but one Saviour, and but one Spirit, and but one God the Father. "Afterwards shall the sons of Israel return and seek" — not the exalted Head in heaven nor the gospel as such, but — "Jehovah their God." I grant you it is the same God, yet as Jehovah. It is not the revelation of His name as the Messiah (when rejected, and above all dead and risen) made Him known as "His Father and our Father, His God and, our God." It is not the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit into which we are baptized with water. Here it is rather the form and measure vouchsafed to the nation of old. In short it is God made known after a Jewish sort. And what confirms this is the next expression, "and David their king" — that same blessed person, even the Messiah as such, who unites these two glories in His person, though the former of course not exclusively.

Evidently therefore a state of things is before us quite distinct from Christianity. The Targum and the Rabbinical expositors own that David here means the Messiah. "And they shall fear toward Jehovah, and toward His goodness in the latter day." Thus we have clearly in this passage, not only the present abnormal condition of Israel, but the future restoration of their blessedness, yea, more than they ever yet possessed.* If "the latter days" mean, according to the well-known rule of Kimchi and other Jewish doctors, the days of the Messiah, the New Testament demonstrates that the question has still to be decided between the days of His first advent or those of His second. The context proves that in the Old Testament these days always look on to His reign in power and glory; but various parts of it in the Psalms and the Prophets attest His profound humiliation and death as clearly as His reign over Israel and the earth. The Jews and the Gentiles are quite if not equally wrong for want of simple-hearted intelligence without confusion of the New Testament with the Old.

{*Dr. Henderson renders the last clause, "shall tremblingly hasten to Jehovah and to his goodness." His goodness will attract but overawe their souls. It is real and pious feeling, but in accordance with their relationship — hardly with that of the Christian; and so the New Testament never speaks in exactly the same way. It is unwise and unfaithful to force the scriptures.}

The rest of the prophecy consists of the indignant appeals of the Holy Spirit to conscience
because of the increasing evils of Israel — not so much the judgment of God on a grand scale, and His grace at the end, but His people caused to see themselves over and over again, and in every class, in presence of His patient but righteous ways with them. I do not mean that we shall not find here, especially at the end, what Jehovah will do in His goodness, but it consists much more of presentation sketches of Israel in a moral point of view. His dealings and denunciations compare the actual state then with the past, but the Spirit of prophecy launches into the future also. This, in fact, will be found in the rest of the prophecy, which closes with not a call only to repentance, but Jehovah's final assurance to Israel of His mercy, love, and rich blessing. Thus the two divisions end alike with Israel blessed inwardly and outwardly on earth to the praise of Jehovah their God, wound up with a moral appeal and a warning at the conclusion of all (Hos 14:9).

The prophecy of Hosea naturally divides itself into two principal divisions with minor sections. The first consists of Hosea 1, 2, , 3; the second, of the rest of the book. Within these greater divisions, however, we have distinct parts.

The first chapter presents the prophet with his ministry
"in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel." He was therefore a contemporary of Isaiah, who prophesied during the same kings, save that in the case of Hosea only do we hear of the then reigning king of Israel, of whom, rather than Judah, our prophet treats. For the word of Jehovah to him takes into account the condition of Israel as a whole, and particularly uses the dismal condition of Ephraim for the moral good of Judah. This is true of the whole book, which is remarkable for its occupation simply with the Jew, without noticing (as do other prophets) the Gentiles either for judgment or for blessing.

Hosea is, one might say, exclusively devoted to the ancient people of God, with a very slight but remarkable exception in the first chapter; but even it is couched in terms so enigmatical (and this, I believe, with divine intention for a special end), that many have failed to discern the truth contemplated in consequence of not using the light supplied in the New Testament. But there cannot be a more striking example than this very instance affords of the all-importance of using one part of scripture, not to correct indeed — this were impossible and irreverent — but better to understand another. In order to profit by the fuller revelation of the mind of God, we do well to read the earlier communications in the strongest light vouchsafed to us. It is one mind conveyed by one Spirit; and God can give us grace by dependence on Himself to guard us, as far as is consistent with our moral condition, from that narrowness to which we are all too prone, making certain portions of scripture our favourites, so as to interfere with due heed to the rest of the word. Those who indulge in these thoughts cannot be expected to understand the word of God, and, in what they make their one-sided study, are apt to fall into singular and sometimes fatal mistakes. The most precious truths of God, if they are used in an exclusive way, may by the enemy be turned to the support of serious error. Thus there would be danger if there were, for instance, the systematic limiting of the mind to the resurrection or heavenly side of divine truth. Or again, take prophecy; and how withering to the soul when that part of scripture practically becomes a monopoly? Take the church — for it does not matter what — and in it there is no security one whit more. The reason is simple; the secret of power, blessing, security, and communion is found, not in resurrection or heaven, not in prophecy nor in the church, nor in any other conceivable branch of truth, but in Christ, who alone gives the whole truth. Consequently we see that what we all know to be a doctrine and a necessary principle in God's revelation is true also as applied to every detail of practical experience.

In this case, then, the date of Hosea indicates his interest in Israel, and the work that God assigned him in reference to the twelve-tribed nationality of His people, when the ruin of Israel was at hand, and that of Judah was ere long to follow. Brief as his handling of his subject is, there is a remarkable completeness in the prophecy; and the moral element is as prominent in the second part, as the dispensational is in the first. The parenthesis of Gentile empire is quite omitted throughout. He is filled with the afflictions and the guilt of Israel as a whole, and, more than any other of the twelve shorter prophets, breaks forth into passionate and renewed grief over the people. The book accordingly abounds, as none other does so much, in the most abrupt transitions, which therefore make the style of Hosea singularly difficult in some respects, and, it may be added too, far more so to us just because of its intensely Jewish character. Not being Jews, we do not come under their character of relationship; but those who are to be called as Jews by and by will understand it well. They, having that position, and being thus called (though through the sense of the deepest sins on their part, at the same time knowing the yearnings of the Spirit of God over them), will enter into, as I believe they will profit by, that which to us presents difficulty because we are not in the same position.

The first chapter mainly consists of symbolic action, which represents the course of God's purposes. "The beginning of the word of Jehovah by Hosea. And Jehovah said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms* and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from Jehovah." Nothing can be more evident than this declared object. The prophet is commanded to do that which was necessarily most painful in itself, and suggestive of what he as a man of God must have felt to be humbling as well as repulsive. But such was the attitude of Israel to their God, and Jehovah would make the prophet and those who heeded the prophecy to understand in measure what He must feel as to His people. "So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son. And Jehovah said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel. And it shall come to pass at that day, that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." This was the first great blow. Israel was to be smitten in the house of Jehu, the avenger of the blood-guiltiness that had been brought in by the idolatrous Jezebel. Jehu was a rough man, vain and ambitious, suited notwithstanding to deal in his rude fashion with that which had dishonoured Jehovah — a man far enough outside the current of the feelings of the Spirit of God, but none the less employed in an external way to deal with the evident and open evil of Ahab's house and Israel.

{*The very least we can say is that the expression intimated to the prophet what Gomer was going to be. But it must be allowed that the phrase naturally conveys the impression that she had already been guilty of an impure life too common where idolatry reigned. If Salmon begat Boaz of Rahab the harlot, it is not hard to conceive the Lord commanding the prophet to take Gomer to wife as a symbolic parable to Israel. It may be worth noticing that, while in ver. 3 she is said to have borne "him" a son, this is not the phrase, but one more vague, in verses 6 and 8. The mother's character might suffice to stamp itself on the children; but the absence of the pronoun in the case of Lo-ruhamah and Lo-ammi, as contrasted with Jezreel is under the circumstances remarkable.}

Nevertheless this, as it had no root in God, so it had no strength to maintain itself against other evils. Hence, although it suited the policy of Jehu to deal with certain gross idolatries, the political-religious evil that characterized the kingdom of Israel seemed necessary to sustain him against the house of David. Consequently, as he had no conscience as to the sin of Jeroboam, this was judged of Jehovah in due time. God smote not only Jehu's house, but Israel. The kingdom was to pass, though it might linger for a little while afterwards; but it was smitten of God. This is what is represented by Jezreel. God would scatter in due time. The Assyrian broke the power of Israel in the valley of Jezreel (afterwards called Esdraelon), a scene of covetousness and blood from first to last.

Then again we find a daughter appears, whose name was to be called Lo-ruhamah, a name which expresses the absence of pity towards the people. No more mercy was to be shown. Thus the failure of the kingdom of Israel, which soon followed after the dealing with Jehu's house, was not then complete. There would be still more judgment from God; for He says, "I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel." Jezreel was but the beginning of the judgments of God. "I will utterly take them away." It was not therefore the collapse of the kingdom of Jehu only, but Israel as a whole was to be swept from the land, never more to be restored as a separate polity. "But," says He in the very same breath, "I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by Jehovah their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." The Assyrian was allowed to destroy the kingdom of Israel, but was himself checked by divine power when he hoped to carry off Judah.

Thus there was a lengthening of the tranquillity for Judah. They, at least for the time, exhibited fidelity to Jehovah in their measure. Afterwards another child is born — a son; and "then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be to you." It was no longer therefore simply a case of breaking up Israel completely, but Judah now comes into judgment. As long as the royal tribe stood, there was still a nucleus round which all the people might be gathered. As long as the house of David was true in any measure with Judah attached yet far from being true, God could (morally speaking) yet work recovery, or at any rate He could make them, as it were, swell out into a great people. But now, on the proved faithlessness of the innermost circle, God represents the solemn crisis by the birth of the son called Lo-ammi. Yet there is no notice of the Babylonish conqueror. The prophet abruptly passes by the captivity of Judah, and at once goes forward to the glorious reversal of all the sentences of woe. It is the reunion of all the tribes, but not the scanty return under Zerubbabel. A greater is here, even Messiah. Undoubtedly He is chosen, given and appointed to them by God; but it was important also to show that they will yield willing and active subjection. Gathered together, Israel and Judah shall make (or appoint) themselves one head, and shall come (or go) up out of the land: not Babylon or Assyria, or even the earth at large, I think, but rather an expression of their union religiously in the same solemn assemblies and feasts, as we have already seen them one people under one head. It was accomplished neither after the captivity nor when Christ came, but strikingly the reverse. It remains to be fulfilled when He comes to reign over the earth. "For," then indeed, "great [shall be] the day of Jezreel." God shall sow His people in His land, not scatter them out of it. It is the day not of humiliation but of manifested glory. "Yet," says He in His very sentence of judgment on Judah, "the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, in the place where it shall be said unto them, Ye [are] not my people, it shall be said unto them, [Ye are] the sons of the living God."

Observe the remarkable change here. It is the scripture already referred to as the mysterious intimation of the call of the Gentiles in pure grace. This, though distinctly taught in Romans 9, surprises many readers. The reason is because we are apt to regard all as an antithesis in a merely human or limited fashion. If any man of God on the face of the earth had had the writing of the sentence left to himself, had there not been the full power of God which is meant by inspiration in its true and proper sense, it seems quite inconceivable that this sentence could ever have been written. Who would have said it, let him be supposed the best of men, if he loved Israel as a good Jew? Least of all surely Hosea, whose heart was all on fire for the people, both in horror on account of their wickedness and in yearning after their blessedness. But for that reason he of himself would have said, not "Ye are not my people," but Ye shall be made my faithful people. No, this is not what God says, but something quite different. The strong bias so natural even to a good man would have rendered it out of the question to speak as Hosea does. We find it hard to take in, even when written plainly before our eyes, the distinct teaching of God, conveying as it does an unexpected form of thought and an altogether new subject. The Spirit inspired him and can teach us.

28 Hosea 1-3 contd

This, as hinted before, is the scripture which the apostle Paul employs in Romans 9, as is well known. There he is vindicating, as is plain, the sovereign call of God — the only resource for man where all is ruined. How beautifully this fits in with our prophet is evident. The ruin of Israel was already there; the ruin of Judah was impending. All was doomed. What then can man fall back on? If the people of God on the earth turned out only a mass of ruins on one side or another, what was there to look to? Nothing and none but God, not His law, but His sovereign grace. Accordingly this is exactly what does come in; as indeed the sovereignty of God must always be the help and sustainment and joy of a soul that is thoroughly beaten out of itself when its evil is truly judged before God. But it often takes a long while to break a man down to that point. Hence it is that many feel difficulties about it, unless perhaps on their death-bed. Then at least, if anywhere, man is true. God is true always; but man (I am speaking now only of such as are born of God) then parts company with those visions, or rather fitful shadows, which had disordered and misled him during the activities of life. Then indeed he realizes what he is as well as what God is. Accordingly, if he lose all confidence in himself in every possible way, it is only to enjoy a confidence, never so well known before, in God Himself.

This is precisely what we find here in the reasonings of the apostle Paul. It is naturally offensive to the pride of man's heart, and more particularly to a Jew's. For had they not received magnificent promises from God? It was a great difficulty to them, and it sounds very natural and formidable, how it was possible that the promises of God should — I may not say fail, but — *seem* to fail. But this came from looking simply at themselves with the promises of God. We must remember that the Bible does not contain merely the promises — it largely consists, and particularly the Old Testament, of a divine history of the responsibility of man. We must leave room for both, so as not to let the responsibility of man overthrow the promises of God; but, on the other hand, not to neutralize the responsibility of the one because of the promises of the other.

The tendency of all men is to become what people call either Arminians or Calvinists; and a hard thing it is to hold the balance of truth without wavering to either side. There is nothing, however, too hard for the Lord; and the word of God is the unfailing preservative from either one or the other. I am perfectly persuaded — spite of partisans who think only of their own views, or freethinkers who have no difficulty in allowing that both are there — that neither Arminianism nor Calvinism is in the Bible, and that they are both thoroughly wrong without even the smallest justification. The fact is, that the tendency to either is deeply seated in unrenewed minds — that is, the same man may be an Arminian at one time and a Calvinist at another; and it is likely that, if he has been a violent Arminian one day, he may become a violent Calvinist to-morrow. But the roots of both lie in man and in his onesidedness. The truth of God is in His word as the revelation of Christ by the Spirit, and nowhere else.

So it will be observed in Romans 9 how completely the apostle sets aside the Jewish misuse of the promises of God. By a chain of the most convincing facts and testimonies of the Old Testament urged in this wonderful chapter, he compels the Jew to abandon the flattering conceit of national election, used absolutely and exclusively as was his wont; for really it is a conceit of himself after all. If they hold to the exclusive pretensions of Israel as simply deriving from Abraham in the line of flesh (which was their point), in that case they must accept others to be their companions; for Abraham had more sons than Isaac, and Isaac had another son than Jacob. The ground of flesh therefore is utterly indefensible. A mere lineal descent would have let in the Ishmaelites, for instance; and of them the Jew would not hear. If he pleaded that Ishmael sprang from Hagar, a slave, be it so; but what of Edom, born of the same mother as well as father, of Isaac and Rebecca, twin brother of Jacob himself? Consequently the ground taken was palpably unsound and untenable. We must therefore fall back upon the sole resource for man's evil and ruin — God's sovereignty and gracious call. This was so much the more in point, because there was a time, even in the early history of the chosen people, when nothing less than God could have preserved it and given a ray of hope. It was not the Ishmaelites, not the Edomites, not the Gentiles, but Israel, who made the calf of gold. Had God dealt with them according to what they had been there to Him, must there not have been utter and immediate destruction? It is referred to now because of the moral principles connected with the citation of Hosea in Romans 9; and indeed all these truths appear to me to run together in the mind of the Spirit of God. If therefore we would understand the prophecy, we must follow and receive that which may seem discursively pursued in the New Testament, but which really was before the inspiring Spirit here too.

Consequently we have in the prophet what was true morally from the beginning of their sad history. It was now verging towards the bitter end of Israel, with Judah's ruin in full view. The very fact of prophets being raised up proved that the end was approaching; for prophecy only comes in with departure from God. There is no such form of revelation as prophecy when things run smooth and fair; nor is it then, morally speaking, required. What we have in days of comparative fidelity is the setting forth of privilege and duty; but when the privilege is despised and the duty not done, when God's people are in evident guilt, and judgment must follow, prophecy comes to tell of God's judging the evil, but with mercy and yet better blessing to the obedient remnant. This is true in principle even of the garden of Eden. God did not speak of the Seed of the woman till Adam was fallen; and so when Israel had transgressed like Adam, prophecy shines out. If the ruin were before Moses' eyes, as indeed it was, prophecy was vouchsafed to the lawgiver himself, as we see conspicuously in the end of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, not to speak of the wondrous burst through Balaam's mouth in the close of Numbers. Afterwards, when God had brought in every new form of blessing to kings raised up in grace to sustain the people, yet the ruin was only more decided. Prophecy too assumes a more comprehensive, systematic, and complete shape. A whole host of prophets, one might say, appears at this time; mighty prophetic utterances warned the people when outwardly things seemed strong but all was over before God, who therefore caused the alarm to be sounded with a remarkable and persistent urgency. The trumpet, as it were, was blown for Jehovah all over the land; and thus Hosea, as we know, was the contemporary of Amos, Micah, Isaiah, and perhaps other prophets at this time. There had been one even earlier still, as we may see if we compare the history. There was a peculiar reason for not putting the earliest first in order, which I hope to explain when I arrive at his book.

Already then the ruin was such that God's sovereignty was the only sure ground which could be taken. Hence we have seen that the apostle Paul uses this to point out, not merely the resource of grace for Israel, but that on Israel's failure it was perfectly open to God to go out to the Gentiles. For this is what Paul quotes the passage for in Romans 9 : "That he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us whom he hath called, not of the Jews only." From the moment God falls back on His own sovereignty the ground is as open for a Gentile as for a Jew. God is not sovereign if He may not choose whom He pleases. If He is sovereign, then it is but natural that His sovereignty should display itself where it would be most conspicuous. The call of the Gentiles furnishes this occasion; for if they were worst, as they certainly were utterly degraded, for this very reason they were most fit objects for the exercise of the divine sovereignty in grace. "Even us whom he called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles. As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people which were not my people, and her beloved which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there shall they be called the children of the living God." It is evident that verse 25 the apostle interprets of the future call of Israel, the reinstatement of the people of God on a better footing than ever in sovereign grace; but he also applies verse 26 to the Gentiles.

Thus all is here set out in the most orderly method: "Even us whom he hath called, not of the Jews only" (shown in verse 25), "but also of the Gentiles" (referred to in verse 26). "And it shall come to pass that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there shall they be called the sons of the living God." Consequently sonship is far more characteristic of the call of the Gentile than of the Jew. Thus in the change (not a little one, as I was going to say, but very great indeed), in the avoidance of the expression "people" and the employment of "sons," God with the most admirable propriety, intimates by His prophet that when He was going to work in grace He would work worthily of His name. He would bring Gentiles not merely into the place of Israel, but into a better standing. Granted that they were the vilest of the vile: even so grace could and would raise them into the nearest relationship to God Himself. Then they should be, not a mere substitute for Israel, but "the sons of the living God" — a title never given in its full force to any but the Gentiles who are now being called.

In a vague and general sense, as compared with distant Gentiles, Israel is called son, child, first-born; but this merely as a nation, whereas "sons" is individual. The expression, "In the place . . . . Ye are the sons of the living God," in the latter part of verse 10, is what has been already spoken of as the dim allusion to the call of the Gentiles. but it is so dim that many persons swamp it all together, making it bear on Israel. It might have been viewed as referring to Israel if God had said, "Then they shall be Ammi." He does not, however, say this, but "sons of the living God."

Such is the point of the apostle Paul; and what confirms this as the true interpretation is, that Peter also quotes from our prophet, and indeed was writing to a remnant of Jews only, as the apostle Paul was writing in his own proper place to Gentiles. Peter, however, though he does quote Hosea, omits the words, "They shall be called the sons of the living God." See 1Pe 2:10 : "Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." For his object he quotes from Hosea 2, not from Hosea 1.

This strikingly falls in with what has been already observed, that the first chapter shows not merely the restoration of Israel (perfectly true as this is, and therefore in no way to be combated), but in a mysterious way room left by God for the bringing in of the Gentiles too. By the form of the allusion, which might very easily be overlooked, He proves His perfect knowledge beforehand, and makes a communication to us of the call of the Gentiles in their own proper distinctive relationship as sons of the living God, and not merely His people.

Hence it is that Peter, writing to Christian Jews only gives the latter. Although they had lost their place of people of God through idolatry — and certainly the rejection of the Messiah did not mend matters, but rather confirmed the righteous sentence of God, that the little remnant which had come back were as bad as their fathers, or even worse, for they certainly perpetrated a greater crime in the rejection of their own Messiah, — yet grace is come in, and they who have received the Messiah rejected but glorified, "are now the people of God." But he does not go farther, because he simply takes them up as persons who had by grace entered in faith into the privileges of Israel before Israel. They had received the Messiah; they were the remnant of that people. They who were not a people had become now a people; they who had not obtained mercy have now obtained mercy. But Paul, writing to the Gentiles, avails himself in a most appropriate way of what Peter passes by — not of Hos 2:23, but of Hos 1:10, which intimates the call of Gentiles in yet greater depth of mercy. At the same time he takes care to show that the Jew will require the very same ground of sovereign grace to bring him in by and by as we have for coming in now.

The prophet, it is well to observe, appears to point out Israel's future restoration immediately after in a slightly different phraseology, which I think ought to be noticed. "Then," he says (that is, when God has brought in the Gentiles, as we have seen), "Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land." Their restoration to the land is made evident here, their being joined — not only Judah, but even reprobate Ephraim — into Israel as a whole. "For great shall be the day of Jezreel." The very name of Jezreel, which was before a term of reproach and initiatory judgment, is now turned by the grace of God into a title of infinite mercy, when they shall be indeed the seed of God, not for scattering only but for the rich harvest of blessing that is to characterize the millennial day. Such is the first chapter.

Hosea 2 begins like the end of the first. In the rest of the chapter we have God carrying out a part but not the whole of the wonderful principles that are so compressed in the first chapter. We begin with the message: "Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ruhamah. Plead with your mother." It is a call to those who like Hosea could feel, speak, and act according to the Spirit of Christ, with the courage inspired by the certainty of such relationships, though for the present the state of the people was as far from comforting as could well be conceived, as indeed is plain from the next and following verses. "Brethren" and "sisters" look at the Jews (I think) individually. "Your mother" looks at them corporately as a body. "Plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight." Here then we behold a most painful picture — Jehovah threatening to put Israel to shame, and to have no mercy upon her children, because their mother had behaved shamelessly towards Himself. "For she is not my wife, nor am I her husband." She must put away her scandalous unfaithfulness, "lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day when she was born, and make her as the desert, and cause her to die of thirst. On her children I will have no mercy; for they are lewd children, because their mother hath committed lewdness, their parent hath acted shamefully; for she said, I will follow my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my wine."

Accordingly Jehovah threatens to hedge up her way with thorns. "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and raise a wall, that she may not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now." There was compunction occasionally, a little revival from time to time even in Israel; but the people never really repented or consequently abandoned their course of sin. Their good resolutions were the proof of God's goodness and the fruit of His testimony, but they never effected a thorough repentance of Israel. "For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they made into images of gold." Thus all was perverted to the service, and it was imputed to the favour of false gods. "Therefore," says He, "I will take my corn in its time, and my new wine in its season; and I will recover my wool and my flax designed to cover her nakedness. And I will expose her vileness before her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of my hand." Then He threatens that all her mirth shall cease, "her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn assemblies. And I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees." Even her natural blessings must be cut off which her unbelief made an excuse for the idols she set up. "And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them." All her luxurious and idolatrous sins therefore would come up in remembrance for judgment.

Nevertheless Jehovah remembers mercy, and immediately after announces that He will allure her, and, though leading her into the wilderness, speak soothingly to her. But it should not be the past renewed, the old and sad history of Israel rehearsed once more; for to her He would grant her vineyards thence, the valley of Achor for a door of hope. The very place which of old was a door of judgment under Joshua becomes a door of hope in the prophetic vision. "And she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." Nor shall this freshness of renewed youth fade away as then. "And it shall be at that day, saith Jehovah, that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali," (that is, "husband" in love instead of mere "lord," were it in the best and truest sense of dominion and possession from her mouth); also the many and false lords should no more be remembered by their names. "And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword."

Thus we see that, coincident with the return of Israel to Jehovah, and this flowing out of His grace towards them, there shall follow universal blessedness. God will make all the earth to feel to its own joy the gracious restoration of His long-estranged people. With the beasts of the field, and the fowls of heaven, and the reptiles of the earth, Jehovah declares He will make a covenant for them in that day. It is infatuation to think that all this was fully accomplished at the return from the Babylonish captivity. The result is that even Christians, misled by this miserable error, are drawn away into the rationalistic impiety of counting God's word here mere hyperbole to heighten the effect, as if the Holy Spirit deigned to be a verbal trickster or a prophet were as vain as a litterateur. No; it is a brighter day when the power of God will make a complete clearance from the world of disorder, misrule, man's violence and corruption, as well as reduce to harmless and happy subjection the animal kingdom at large.

On the other hand, it is not the epoch of the Incarnation, as some pious men say; though how they can venture on it is marvellous. "That day" is still future, and awaits the appearing and the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. It its distressing to confound such a prophecy with Peter's vision in order to apply all to the church now. "The bow and the sword and the battle I will break and remove out of the earth or land, and will make them to lie down safely." But, better than all, "I will also betroth thee to myself for ever;" for what is the worth of every other mercy compared with this nearest association with Jehovah Himself? "Yea, I will betroth thee to myself in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies," says He for the third time. "I will betroth thee to myself in faithfulness; and thou shalt know Jehovah."

Then comes a final and still fuller assurance. "And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith Jehovah, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel." What an uninterrupted line of blessing, from the heavens down to every earthly blessing in the land of Israel! Every creature of God shall then reap in full enjoyment the fruits of the restored and consummated union of Jehovah with His ancient people. "And I will sow her unto me in the earth [referring to the name of Jezreel]; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy (or Lo-ruhamah); and I will say to them which were not my people (or Lo-ammi), My people thou; and they shall say, My God."

Alas! the heavens had been severed, necessarily and long severed, from the earth by the sin of man, and Satan had gained power not merely on the earth, but above could claim a seeming title of righteousness as accuser before God; and thus the heavens were turned into brass against His people, whom the same enemy so often deceived, perverting that which ought to have been the constant governing power and symbol of all, that influenced men in relation to God into his mainspring of corruption. For instead of looking up to God in adoration, man adored the heavens and their host rather than God as the highest object of his worship. Such was the earliest form of idolatry. It was there that Satan's power particularly developed itself, in the turning of the highest creatures of God, the most significant parts and signs of His blessing to man, into instruments of the worst corruption. In that day Jehovah will show His power and goodness in destroying and reversing the work of Satan.

Instead therefore of longer hearing his accusation in the heavens who had only sought to dishonour God and involve man in his own ruin, Jehovah will clear the heavens. There will be restored freedom between the Creator and the higher creation, which speaks to Him as it were on behalf of the thirsty earth, Satan being then expelled, and his power and corrupting influence broken, never more to enter there again. Then, as it is said here, "the heavens shall hear the earth, and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil." That is, instead of the old and complete breach between the creation and God, and consequently therefore, through the serpent's wiles, desolation justly inflicted by God because of its fallen head, Satan will be effectually gone and all the effects of his power effaced. For the Second man will establish peace on a righteous ground for ever between God and Israel, and all the creatures of God, from the highest down to the lowest, enter into rest and joy.

Thus there is a total reversal of what Satan had done by sin throughout the universe, but especially in view of Israel; so that the names of the first chapter, which then betokened divine judgment, are now converted into mercy and blessing. "The earth [or land] shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel," as Israel is styled, the seed of God. Lo-ruhamah God calls Ruhamah; and to Lo-ammi He says, "Ammi thou." No doubt there is an allusion in Jezreel to their antecedent dispersion; in no way to anything Israel has been during their days of shame and sorrow, but rather to a fresh sowing of them in the land by Jehovah's grace to His glory. The proper fulfilment of this (whatever be the verification of its principle in the Christian remnant, as we see in 1 Peter 2) awaits the future and manifest kingdom of Jehovah and His Anointed. Then, not in pledge but in fulness, will it be seen by all the world that Hosea has not written in vain: "I will sow her unto me in the earth." It is granted that Jehovah intends to take all the earth under His manifest sway (Psalms 2, Zechariah 14), but a great mistake that "the land" will not have a central place in this vast scheme of earthly blessing. The church will be the *New* Jerusalem, the heavenly metropolis, coming down from God out of heaven, to which she properly belongs as the bride of the Lamb. But the earth is to be blessed, and pre-eminently the land of Israel under Christ's glorious reign; for the divine purpose is to sum up all things in Him in whom we have obtained an inheritance — all things, whether they be things in heaven or things on earth. He, the Son in a way quite unique, is Heir of all in the truest and fullest sense, and the kingdom at His coming will display what faith believes while it is unseen.

Hosea 3 presents a still more concise summary of Israel's past, present, and future, yet with fresh and striking features in this new outline, brief as it is. Even such Jews as acknowledge their own prophets as divinely inspired confess that Hosea in verse 4 describes exactly their present state, as it has also been for many centuries: neither altar of God nor idolatry, no consultation by the true priests or by idols; though they flatter themselves that they still adhere to Jehovah notwithstanding their sins.* How blind to overlook the teaching that they are out of relation to Jehovah, and that it is only after the present long-lasting anomaly in their state that they are to seek their God!

{*Leeser's Twenty-four Books of the Holy Scriptures, page 1242. London edition.}

This chapter winds up, as has been stated, the introductory portion of our prophecy. Hosea is still occupied with the purposes of God. "Then said Jehovah unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress." Again that most distressing contrast; the object of Jehovah's affection, and withal the base and gross return of Israel represented by Gomer, who had been unfaithful to the prophet, as was intimated before the marriage that she would be. The precision of the language, and the purity of God's servant even under so singular an injunction, are equally beautiful. She is called no longer thy wife but "a woman;" but her impurity was after marriage, and so she is justly named an adulteress. He is told to go again, and love her, a woman beloved by a "friend." Conjugal love is not intended; yet was she to be loved, as indeed she had been: there was no excuse for her sin in any failure of his affection. The exhortation was not after the manner of men, nor even of the law which regulated Israel's ordinary ways. It was grace, and "according to the love of Jehovah toward the sons of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons [or cakes] of grapes." For the connection of cakes with idolatry, see Jer 7:18, Jer 44:19. The purchase-money, half in barley, half in money, is that of a female slave; which marks the degradation to which the guilty woman had been reduced; it was of course not a dowry, as she had been married to him already. "And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide [lit. sit] for me many days," said the prophet to her; "thou shalt not commit lewdness, and thou shalt not be to* a man [i.e. neither in sin nor in lawful married life]: so I also toward* thee" — his heart and care here, not "to her" as her husband, but "toward" her in affection as a friend. The bearing of this on Israel is next explained: "for the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without seraphim: afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek their God, and David their king; and shall fear Jehovah and his goodness in the latter days."

{*The authorised version by giving "for me" and "for thee" seems slightly to injure the force by its vague sameness of rendering.}

Here are many important points which we could not have gathered from either the first chapter or the second. We have seen the general position down to the end in Hosea 1; we have had certain details about Israel in Hosea 2; but Hosea 3 furnishes the solemn evidence that the humiliation of Israel was to involve a most marked and peculiar isolation, and that it was not to be a passing visitation but a prolonged state, while grace would bless more than ever in the end. "For the sons of Israel shall abide many days." This could not have been concluded from the language of the preceding chapters. The picture therefore would not have been complete without it. Hence the Spirit of God, true to the divine purpose, gives us enough in these few words to meet the objections of him who might complain that Christianity supposes such an immense time as the period of Israel's blindness and departure from God. The answer is that the Jewish prophet says as much, and thereby the Lord leaves room for all that had to come in meanwhile. Not of course that "many days" would convey the thought of ages as the necessary meaning at first, but that as the time lengthened out, it would be seen that it had been all foreseen and predicted.

But there is more. For they are to remain "without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without a seraphim." Further, they were not to take up idolatrous statues or images, as they had so often done up to the captivity; and as they should be without an ephod, the distinctive priestly apparel, so they should not fall back on tutelary divinities as they used to do for anticipating the future. They should not have a king as before the captivity, nor a prince as the Jews had after their return from Babylon. Israel afterwards had neither; and even the Jews lost what they had not long after Christ came. Again, they were to be "without a sacrifice," their sacred as well as civil polity was at an end; for what is the law without a sacrifice? Thus it is a state of things far more true now since the rejection of the Messiah, than up to that transitional period when Messiah came to them; for, although they had not a king, they had a sort of princely ruler. Certainly in the days of the Lord there was under the authority of the Roman empire a subordinate king or ruler, who might be called prince in a certain sense. They were also to be not only without the worship of the true God, but even without the false gods to which they had formerly been victims. Clearly then this describes the present condition of Israel — the most anomalous spectacle the world has ever seen — a people who go on age after age without any of those elements which are supposed to be essential for keeping a people in existence. For they have lost their king and prince, they have neither God nor an idol. They are not able to present a sacrifice, having nobody that they know to be a priest. Partly since Babylon carried them into captivity, entirely since Titus destroyed Jerusalem, they are literally without those genealogies which the priests must possess and produce in order to prove their title to minister in the holy place. Whatever their pretensions, they can prove nothing, and yet they are upheld by God.

Thus we have here in a single verse of our prophet the most complete picture of their present state found in the word of God — a picture which no Jew can deny to be a likeness of their actual state. The more honest they may be, the more they must acknowledge the living truth of the representation. Now, that God should have no connection with anything on the earth — that He should be effectuating no purpose in a distinct manner for His own glory — would be a monstrous notion, only fit for the wildest Epicurean dreamer, and a practical denial of the living God. Consequently, that God should use this time of the recess of Israel for the bringing in of other counsels is the simplest thing possible, which we can all understand. The Jew by and by will confess that he was inexcusably faithless in his ways and mistaken in his thoughts; he had here at least the negative side of the picture, his own enigmatic state, the people of God not His people, a nation without a government, and, stranger still, with no false god and yet without the true, having neither priest nor sacrifice. The Spirit of God gives the positive side in the New Testament, where we have the call of the Gentiles meanwhile, and within it the gathering of the faithful into the church — Christ's body.

But in addition to all, the last verse furnishes another most distinct disclosure, which none but prejudiced men could overlook, that God has not done with Israel as such. It is not true, therefore, that the sons of Israel are to be merged in Christianity. They are said (ver. 5) afterwards not to turn but to "return," and seek Jehovah their God. This is not a description of becoming members of Christ, or of receiving the new and deeper revelations of the New Testament. They will never as a nation form the heavenly body of Christ, either wholly or in part. They will be saved in God's grace through faith in the Lord Jesus, but rather according to the measure vouchsafed to their fathers than to us now, with the modification of the manifest reign of the Lord. Compare Isaiah 11, Luke 1, Romans 11. Individuals merge in Christianity now of course, and are brought out of their state of Judaism consequently; but here we have a different and future state of things quite distinct in some material respects from anything that was or from anything that is, though there be but one Saviour, and but one Spirit, and but one God the Father. "Afterwards shall the sons of Israel return and seek" — not the exalted Head in heaven nor the gospel as such, but — "Jehovah their God." I grant you it is the same God, yet as Jehovah. It is not the revelation of His name as the Messiah (when rejected, and above all dead and risen) made Him known as "His Father and our Father, His God and, our God." It is not the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit into which we are baptized with water. Here it is rather the form and measure vouchsafed to the nation of old. In short it is God made known after a Jewish sort. And what confirms this is the next expression, "and David their king" — that same blessed person, even the Messiah as such, who unites these two glories in His person, though the former of course not exclusively.

Evidently therefore a state of things is before us quite distinct from Christianity. The Targum and the Rabbinical expositors own that David here means the Messiah. "And they shall fear toward Jehovah, and toward His goodness in the latter day." Thus we have clearly in this passage, not only the present abnormal condition of Israel, but the future restoration of their blessedness, yea, more than they ever yet possessed.* If "the latter days" mean, according to the well-known rule of Kimchi and other Jewish doctors, the days of the Messiah, the New Testament demonstrates that the question has still to be decided between the days of His first advent or those of His second. The context proves that in the Old Testament these days always look on to His reign in power and glory; but various parts of it in the Psalms and the Prophets attest His profound humiliation and death as clearly as His reign over Israel and the earth. The Jews and the Gentiles are quite if not equally wrong for want of simple-hearted intelligence without confusion of the New Testament with the Old.

{*Dr. Henderson renders the last clause, "shall tremblingly hasten to Jehovah and to his goodness." His goodness will attract but overawe their souls. It is real and pious feeling, but in accordance with their relationship — hardly with that of the Christian; and so the New Testament never speaks in exactly the same way. It is unwise and unfaithful to force the scriptures.}

The rest of the prophecy consists of the indignant appeals of the Holy Spirit to conscience
because of the increasing evils of Israel — not so much the judgment of God on a grand scale, and His grace at the end, but His people caused to see themselves over and over again, and in every class, in presence of His patient but righteous ways with them. I do not mean that we shall not find here, especially at the end, what Jehovah will do in His goodness, but it consists much more of presentation sketches of Israel in a moral point of view. His dealings and denunciations compare the actual state then with the past, but the Spirit of prophecy launches into the future also. This, in fact, will be found in the rest of the prophecy, which closes with not a call only to repentance, but Jehovah's final assurance to Israel of His mercy, love, and rich blessing. Thus the two divisions end alike with Israel blessed inwardly and outwardly on earth to the praise of Jehovah their God, wound up with a moral appeal and a warning at the conclusion of all (Hos 14:9).

28 Hosea 4-14

In this second or remaining part the opening chapter (Hosea 4) begins to set out the ground of complaint against the sons of Israel. They are called to hear Jehovah; for He "hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land." It is well to note this. In the hypocrite or the theorist there may be a certain knowledge without good fruit; but, in those who are simple and real, knowledge of God cannot be separated from holy and righteous ways, as practical evil goes with ignorance of God. As the first verse puts their state negatively, in the second we have the positive wickedness charged home with amazing energy: "Swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, burst out, and blood [lit. bloods] toucheth on blood." There was to the prophet nothing else. Profanity against God, corruption and violence among men, filled the scene; and this in the land where Jehovah's eyes rested continually, whence He had destroyed the former inhabitants because of their iniquities. "Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away." God marked His sense of all by desolation in the lower creation, down to those which might seem farthest from the control or influence of man. Such was the havoc and misery under God's hand through Israel's sin. "Yet let not man strive, and let not man reprove; for thy people [are] as they that strive with the priest." It was vain for man to speak now: God must take in hand a people who were like such as rejected him who spoke and judged in His name. Therefore was their destruction imminent, and would it be unceasing, "thou" and "the prophet" and "thy mother" — all, root and branch. "Therefore shalt thou fall in the day, and the prophet also shall fall with thee in the night, and I will destroy thy mother."

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I also will reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: because thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I too will forget thy children" (ver. 6). The true meaning seems to be Israel's loss of their relative nearness to God as His people (Exodus 19), not to such sons of Aaron as might pander to irregularities in worship or connive at sin. Not individuals but "my people" are in question; as those who bring priests into the verse seem to see in the following clause. We shall hear of priests presently. Here it is the people. "As they increased, so they sinned against me: I will change their glory into shame. They eat up the sin [perhaps sin-offering] of my people, and long after [lift up their soul to] their iniquity. Therefore it shall be, like people, like priest; I will visit upon him his ways, and make his doings to return to him." Here imperceptibly we come from the people to the priest, who are singularly identified, as in wickedness so in punishment, in the latter clauses of verse 9 — not "them" but "him." They were alike evil. No class was exempt from pollution: people and priests were indiscriminately corrupt. From their position the priests might be more guilty than the people; but they were all morally at one. But God would not fail in judgment.

"For they shall eat, and not have enough: they shall commit lewdness, and shall not increase: because they have left off to take heed to Jehovah. My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them: for the spirit of lewdness hath caused them to err, and they have gone lewdly from under their God." Thus moral laxity and indulgence play into the hands of idolatry, as Satan takes advantage of the passions to hold men in his religious toils. Hence we see how well the expression for uncleanness morally suits the heart's going after false gods. "They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains, and offer incense on the hills, under the oak and the poplar and the terebinth, because their shade is good: therefore your daughters commit lewdness, and your daughters-in-law commit adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they commit lewdness, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery; for they themselves go aside with harlots, and sacrifice with prostitutes" (literally, consecrated to this demoralising false worship, which made their debasement a religious duty and a gain): "therefore the people not understanding shall be cast headlong."

Whatever their faults and ways against each other, deepest of all was their sin against Jehovah their God. And this furnishes the opportunity and necessity for the warning that they must lose their priestly character as a nation; that is, their distinctive nearness in relation to God. Further, let their ruin be a call to Judah to beware. This brings us face to face into the actual state of Israel when Hosea was on the earth. "Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend; and come not ye unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Beth-aven." The allusion is to the notorious idolatry of Israel and its chief seats, where God had once given the nation to judge their own evil, or near the spot where their father, prince with God, received promises of grace from Himself. It was now, however, not Bethel (house of God) but the neighbouring pollution, Beth-aven (house of vanity). "Nor swear, Jehovah liveth," thus adding insult against Jehovah to the injury done towards His truth; for idolatry is in no way mitigated, but the less excusable in him who even outwardly owns His name. This very recognition, and the attempt to mingle Jehovah with what was contrary to Jehovah, form the gravamen of their guilt, and its exact measure and worst aggravation at that epoch in the sight of God. The same principle applies now. To accredit with faith an offender is no ground whatever to count his sin less but rather more heinous. For there cannot be a more immoral or destructive principle than to allege the fact or hope of one's Christianity as a reason for slurring over his sin: on the contrary moral judgment and separation would be but due to the name of God, not to say in love to his soul whose deliverance and restoration we desire. For we have to do with God's will and ways; according to which a man's faith and confession of the Lord's name should be the ground of discipline, never of tolerating his sin. But latitudinarian laxity characterises these days, and is, under the show of grace, real evil in God's sight.

Take notice of another solemn principle in verse 17 after warning Judah from the sad ruin of Israel: a desolate land of exile was before them. "Ephraim is joined to idols [lit. toils]: let him alone." God chastises as long as there is the smallest feeling; but when He ceases to deal with the guilty, all is over morally speaking. When to Ephraim or any other He gives such rest as this, it is because hope is abandoned, and the evil is allowed to run its course unchecked. "Their drink is turned; her rulers greatly love infamy:" that is, they give themselves to nothing else than that which is and brings inevitable shame. "The wind hath bound her up in its wings, and they shall be ashamed of their sacrifice." They refused to learn of God in peace and righteousness, and must be given up to the winds, dispersed afar off by their enemies, and there be humbled seeing they refused it in their own land.

There is a triple summons in Hos 5:1. We begin with a distinct address to the priests, then a call to the people, and lastly to the house of the king. The last chapter was occupied with the people, and only by gradual transition came to the priests. But now the leaders are appealed to, religious and civil.

There is a notion that Hosea is disorderly, some going so far as to say that there is no regular method in the book. One can understand men owning that they have failed to comprehend a prophet so concise and so rapid in his changes. But it is grievous to add that a bishop who was considered to possess learning ventured to pronounce it merely the leaves of the Sibyl; as if any inspired words could with reverence be compared to mythic oracles of no heavenly birth, written on leaves and dispersed by the wind. When will men learn modesty as to themselves as well as reverence when they have to do with the word of God? If they cannot explain a passage or a book, why not confess their ignorance or hold their peace? For a man professing to be a chief shepherd of Christ to dare thus to speak of writings beyond his own measure evinces certainly anything but the lowly faithfulness which becomes a steward of God. Such, however, is the spirit of man increasingly in this age. To my conviction, though with abundant ground for feeling my own shortcomings, the prophecy is beyond doubt knit together so as to indicate a systematic chain, profoundly dealing with the whole people, and pointing the moral for Judah from apostate and callous Ephraim.

Idolatrous evil, with every other in its train, had perverted all grades and men in Israel up to the priests and the king's household — the one controlling religious matters, the other acting as the fountain of authority here below. Where now was the saint of Jehovah, or the witness of the true David that was coming? Reckless impiety and self-indulgence reigned. There was wickedness everywhere. The judgment was now towards those who should have judged righteously. Alas! they were a snare on Mizpah and a net spread on Tabor. East or west of the Jordan made no difference; and the scenes of former mercies which ought never to have been forgotten were remembered but to give effect to actual enticements of idolatry. And the revolters made the slaughter deep, though Jehovah had been a rebuke to them all. Little as the guilty people thought it in their headlong self-willed madness, He well knew Ephraim, and Israel was not hidden from Him: defiling corruption wrought everywhere. Their doings would not permit them to return to their God; for the spirit of lewdness was in their bosom, and they had not known Jehovah. Therefore should the pride of Israel be humbled before His face; and Israel and Ephraim should stumble in their iniquity, Judah too falling with them (verses 1-5).

"They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek Jehovah; but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them. They have dealt treacherously against Jehovah: for they have begotten strange children: now shall a month devour them with their portions." No offerings in such a state would avail: God stood aloof. Their treachery against Him was extreme; and the evil was perpetuated: but now, says the prophet in warning of speedy and sweeping judgments, shall one month devour them together with their portions [possessions]. Hence, says the prophet (verses 8, 9): "Blow ye the cornet in Gibeah, and the trumpet in Ramah: cry aloud at Beth-aven after thee, O Benjamin. Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke: among the tribes of Israel have I made known that which shall surely be."

Alas! Judah, instead of repenting, sought their own profit; and divine wrath must be poured on them. Ephraim, disobedient to God, was subservient enough to him who made Israel sin against God, who thereon is like a moth to him, and to Judah like rottenness. Chastening did not lead them to God, but to the Assyrian: could he heal or cure? It was bad enough to be treacherous to God; but it was worse that they must expose their impiety and unbelief by having recourse to the stranger. It is a distress when the children of God behave ill among themselves, but it is an awful thing when there is no shame in seeking the resources of the world that hates them. With Israel this was the case. They exposed themselves; they exposed God, so to speak, in His own people, the only link, we may say, with God on the earth. "When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb:* yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound." In fact it was God who was inflicting it: no wonder it was incurable. "For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah." Thus, we see, they are both now joined, as in sin so in punishment, first slow decay, and then fierce violence. Judah would take no warning from the sin of Ephraim or from his judgment now at hand. Hence says Jehovah, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early."

{*There seems no good reason to regard ja'-reb as a proper name, but rather as an ordinary appellation, meaning the king "that should contend," "plead," or "avenge" the hostile king: so many ancients and moderns. It was the Assyrian.}

This draws out a remarkable appeal from the agonized prophet (Hos 6:1): "Come, and let us return unto Jehovah; for he hath torn, and he will heal us." Is there any disorder here? What more proper? We have had the proof of the guilt of them all; not only the solemn warning of the Lord, but the distinct statement that He was going away from them to leave them to themselves — not absolutely as if He had done with them, though they had done with Him for the time; for He says, "In their affliction they will seek me early." There He gives them up. But this draws out the prophet. If such was the divine character, if God felt so keenly their adultery and spiritual treachery towards Himself, it nevertheless showed that His heart was towards them. "Come, and let us return." Why wait? Why go to the end of wickedness? "Come, and let us return unto Jehovah: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up," and with how much delight! It was God's hand that had brought them low, but He was able to heal. "After two days" — a sufficient witness, it would seem — "After two days he will revive us: in the third day" — the witness was now complete; for "in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established" — "in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight." He first gives enough proof of what we are; then He will prove what He is in raising His people up nationally as from the dead.

Can it be doubted that the passage does in an indirect and hidden but real way refer to the resurrection of Christ? He became the true Israel. Consequently, just as He went down in grace and perfectness into the depths where they had fallen justly for their sins, under the persecuting power of the Gentiles, and was called out of Egypt, as they had been of old (a scripture which is given later in Hosea and applied by the Spirit of God in Matthew 2), so I do not doubt here similarly we have the resurrection of the Lord in mysterious view. Nevertheless its plain and immediate bearing is rather on Israel than on the Messiah. To Him it only refers, inasmuch as the Holy Ghost cannot but bring Him everywhere in the Bible. No matter what He may treat of — if it be only loops or taches, badgers' or rams' skins, pillars, curtains, or anything else, revelation must always turn on Christ. His name lies at the bottom and is the top-stone of all. So it is here. Whatever the Spirit may hold out to Israel, Christ is the One fixed and guiding star to which we are directed by the Spirit of God. The chosen people may wax, wane, or disappear; but He abides, occasionally behind clouds the Sun that never sets. The Spirit is come to glorify Christ; He is now sent down, takes of the things of Christ, and shows them unto us. Even in the Old Testament, when coverings and a vail hung over all that was within, His words might be given, as remarked, in a kindred style: still Christ was ever underneath the veil.

Next we have from verse 4 Jehovah's grief, to which Hosea gives expression: "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away. Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and their judgments are as the light that goeth forth. For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. But they like men have transgressed the covenant; there have they dealt treacherously against me." It is the language of Jehovah, as the earlier verses were the prophet's exhortation. Thence he slides so to speak, into the language of Him who gave him his office. A prophet was really the voice of Jehovah, and therefore beginning as a prophet he rises up to that which becomes Jehovah Himself. The hewing of the people by the prophets expresses vividly the moral dealings of God which gave the wicked no quarter. "I have slain them by the words of my mouth," he adds, to make still plainer what kind of slaying it was. "And thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth."

But of mercy He speaks. "For I desired mercy:" this is what He loves, and to this end, that He may be morally vindicated in displaying it. "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. But they like" — not "men" but — Adam is right. *"Men"* hardly gives the full force; in fact it is a force contrary to the truth, because men as such were not under the law nor under His covenant, and Adam did not hold such a place. As the head of the race, his position was well defined and peculiar. Adam had a relationship with God; but the fall broke up the state of innocence, and God "drove out the man," instead of keeping him in the earthly garden of His delights. The position of man since is that of an outcast from paradise. But Israel were called externally to a place of favour, separate to Jehovah from all the rest of mankind. There was a new trial of man, though of man fallen. Indeed this forms the proper scene of man's probation: either when in Eden, and there Adam comes before us; or out of Eden, and in due time the Jew manifests his course and issue. The interval between Adam and Israel, though not without divine testimonies and dealings in grace of the deepest interest individually, not to speak of the judgment of the world by the flood, was not one of recognised relationship with man as such, because, being driven out from the presence of God, he had as yet no formal position with God, save the responsibility of avenging His injured image. (Gen 9:5-6.)

Consequently, although in the intervening time there were most instructive lessons, and of the greatest importance for us to heed, nevertheless Israel have a peculiar place, as under probation, that was found in no way between the two. Hence there need not be the slightest doubt that, although the word is capable of meaning "men" as well as "Adam," the context proves the true meaning to be what is given in the margin, not in the text: "But they [that is Israel], like Adam, have transgressed the covenant." Scripture never so speaks of man in general. Man is called a *sinner.* The Gentiles as such are not, I think, called *transgressors.* We hear of "sinners," never "transgressors, of the Gentiles." Men generally were not in a position to transgress; but they certainly were sinners and did nothing but sin. Transgression, dreadful as it is, supposes that those guilty of it have had a known revelation of God's revealed mind and will, and hence stand on a definite ground of relationship, the limits of which they have overpassed. Hence it is that "transgression" suits the state of man not when outcast, but when they break through the bounds that God has been pleased to set them. Certainly Adam was under a law, which he broke; he thus became a transgressor. Israel were under *the* law, which they broke likewise, and thus became transgressors. But the people between Adam and Moses, although they were sinners just as much as either, were not transgressors as both were.

This appears to be the ground taken here. Therefore the passage does not, I am persuaded, mean men, but Adam. "But they like Adam have transgressed the covenant." The relation of Adam with God may be regarded as a covenant with God, though not *the* covenant. There was certainly a law given to Adam, but not *the* law. Israel had the law and the first or old covenant, in contrast with that new one of which Jeremiah speaks under the Messiah's reign of peace and glory. But Israel rebelled, or, as it is said here, "transgressed the covenant." "There have they dealt treacherously against me."

The region of Gilead, which was across the Jordan, is next specified. No city of the name is known: if none, the name is given by a bold figure to their corporate union in corruption and violence. "Gilead is a city of them that work iniquity, and is polluted with blood." Nor is this the worst: for the priests banded privily to waylay and destroy "And as troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent." Those that ought to have been a city of refuge and active intercessors for the needy were themselves the ringleaders in evil, and on every ground the most guilty of all. They "murder in the way of consent (or "toward Shechem"): for they commit deliberate crime." This was the heart-breaking sorrow. Had it been among the heathen, it were not so surprising. But "I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel: there is the whoredom of Ephraim, Israel is defiled." The chapter closes with the assurance of sovereign mercy on His part who must judge iniquity according to the holiness of His nature. "Also, O Judah, he hath set an harvest for thee, when I returned [or rather return] the captivity of my people." It is impossible fairly to apply this to the return from the captivity in Babylon; for it is striking to observe that the post-captivity prophets never speak of the Jews who returned as "my people," save in predictions of future blessedness under their Messiah reigning in glory and power over the earth. The return of the Jews by the decree of Cyrus was an unparalleled event, contrary to the policy of the East, and only to be accounted for by the power which wrought in the conscience of Babylon's conqueror through the divine word, and (it may be) the personal weight of Daniel. But those who returned were never called "my people." It awaits another and very different day when the Jews shall look on Him whom they pierced. Compare chapters 1, 2, 3. For that day awaits the real fulfilment of Psa 126:1; Psa 126:5, when the harvest of joy shall come after many and long sorrows.

Hosea 7, in a most solemn description, follows up the same proof and reproof of sin against them all; and shows that, spite of the patient mercy and touching appeals of God, they would only get worse and worse. The day of deliverance was as yet far off. God's intervention in goodness only manifested the people's sin "When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered, and the evils of Samaria; for they practise falsehood (cf. John 3); and the thief cometh in, a troop of robbers plundereth without. And they say not to their hearts, I remember all their wickedness: now their own doings encompass them; they are before my face. They have made the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies."

What can be more graphic, though somewhat obscure from the singular compression of the style and rapid changes in figure, than the description which follows in verses 4-7, where the heart burns with the fire of passion, and indulgence and flattery furnish fuel? "They are all adulterers, as an oven heated by the baker, who ceaseth from raising after he hath kneaded the dough, until it be leavened. In the day of our king the princes have made him sick with bottles of wine; he stretched out his hand with scorners. For they have made ready their heart like an oven, whiles they lie in wait: their baker sleepeth all the night; in the morning it burneth as a flaming fire. They are all hot as an oven, and have devoured their judges; all their kings are fallen: there is none among them that calleth unto me." Ephraim is shown to have been mixed up among the nations to the dishonour of Jehovah. There might have been some hope, if he had judged such a self-willed slight and confusion and had repented; but he is become "a cake not turned" (verse 8). Therefore, it is only a question of getting so burnt as to be good for nothing. "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, grey hairs are sprinkled about on him, and he knoweth it not" (verse 9). It was plain enough their heathen idols were proving their ruin. "And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face; but they turn not to Jehovah their God, nor seek him for all this." This is confirmed in verse 11 by the proof of their folly. The grey hairs beginning to show themselves here and there held out no promise of a crown of honour for his head — far from it. They were but the sign of death working decrepitude, and of distance from God. Hence it is said: "Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria." That is, they look anywhere and everywhere rather than to God. Jehovah had dealt with them, no doubt, punishing them in His retributive righteousness.

Hence it is said, "As they go, I will spread my net upon them; I will bring them down as the fowls of the heaven; I will chastise them, as their congregation hath heard. Woe unto them! for they have fled from me: destruction unto them! because they have transgressed against me: though I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me. And they have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds: they assemble themselves for corn and wine, and they rebel against me. Though I have bound and strengthened their arms, yet do they imagine mischief against me. They return, but not to the most High: they are like a deceitful bow: their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue: this shall be their derision in the land of Egypt." Egypt, to which they called in vain, not only fails them, as against Assyria, but mocks at their captivity and ruin. Such is the world against God's guilty people. Whatever favours God gave them, they turned against Him; whatever judgments He sent against them, they never cried to Him. How dreadful was their condition when justly given up to their folly and its punishment! "They have not cried unto me," He says, "from their heart." They cried out when punished, but they never cried to God with their heart when they howled from their beds. Judgment had no more moral effect upon them than mercy.

In Hosea 8 accordingly, Jehovah warns aloud of unsparing judgment. "Set the trumpet to thy mouth. He shall come as an eagle against the house of Jehovah." They are the same figures used by our Lord in Matthew 24, where the disciples are told of the loud sound of the trumpet and of the eagles gathering together at the end of this age. The trumpet is clearly the announcement of the purpose of God in any given case. Here it is the sound of imminent judgment, as in the Lord's later prophecies it assures of the time come to gather the scattered Jews, or rather Israel. The eagles are a figure of the instruments of divine vengeance surely and rapidly coming to their prey. I only refer to both now to illustrate the surprising unity of scripture, and show how the employment of figures from beginning to end is governed by the perfect wisdom of God. This is no inconsiderable help to interpretation; because if the prophets had only employed each his own peculiar phrases, it would have been incomparably more difficult to understand scripture. As it is, there is a definite language of symbol used right through the Bible; and when you have seized it in one place, it remains for use in another, and thus become a means of helping us through what would otherwise prove more difficult. But it is well to remember that in point of depth the New Testament exceeds the Old; and although many complain of difficulties in Hebrew, they are not of the same nature but are mainly owing to a difference of relationship.

"To me will they then cry, My God, we [Israel] know thee." It was but lip-confession. "Israel hath cast off good; the enemy shall pursue him. They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes and I knew it not: of their silver and their gold have they made them idols that they may be cast off. Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off; mine anger is kindled against them: how long will it be ere they attain to purity? For from Israel was it also: the workman made it; therefore it is not God: but the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces. For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up. Israel is swallowed up: now shall they be among the Gentiles as a vessel wherein is no pleasure."

The prophet in spirit sees the people already captives, yet not extinguished, among the Gentiles, yet never coalescing as others, utterly despised as none ever were, yet surviving all cruelty and shame to this day. "For they are gone up to Assyria, a wild ass alone by himself: Ephraim hath hired lovers. Yea, because they hire among the nations, now will I gather them, and in a little they shall sorrow for the burden of the king of princes." This was one great offence with God, whom they forsook and forget: else surely He had appeared for their deliverance as He did for Judah. They sought the shelter of Assyria, and there should they be carried in shame. "Because Ephraim hath made many altars to sin, many altars shall be unto him to sin." This was their other great transgression, the parent of fruitful evil and sorrow. "I have written to him the great things of my law: they were counted as a strange thing. They sacrifice flesh for the sacrifices of mine offerings, and eat it: Jehovah accepteth them not; now will he remember their iniquity, and visit their sins: they shall return to Egypt. For Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples; and Judah hath multiplied fenced cities; but I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour the palaces thereof." There might be thus a difference in degree of departure. Israel had abandoned the true God, Judah trusted her fortified cities; but judgment would prove that God is not indifferent in either case to His own dishonour. The denunciation here is too plain to call for explanation.

Hosea 9 sets out the joyless doom of Israel for their lewd departure from their God; for they had taken their corn as a harlot's hire from their false gods: all such outward mercies should fail, and they should not dwell in the land of Jehovah, but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and in Assyria they should eat of unclean things — some fleeing voluntarily to the former, the mass captives in the latter. They should not pour out wine to Jehovah, nor should they be pleasing to Him — their sacrifices unto them as the bread of mourners; all that eat thereof should be unclean; for their bread should be for themselves — none should come into the house of Jehovah (verses 1-4). "What will ye do on the day of assembly — on the day of Jehovah's feast?" They should be not only incapable of keeping holiday after the manner prescribed, but alas! without the heart and conscience exercised, seeing man's power, not their own sin nor God's judgment. "For, lo, they are gone because of destruction." To avoid the Assyrian they escaped to the south; but "Egypt shall gather them, Memphis shall bury them [not the land of their fathers]; as for their desired silver, nettles shall inherit it — thorns in their tents." Impatience had long stupefied them. They should awake to suffering if not repentance. "The days of visitation are come, the days of retribution are come; Israel shall know it [not yet themselves, nor Jehovah]. The prophet is foolish, the man of the spirit frantic, for the greatness of thy punishment and the great hatred." Such had been Israel's taunt against the true prophet; and such was meted again to the false. Of these deceivers it was true. "Ephraim [was a] watchman with my God; the prophet is a fowler's snare on all his ways — hatred in the house of his God. They have gone deep, they are corrupted, as in the days of Gibeah: he will remember their iniquity, he will visit their sins" (ver. 5-9).

As the Spirit compares their state as a whole to that frightful epoch when one tribe all but perished for its obstinate espousal of an evil most offensive to Israel, so now He dwells on Jehovah's love for the people and their sad return. "I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first-ripe in the fig-tree at her first time: but they went to Baal-peor, and separated themselves unto that shame; and their abominations were according as they loved. As for Ephraim, their glory shall fly away as a bird, from the birth, and from the womb, and from the conception. Though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them, that there shall not be a man left; yea, woe also to them when I depart from them! Ephraim, as I saw Tyrus, is planted in a pleasant place: but Ephraim shall bring forth his children to the murderer. Give them, O Jehovah: what wilt thou give? give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts. All their wickedness is in Gilgal: for there I hated them: for the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house, I will love them no more: all their princes are revolters. Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit: yea, though they bring forth, yet will I slay even the beloved fruit of their womb. My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations."

Thus not only should a blight fall on their national prosperity, and their glory in their children perish, but woe to themselves forsaken of Jehovah! Murder and barrenness should befall Ephraim, who dared to make Gilgal itself the sink of their wickedness: for their wicked audacious doings Jehovah would drive them out of His house, and love them no more; but they should not wander only, but be wanderers among the nations. How truly accomplished to the letter! and the more strikingly because they do not form a separate community, but mix with the Gentiles within and without Christendom, chiefly abandoned to the lust of gain.

In Hosea 10 we have Israel judged as an empty* vine in accordance with all that precedes. For it is clear that this answers to the outward state in the days of the prophet. There was ample religious show, such as it was — profession, but nothing for God's acceptance — the plain contrast of Christ, who alone was the true vine. This is another instance of the way in which Christ takes up in His own person the history of Israel, and renews it for good in obedience to God's glory; as all the fruit Israel brought forth was to lusts, multiplying altars as his fruit multiplied, and making goodly statues or images as his land was made good. It is always thus where prosperity accompanies an unrenewed mind. "Their heart is divided; now shall they be guilty. He will cut off their altars; he will spoil their statues [or images]. For now will they say, We have no king, because we fear not Jehovah and the king: what can he do for us? They have spoken [mere] words, swearing falsely, making a covenant, and judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field." It was poison they planted, cultivated, and would reap. "For the calves of Beth-aven the inhabitants of Samaria fear; yea, the people thereof mourn over them, and the priests thereof [that] rejoiced over them for its glory, because it is departed from it. This also shall be carried to Assyria a present to the contentious king [or king Jareb]: Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel be ashamed of his own counsel." Their idol, far from helping, was taken captive with the besotted people who gave up Jehovah for the likeness of a calf which eats hay. "As for Samaria, her king is cut off as foam [or a chip] on the face of the water. The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed: the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars; and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us."

{*Dr. Henderson and others render baqaq "luxuriant," and argue that the idea of emptying, which the verb also has (derived) from that of pouring out entirely or abundantly the contents of a vessel, does not suit the present connection. But there is no need for the smallest violence. For inasmuch as the sense is clearly a vine that is luxuriant in everything but fruit, pouring out, as it literally means, its wood and leaves, the authorized version is justified, not those who overlook the connection, and take it in the sense of fruitfulness. The Targum of Jonathan is decidedly in favour of this; the old versions are divided, like the moderns.}

Verses 9-11 are a most animated appeal, putting Israel now in as bad or a worse light than guilty Benjamin when all the other tribes punished his iniquity. "O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah: *there they stood."* They were fallen now; and that battle or worse must now overtake them. The nations will be used of Jehovah to chastise Israel, only harmonious and earnest in toiling at sin. Whatever might have been the gentle training of God before, He would place a rider on Ephraim [not make Ephraim to ride], but Judah, yea, all the seed of Jacob, should be broken down under the hand of the enemy. Under kindred figures an exhortation follows in verse 12, and a reproof in 13; but internal tumult would surely come, and ruin from without ensue, on Shalman (=Shalmaneser's) in the day of battle; and all this destructive devastation Bethel should procure them for "the wickedness of their wickedness:" "in a morning shall the king of Israel utterly be cut off."

Hosea 11 exemplifies a remark made repeatedly; for here again the Spirit intermingles Christ and Israel very strikingly. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." The allusion is clear to the past history of Israel, when they were the object of Jehovah's love and delivering power and special government. There seems an intimation of what He may do for His people by and by; for great things are in store for that people preserved providentially now for the work of grace at the end of this age. Meanwhile the Lord Jesus comes in between the two, enacting as it were the history over again in His own person, and becoming the basis for the future restoration of Israel. It is here that the principle applies so admirably. He resumes in grace their leading points, and thus comforts faith in Israel by the testimony of God's care for His people. "[He] then called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images. I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them." Thus, spite of all His goodness in every suited form, He was in their eyes as those that put the yoke on the Jews, feed them as He might.

At the same time Egypt is not, strictly speaking, the place where the great bulk of them lie hidden, though those who may be there will surely be called out. Thus was Christ when His parents fled of old from Herod. But as a whole the tribes were carried into Assyria; and Hosea says here, "He shall not return into the land of Egypt: but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return." The meaning implied is that in rebellion against God some would have liked Egypt as a refuge from the Assyrian spoiler. We know that in the time of Jeremiah there was such a resource in order to avoid submission to Babylon. God commanded the king and people to submit to the head of gold; but they would not, keeping by Egypt, which was tolerably near for escape. In vain! they perished; and Egypt was humbled under His hand. It was not that Israel had reason to love the iron furnace whence they had come out, — their house of bondage till God delivered them by Moses; but man is ever perverse; and even Egypt, when displeasing to God and about to be judged after Israel, seems to their blind unbelief a desirable shield from the sword of the Assyrian when it comes, as it surely will. What we fly from in opposition to God's will becomes our severest scourge. "He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return. And the sword shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour them, because of their own counsels. And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him." The prophet's language is picturesque, though compressed. The supposed Sibylline irregularity is nowhere in Hosea. There is often difficulty, because we are ignorant, and it may be added, because we do not read with the feeling and on the ground of Jews; for this prophet is intensely Jewish. The time is not yet come when Israel will be awakened to appreciate his rapid transitions, his solemn reproaches, his mingled recalls of divine favour. When that time comes, all difficulties of this kind will disappear. The Israelite will delight in and sympathize with these impassioned changes. Gentiles are but little capable of entering into such experience, and more particularly too when they confound, as they generally do, what belongs to Israel with the Christian's portion.

Here then, just as before, the announcement of these sweeping judgments of Jehovah, as well as of their humiliating causes, is pressed on the conscience and heart of Israel; at one time they are inflicted morally by the prophet, at another they are from their foes. Of course moral judgment comes first. Now we have it in a more external form. Their punishment is threatened to the last extremity out of the land, slaves of the heathen, which they assumed never could be; for so superstition dreams, as once in Israel, no less in what calls itself the church. But it is most just and retributive punishment. Nevertheless we have a new burst of sorrow on God's part, who grieved though compelled to strike, and would not utterly destroy the people He had chosen. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city. They shall walk after Jehovah: he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west. They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria: and I will place them in their houses, saith Jehovah. Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit: but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints."

Were they not really as bad as the devoted cities of the plain? Yet would He spare in sovereign mercy, not like man returning to complete the work, nor entering into the city that He might do it thoroughly; for He is God and not man, the Holy One in the midst of Ephraim. Here He assures not only of His intervention, but of their submission and answer to His summons, from the west, south, and north-east; for the Assyrians represent the north as decidedly as the east. The last verse however judges the present moral state of the two houses of Israel. How far from what grace will yet work though Judah stood?

Accordingly Hosea 12 pursues the reproof of Ephraim, and charges Judah also with offences in His sight. Thus Jacob is brought in not only as guilty in his sons, but personally as an object of divine dealing in order to counsel the people now. And a most interesting appeal it is, where Jehovah now pleads with His people, not so much appealing to conscience, nor letting them know His own pain in smiting them, but urging on them the reminiscences of past mercy to their father Jacob as a present lesson to his sons. How many a soul has been brought back to God by reminding it of joys once tasted, though long, long forgotten! And Jehovah will use any and every right measure to win His people back to Himself. So here He reminds them of Jacob. "Ephraim feedeth on wind" — what folly! "And followeth after the east wind," — of all winds the most fierce and scorching. "He daily increaseth lies and desolation," deceitful evil and its recompence even now, as well as by and by. "And they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt." They might like to curry favour again with the mighty; but their false heart, breaking the covenant, and seeking to win Egypt also by presenting what they could expect abundantly, only made the Assyrian their enemies; and so end all efforts at setting one power against another to one's own advantage. It is unworthy even of a man, how much more of the people of God!

"Jehovah hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him." It was not Ephraim only but Judah too which was in question, though not yet so far gone as the rest. This gives the link reminding them of the ancient history of their common father. "He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God." From the first Jacob did that which indicated the supplanting of his brother on the one hand, before it could be set down to developed character, but on the other God recalls what grace did when it gave him strength beyond his own in his weakness. When he was shrunk up in the sinew of his thigh he was strengthened of God to prevail with the angel, and acquired the name which pledges the blessing of grace and all overcoming to the seed of Abraham. "Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him." What! The man who cowered and wept for fear of Esau? The self-same man on that very same occasion, when full of plans though not without prayer at the alarming approach of Esau, learns the sufficiency of grace, and has this strength made perfect in his weakness. "He found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us [identifying strikingly and touchingly the children with their forefathers] even Jehovah the God of hosts; Jehovah is his memorial. Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually." What a withering rebuke in verses 7, 8! "A merchant [Canaan], the balance of deceit in his hand, he loveth to overreach! And Ephraim said, I am simply become rich; I have found me out substances: it is all my labours. They will find no iniquity in me that is sin." How often prosperity blinds to evil, and God's judgment those who should know both.

In verse 9 Jehovah binds together His deliverance of Israel from Egypt with that mercy which will yet make good what the feast of tabernacles pledged; in verse 10 He reminds them of this extraordinary testimony when they ruined themselves by breaking this law and forsaking Himself; in verse 11 He sets before them the lamentable and ruinous witness of their idolatry. Then in verse 12 their father Jacob is once more held up to rebuke them, who fled in weakness, but served faithfully — sad contrast of his sons; and yet, though brought by God's word and power out of Egypt, most bitterly did Ephraim provoke to anger now therefore should his Lord leave his blood-guiltiness on him and requite his reproach to him.

In Hosea 13 we see that when Ephraim spake, there was trembling, so exalted was he in Israel: "When he offended in Baal, he died. And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen; they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves." Hence was so great a change, and the downfall of his power; their prosperity was as evanescent as the lightest things men speak of in proverbs. Yet again Jehovah reminds them of His relation to them from the beginning. Himself the only true God and Saviour. His very mercy was too much for them. He should now show Himself an avenger (verses 7, 8). Truly, as it is so earnestly put, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help."* The sovereign grace of God is the only hope and help for His sinful people. Of this Israel will reap the benefit, as we are doing.

{*The words probably mean, literally, "Thy destruction, Israel, [is] that [thou art] against me, against thyself."}

Where was now their king to save? where their judges? Alas! the words recall another early history of sin and rebellion and of God's displeasure. Yet Ephraim clung only to his sin (ver. 12), hid instead of confessing it. The very patience of God only makes the blow the more sudden and felt when it falls. What folly not to come forth when safety depends on promptness? But man's extremity is God's opportunity, who will deliver when all hope is gone. How unlike the king whom He gave once in wrath, who brought them into such a state of degradation that they could not even sharpen the mattock in the land of Israel, but were obliged to their bitterest enemies for the barest means of subsistence! Jehovah assuredly will take the matter in hand, and then not merely their enemies, but death and the grave would be put down. Let them summon plagues and array pestilence as they may, Jehovah will conquer on behalf of His people.

To apply this to any thing past in Israel's history is extravagantly poor. But it is a mistake to think that they will not be accomplished magnificently in Israel's future deliverance. Gentile "conceit," as the apostle warns in Romans 11, easily falls into such oversight, in its eagerness to take all the blessings to itself, leaving all the curses, and only these, to Israel. The New Testament gives a still richer turn, and reads a deeper truth in the words; but this in no way warrants our alienating the ancient people of God in the latter day from their predicted blessing through Jehovah's grace, when our Lord reigns, the all-conquering King of Israel, Jesus the Christ. Deliverance will come when the last Assyrian, the king of the north of Daniel, strikes his last blow — not as of old carrying off the people, but himself falling far more miserably than Samaria then met her punishment at his hands.

Then most beautifully winding up the prophecy, we have in Hosea 14 no scattered leaf of the Sibyl, but what ought to be here and nowhere else — the final operation and effect of divine grace on the long-guilty, long-hardened people of God. The appeals, the reminiscences, the warnings, and the mercy are no longer in vain; but at length by the Spirit poured into the heart of Israel (who bow at last to that gracious Jehovah whose long-suffering had waited upon them many days — ages of His own dishonour through them — waiting for these latter days) the blessed time of Israel's restoration to their God in their own land. Fitly therefore at the end, and assuredly not in vain, comes the call: "O Israel, return unto Jehovah thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." How true and wholesome is the word of God! "Take with you words, and turn to Jehovah: say unto him, Take away all iniquity." He would not leave them without a suited word to Him, for He loves to provide all; He would put no words less than these into their lips: "Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." Would they have ventured to ask so much? Lord, teach us to ask from Thee — we need this — as well as to act for Thee. "So will we render the calves of our lips."

All is judged now aright; because self is judged before the God who brings them near Him. Their repentance is genuine and the fruit of grace. "Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses." All their vain resources are now and for ever abandoned. "Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy." Idolatry had been the inlet of all mischief at home, as well as the outlet to pride in the world. Then comes Jehovah's answer from verse 4: "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon." What mercy in the face of wayward inconstancy and hearts only firm in rebellion! What tender love as well as mercy! Love free and full whose motive is in God Himself, who once smote His people in anger, but now will be as the dew to them so long without one drop of moisture to refresh them! How will not Israel then flourish! As the lily for form and graceful elegance; as Lebanon for stability; as the unfading olive for beauty (no longer under the morning cloud), and with the fragrance of Lebanon. "They that dwell under his shade shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine; the scent as the vine of Lebanon." What will the receiving back of Israel be to all the world but life from the dead?

True and faithful is the sovereign grace of God. It is not salvation in the meagre sense that the Jews will be screened from deserved destruction. If Jehovah saves, He will do it evermore for earth or heaven in a way that is worthy of Himself. "Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir-tree. From me is thy fruit found." It appears to be a conversation between Ephraim and Jehovah. "Ephraim [shall say], "What have I to do any more with idols?" To this Jehovah answers, "I myself have heard and observed him." Thereon Ephraim replies, "I am like a green fir tree;" to which Jehovah rejoins, "From me is thy fruit found." What a blessed change for Ephraim! and what communion with their God!

The whole of this terse prophecy ends with the searching question of the closing verse — "Who is wise, that he may understand these things? intelligent, that he may know them? for the ways of Jehovah are right, and the transgressors shall stumble thereon." May this wisdom be given to us, that we too may understand Himself and His ways! "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever;" and this being the desire, he "shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." "None of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand."

29 Joel

Joel.

Lectures on the Minor Prophets.

W. Kelly.

"The word of Jehovah that came to Joel the son of Pethuel." Like Hosea, Joel is one of the earliest prophets (being earlier even than Jonah), but differs essentially in this, that whereas the former looks at the whole people, the latter was led of God to restrict himself to that portion which outwardly clave to the house of David as well as the ordinances of the law. This gives us accordingly a much more contracted sphere, but for that very reason contributes to a greater definiteness in the objects noticed, which is also helped by a characteristic vividness of style. Indeed the contrast is striking between these two earlier prophets, Joel being as remarkable for smoothness of language, fulness of handling, and easy transitions, as Hosea for a certain rough negligence, pregnant brevity, and sudden turns, highly expressive but to Gentile minds somewhat obscure.

The grand subject of our prophet is the day of Jehovah, and this in all its extent, but with special application to the Jews, and above all to Jerusalem. At the same time Joel shares the habit of all the prophets, one may say, in taking some present fact, or that which was close at hand, as a groundwork for what was future. Thus the prophecy had an immediate bearing or a practical aim not far off, while along with it we see how far the Spirit of God is from confining Himself to what was either actually at work or of a transient nature. No prophecy of scripture is of its own solution; it is constructed so as not to be. To limit it to the past would be an oversight; to set aside the future would destroy the most momentous object God has in it. Thus if to deny the past be an error, to deny the future is a still greater one. The one would have cut off somewhat of interest and profit then; the other shuts out its permanent witness to God's glory. In both respects divine wisdom is most apparent. He provided that which was a warning or encouragement to His people when the prophet was in view of the circumstances which surrounded him; but He pointed onward to a time that was not yet arrived, when the just results of what was in His own mind will be made good and manifest. Now those results never can be till the kingdom of God come in power and glory. It is impossible that the Spirit of God could be satisfied with anything which either has been among men or is now. All that man has achieved, all that exists, although there be a witness in various ways of what God is toward man, affords alas! still larger and more constant evidence of the failure of man to use aright what God has given him. We shall find these general principles fully borne out, not only in Joel but in all the prophets; for they are invariable.

Among the readers of Joel there has been not only difficulty felt, but one may say misapprehension; yet this rather from their own want of perception of the subject than from any lack of point or of pure and direct language in the prophet. Some have regarded these locust inflictions as merely symbolic; others again deny anything beyond the literal swarms of insects which successively preyed on the products of Palestine. But God, because He is great, can take notice of what is little, while obviously He cannot be limited to it. Hence it is a mistake to suppose that God would in any way be demeaned by noticing the depredations of these various locusts. He takes the liveliest interest in His people for their joy and blessing. He concerns Himself about every sorrow which weighs them down, and deigns to use that which is afflicting for good. Consequently the Spirit of God does not think it beneath His notice to bring before the people of God that which God intended by these successive depredations. Chapter 1 brings them before us; but the connection which follows shows that they were only admonitory facts then. It is to be doubted that they represent the enemies who would surely fall on a people in due time if impenitent. They might well suggest such a result to the thoughtful mind. They were past; worse was coming and at hand.

In Joel 2 the literal locusts are left behind (save of course in the blessing, ver. 25, which reverses all), and the prophet goes forward to that which the locusts represented. Thus the first chapter gives us actual facts, nothing but the various creatures which committed depredations on all the vegetation of the land. It does not appear that in themselves any ulterior meaning is definitely meant to be gathered. The successive desolations caused by the insects are distinctly presented to us. From verse 15 God uses them as an introduction for the purpose of warning His people of a still greater and more momentous burden. The details of this begin to be brought out in chapter 2, with a promise of spiritual power couched in such terms that the New Testament could apply it to the great privilege and power which signalised the godly remnant of Jews who called on the name of the Lord in Jerusalem at Pentecost, but in its full and precious import awaiting its fulfilment when all the accessories of the prediction will be realised at the end of the age.

Joel 3 looks to the full issue in judgment and blessing, the characteristic features of the day of Jehovah. Here again may be seen that, instead of the prophecy consisting of uncertain prognostication and of exaggerated terms, such thoughts are only due to men who do not understand its scope. Would it not be more becoming for them to abstain from an opinion till they do? In my judgment nothing can be less reverent or more inconsistent with modesty than such off-hand and random statements about the word of God. The truth is that scripture is always perfect, but men are not competent to speak unless taught of God. Thus, humanly speaking, there are those who could appreciate the wonders of the heavens, but are dull to perceive the divine construction of a daisy; yet to any one that estimates aright, the perfect hand of God even in a daisy is just as clear and certain as in the solar system. It is only a question of the place which each creature of God occupies in His own immense scheme. His wisdom and power are displayed no less in the minute than in the grand and massive and sublime. Thus there is no doubt that, if the telescope opens many a wonder to man, the microscope is not less impressive. They are both important instruments in the hand of man, and they are both intended, doubtless in God's providence, to show man from the natural world a witness of divine power in what is above and also in that which is beneath. But in all things what ought to be gathered from it is not incense for man (without denying the great dignity of him who is the head or natural chief of creation), but the wonders of God in what He has wrought. A similar principle applies to the word of God; for therein if God displays Himself in what is vast, quite as much does He appear in ways whose minuteness might easily escape observation. Everywhere perfection is claimed for God, whether in what He has made or, above all, in that which He has written, and in what He has written beyond that which He has wrought, because His mind and ways must transcend His outward works. For the word of God is claimed the very highest place as the expression of His wisdom — His inner wisdom. For that which is connected with matter must yield to what has to do with mind and the affections, and above all the display of the divine nature.

Now prophecy is a notable part of this expression of His mind, though it is far from being the highest. But I do not think that any sufficient reason appears to suppose a link of connection between the ravages caused by these marauding insects and the providential judgments previous to the day of Jehovah, which some assign to the earlier part of the cut off seventieth week after the church is taken to heaven. That both chapters must be understood in the same manner, either as alluding to locusts or to a hostile army invading Judah, is a rash and unfounded notion, with no other source than man's will added to a contracted mind. Closely connected they undoubtedly are, but there is much beauty in taking the past calamity as the occasion of warning the Jews of a far more awful infliction, and connecting it with the future day of Jehovah.

Nor do I see any solid reason for considering the four swarms respectively allegorical of Tiglath-pileser, Shalmaneser, Sennacherib, and Nebuchadnezzar on the one hand, nor on the other of the Assyro-Babylonian power, the Medo-Persian, the Macedonian or Syro-Macedonian, and the Roman, or of this last modified. These are speculations which found favour among certain early Christian writers as well as the Jews of their day. But the more we assert the value of the prophetic word, the more resolutely should we set our face against every scheme of interpretation which savours of fancy. We do well to dread speculation in the things of God. It is the rash guess-work of men not subject to His mind as revealed in scripture, and too hasty in coming to conclusions. If we are not sure, it is wise to wait on One who does not disappoint. The basis of scripture for such views it would be desirable to weigh if it can be produced. Hitherto none has been produced, save the analogy of the four with the four beasts and four carpenters, of which we read in the visions of Daniel and of Zechariah. Can any evidence be conceived more precarious? The prophet draws a warning lesson from actual events that had occurred and were before all eyes; and then proceeds to speak of incomparably grave events in grace and judgment, most of which yet remain to be fulfilled. But we must not confound with any part of Joel 1 the plague of locusts in Revelation 9 under the fifth trumpet. The ravages in the holy land furnished the occasion for a figurative description of a mighty foe in chapter 2; the literal locusts being but a passing visitation from God, certainly not to be slighted, but very different from the trouble described afterwards. There may be a connection between Joel 2 (not 1) and Revelation 9, but the latter introduces symbols of a far more complicated nature and pointing to deeper evil. Both refer to men under the symbol of locusts, and in the use of the locusts in chapter 1 I see little more than God's interest in His people. If He dealt a blow, He meant them to humble themselves and ask and learn of Him through the prophet why it was dealt. He was chastening the people He loved that they might be partakers of His holiness, and escape the heavier blows which would otherwise be their portion.

"Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers?" Go back as might the oldest, and search as every inhabitant might, no such thing had been in the days of themselves or their fathers. What had occurred then was to be told from one to another of their descendants. Yet was it a scourge easily attributed to second causes, and all profit lost, because God was thus shut out. If He were heard, that which had just befallen the land would arouse to repentance; if despised, the prophet warns of greater ills.

It is familiar to most of us that prophecy always supposes a state of ruin. It comes where there is such unfaithfulness in the people of God as indicates approaching or actual ruin. Prophecy is then God's special and exceptional intervention, not so much because men have failed in doing their duty as when they have been guilty of general and fatal departure from their place, consequently it will be found to have a twofold character. It convicts of the state of ruin on one hand, specifying wherein men have sinned against God, and pronouncing His judgment; but, on the other hand, it bears witness of a better state of things in God's grace, which will displace what is now in ruins. This I believe to be true of all prophecy. It applies even to the garden of Eden. Prophecy always holds out a blessing by a divine judgment that is coming, and has thus a serious aspect towards conscience. God does not give the fulfilment of the hope of something better till present evils already morally discerned are actually judged. It would disparage what He had already given if He brought in a system to displace it otherwise. Judgment therefore must come not in word only, but in deed and in truth. And this judgment in the Old Testament is first temporal — a palpable infliction of blows on the evil of this world, and especially of His own guilty people. Thus when things work out to still greater evil, a partial present judgment becomes an earnest of a much more severe rebuke, till God's final dealing come, with its full unsparing judgment on the world.

But we must remember that in these prophecies before our Lord came we do not read of the judgment before the great white throne. It is never the judgment of the soul and body in a risen state. I am not aware of any Old Testament prophecies which bring in the eternal judgment of man raised and consigned to the lake of fire as the second death. This is as characteristic of Christianity as the judgment of the world or living men on the earth (that is, of nations, tribes, and tongues) is the proper subject of Old Testament prophecy. The Revelation of John, which is as peculiar in its themes as in its style, embracing subjects from Old and New, and in Hebrew-Greek phraseology most appropriately sets both fully before us.

Herein we may see that traditional teaching is extremely defective and doubly misleading, because men try to bring in mere providential judgments into the New Testament state of things, as they would also graft eternal judgment upon the Old Testament predictions. The consequence is that a strain is put upon both Testaments, and confusion ensues; for the true way to understand the Bible is not to confound things that differ, but to accept divine revelation as discharging in each of its two distinct parts the function for which God inspired those raised up to communicate His mind. The Old and New Testaments are perfectly harmonious, and there is not a line or word of one that contradicts the other; but they are very far from being or saying the same thing. God takes particular pains to mark the difference, in fact writing each in a different tongue — the one Hebrew, having its groundwork in the family of Abraham after the flesh — the other Greek, used when God was sending the gospel to the Gentiles as such. Thus the Greek was just as much a representative of Gentile objects as the Hebrew found its fitting object in Israel. But for all that God shows His mind in both. Only the distinctive feature of the Old Testament is His government, while the distinctive truth of the New Testament is His grace. Government and grace are totally distinct; for government is always a dealing with man, whereas grace is the revelation of what God is and does. Consequently the one invariably supposes judgment, and the other is the full display of mercy and goodness; and both find their meeting-point in Christ. As He is the King, He consequently is the head of the government. As He is the Son of God, full of grace and truth, He consequently is the one channel for all the blessing peculiar to the New Testament. His glory, now that the mighty work of redemption is done, accounts for all our characteristic privileges.

But here, in our prophecy, it is evident there was something more defined and painfully different from past times. God had used in former days, no doubt, Midianites and Philistines and other enemies to chastise Israel when guilty especially of idolatry. But here He shows that His hand was stretched out to deal with it in a most humiliating way. Instead of blessings in the basket and the store because of fidelity to His government, they had on the contrary been most unfaithful, and now Jehovah would use even the very insect world, so to speak, to deal with His people. "That which the palmer-worm [or gnawing locust] hath left hath the [swarming] locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm [or licking locust] eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar [or consuming locust] eaten." All this I take in its plain literal import, as having actually occurred then.

"Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth. For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion." It is not to me doubtful that the locust depredation is alluded to; but the manner is peculiar, though Pro 30:25; Pro 30:27, might well prepare us for it. If the ants could be described as a "people," surely the locusts as a "nation." Besides the phraseology paves the way as a transition for something more, of which we shall hear more, preparatorily in verses 15-20, fully in Joel 2. That is, Joel uses the present visitation as a fact, but withal employs language which forms an easy passage to the prediction of a nation that would deal with the Jews in an unparalleled way. There need be no doubt that the nation in question is the Assyrian. Thus the first chapter starts with the repeated and frightful depredations of the locusts in the prophet's day, but looks on to the trouble of a terrible day. The second chapter directly notices no such havoc from insects, but mingles figures taken from them with the Assyrian who should surely come up. This appears to be the true bearing of the earlier half of the book.

Hence is shown, still in figurative language, how everything was dealt with — the vine wasted, the fig-tree barked, the branches cast away and made white. The prophet calls on them accordingly to lament. Nor was it only that the country and men suffered the destruction of their natural resources as a chastening from God, but everything else was affected. The religious oblations felt the blight over the land — the meat-offering and the drink-offering — the one the witness of devotedness, and the other of joy before God. Both these were clean cut off from the house of Jehovah. "Lament as a virgin girded with sackcloth on account of the husband of her youth. The meat-offering and the drink-offering are cut off from the house of Jehovah; the priests howl, the ministers of Jehovah. The field is wasted, the land mourneth; for the corn is wasted: the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth." Every mark of fertility was now disappearing; and hence the very husbandmen are called to shame, and the vine-dressers to howl, on account of the wheat and the barley — for that which constituted the staff or even the barest necessaries of life (verse 11). Assuredly fruit-bearing trees did not escape. "The vine is dried up, and the fig-tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men" (verse 12)

It is granted that to a Christian all this may seem somewhat outside his line, and for the obvious reason that our blessings are so entirely apart from nature. It should be remembered that the Jew enjoyed natural blessings from God, whilst the Christian's blessings are supernatural. He may of course have along with his privileges in Christ external mercies; but these are not the substance of his heritage at any time. God may give or withhold them, without any mark of approval whatever. But now for us proper blessings are of a spiritual sort. It was not so with Israel. Hence clearly there was an appropriateness and force in these visitations, which is lost for the Christian; and therefore he is accordingly tempted to explain away such prophecies as these whenever he applies them to himself, which he is apt to do. Maintain their proper fulfilment in the sphere of Israel and Palestine, and there ceases all need of doing violence to scripture. One can then take all such prophecies exactly as they are. Not that this means limiting them in a servile literalism. Be assured that mere alliteration is just as wrong as allegorizing without warrant. It is a false principle of interpretation. The letter, if there be only the letter, kills. The great point is not to divorce letter from spirit, but to hold them together. We must retain the exact meaning of every word of God. We must not tie it down only to what is on the surface; we must remember that while it is the word by man, it is essentially the word of God. It may come in part through Moses, but this is none the less the word of God. Prophets were employed, but it is His word, no matter by whom it may be given.

Hence therefore to say that we must only interpret scripture like any other book is a fallacy, yea, falsehood, on the face of it. That God is pleased to convey His mind in the language of man is perfectly true; but if it flows down to me it springs from God. Unless therefore its true source and character are always maintained in view, it is impossible to interpret the word of God justly. Those who forget it will assuredly be guilty of reducing scripture to its lowest meaning, under the delusion that the least part is the whole. It is evident that this would be unworthy even in dealing with a man. For if I have to do with a person of decidedly superior parts to my own, it were a folly to suppose that my mind must be the sufficient measure of what is in his. It is natural to suppose that his capacity might conceive deeper thoughts than I have yet received, and that words which I use on a lower level might suggest if not convey more to him. With how much stronger reason this applies to the mind of God! Therefore we would do well to bear this always in memory as to scripture; for after all the true principle of interpreting God's written word must be gathered from His own account of it.

Now we find in the New Testament that there may be a passing application included within the scope of a prophecy, but also an ultimate and therefore more complete fulfilment. They are of course both true. It is a mistake to deny the imminent and lesser application: it is still more grossly erroneous not to look for more. These views when severed divide men commonly into two opposing schools of interpretation; but it will prove the wisest course for us to eschew particular schools, and to hold the fulness of scripture, which contains in harmony what such parties set in opposition to each other. We should take the word of God in its largest import, bowing to it as known to be His, but always leaving room for more, because it is God and not man who has written that word. "Now we know in part." We cannot take in the whole at once. But if it be only possible for us to learn as disciples, the God who makes the application of His word precious and profitable may lead us into an enlarging apprehension of it as we can bear it. So far from thinking this a defect in the word of God, it is rather its distinguishing characteristic and its admirable and exclusive property. Being the word of God, it is capable of very large and various application. Any illustrations of man can indicate it but in a small measure. The truth is that scripture savours of what is infinite, being the expression of God's mind, although clothed in the words of men. It is therefore really unique; for though it may have on its surface what meets the passing need of the day, below this runs a deep and swelling stream, which flows onward to the full ocean of the accomplished purposes and glory of God.

Returning to our chapter, the call comes not merely to lament and sorrow, which was all right, and the intended effect of so grave a visitation of God, but more — "Sanctify ye a fast." It is more than appointing one. Sanctification always supposes separation to God. Sanctified ourselves by grace, we are entitled so to deal even with the most ordinary matters by the word of God and prayer, as we are exhorted to do in 1 Timothy 4. It brings God in. Without this it cannot be. "Call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of Jehovah your God, and cry unto Jehovah."

Then follows for the first time a phrase of great moment: "Alas for the day! for the day of Jehovah is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come." Now, it is an especially important thing to get a clear view of the day of Jehovah. The prominent truth involved in that day is, it supposes the manifest judgment of the world by God. The choice of the expression "day" involves this. It is not a question of secret judgments or providential dealings. That might be during the night, and unseen. Indeed, the fullest proof and the most beautiful illustration of providence is when He makes use of ordinary matters to bring about the most surprising results, but results that play a distinct part in the maintaining, shielding, vindicating, justifying of God's own people, or in bringing condign punishment on their enemies.

Take for a plain instance the entire book of Esther. Perhaps there is no more remarkable development of the grand truth of divine providence in the Bible. As a striking concomitant of this, observe how the name of God does not appear throughout. This ignorant men have supposed to be a defect; whereas in truth, if the name were openly named in its course, the book would be materially spoiled. The prime object is to evince His hand secretly working where His name could not rightly be proclaimed. Far from being a fault, this is one of the most strengthening considerations when we remember that we have to do with a similar secret providence every day.

It is not meant assuredly that this is all; for now we know God has been revealed fully and personally in His Son. God's name not only has been proclaimed *to* us, but, so to speak, is named upon us. We are brought into living relationship with Him: "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." But besides that, what a comfort to know that while God Himself, as our Father, guides us by His Spirit, the secret providence of God controls circumstances and compels enemies where we could not be, and could do nothing if we were, yea where we ought to do nothing! But God fails not to work for us, and often works too by His worst adversaries. The devil himself is one of those who are obliged most of all to work out the fiats of God's providence. He, when least intending or expecting it, brings about, in spite of himself, what God means in goodness. Is not this then a truth full of comfort? If Satan is obliged when he most exalts himself to be only God's scavenger, it is very evident that we may trust our gracious Lord for everything; for the foot of pride after all cannot but do menial services for the purposes of God. It does not matter who it is or what it may be; the providence of God unseen invariably accomplishes His purposes.

Let it be repeated that this is not all. We have something infinitely nearer and more intimate; and I make this remark the more because those are not wanting who think that a Christian ought to be guided simply by God's providence; it is not too much to affirm that such guidance would be always wrong. It is never set forth as guidance. Providence does not guide saints, but controls circumstances and foes. The Holy Spirit deigns to guide Christians. Still we have to do with external things; and there the providence of God works. But we have to do with God as our God and Father; and here we are not left to the unseen processes of circumstances and what might seem to be the casualties of the world, though really accomplishing divine purposes or ends. We have to do with the direct guidance of the Holy Ghost, who is pleased to lead us by the written word. This puts everything in its place, at least to faith.

It is an oversight to suppose that to bind up the guidance of the Holy Spirit with the word of God is to take it out of the affairs of daily life in any case. There are no doubt instincts of spiritual life; but the word of God is large enough to take in everything. And this increase of spiritual apprehension serves but to enlarge the sphere of obedience — only we do not always perceive the exceeding breadth of the word, and sometimes we may be guided insensibly where we might fail to allege a definite text. How comforting to find our conviction sustained and strengthened and carried further intelligently by direct scripture! The simple believer is thus guided, more than at first sight appears, by the word of God. You see a Christian at once taking exactly the right line. If you asked him why he did so or so, perhaps he might not be able to say with clearness. Hence, when it is affirmed that the Holy Spirit guides by the word, it is not meant that there is always the positive and distinct application of the divine word on the part of him who is guided. Doubtless in any measure of our scriptural knowledge one can intelligently point to example and principle, if not formal precept, in scripture for what is done according to God's will. One should always seek ability to gather from the range of His word the conduct to be pursued or to be pressed on others.

Thus, for instance, supposing a parent tells the Christian child to take care that the pot simmers properly, or any other duty of the simplest every-day sort, is it meant that one can bring a scripture for these? Certainly one can. The child who is set to watch that the milk should not boil over is called to act in obedience to her parents, and so please the Lord. If excluded from the province of scriptural principle, what mischief must result! On one ground the Christian child in such circumstances is amazingly strengthened by the feeling that it is not a question of the milk, or the pot, or the fire, or only of a parent's charge, but of doing the will of God. It is good to link all with Him. Therefore it seemed well to take the smallest matters that might be thought too low for the dignity of inspiration; but the truth is there is nothing more wonderful in scripture as in Christ than this very feature. They both — He in deed, it in word — show that there is nothing too great for man, and that there is nothing too little for God. Therefore "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; . . . and whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."

Suppose now a more perplexing case. An evangelist has two or three stations before him at which to preach the gospel. Where is the scripture directing to one more than another? Am I to give up the word here? Certainly not. If I went to a place where another servant of Christ was preaching the gospel, I should not feel disposed to thrust myself in to do the work, knowing that self-assertion or slighting another would be alike contrary to the grace of the gospel. If the ground be open, well; if already occupied, one would wait till asked. We have to represent Christ as well as present the good news. Were one ever so great an evangelist, one ought not to think of interfering with one who was less; if he were a wise and gracious man, he would be too glad to receive help and fellowship in the work. An open door known to be here or there would be a loud call, even if there were many adversaries. Were others there at work in the field, surely the Master would have us confer as fellow-servants, that the good desired should not be ill spoken of or misjudged. Love would lead a workman to engage the co-operation of another to help in the work of the Lord — a principle amply illustrated in the word of God. And thus one would find oneself directed with an exercised conscience before God, and not by the mere circumstances of providence; as the apostle says, "I commend you to God and to the word of his grace." Every case I am persuaded the wisdom of God has forestalled in scripture, if we have ears to hear, and pronounces upon each difficulty that can arise for the believer, though not apart from his state. Hence of course insensibility of conscience, or even want of intelligence, may hinder our perception, and therefore more or less expose us at least to uncertainty, and it may be to error and wrong; however truly in such cases the goodness of God interferes to hinder the full results for the simple who lack intelligence.

But it is our privilege, now that the Holy Ghost dwells in us, to bring everything within the scope of the written word. Thus, suppose you must go shopping: there at once a question arises; and you will surely incline to one of two desires. In your purchase you will seek to please either yourself or Christ. Even in deciding where to go the same test is really applicable. If among a multitude of shops you wish to know which is the right one to visit, it remains before you still to please Christ. Can one not ask one's conscience, What is my motive for going here or there? He is faithful and knows how to decide by the Spirit's use of the word in judging the secrets of the heart. In the great majority of cases such self-judgment would cut short many a visit to this or that shop, as well as make no small difference in what is bought. Take the very common habit of gratifying one's taste. When one enters a shop, the temptation that occurs to the mind is to get what one likes as far as one can. Where is Christ in this?

We may then look for the distinct guidance of the Lord by His Spirit in the daily affairs of life, as well as the more spiritual occupations that engage our service; but the measure of our spirituality and knowledge of the word gauges our ability to use the word aright as our directory. And thus where we do not clearly see a duty to act, our duty is to wait rather than act. The waiting is a confession of ignorance, but at least of dependence. We desire to do His will and shall not wait in vain. "The meek will he guide in judgment; the meek will he teach his way." "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth," says the attitude of waiting, where restless self-will would prompt to this act or that. But God guides either by bringing clearly before one something that calls on love for action, or by keeping one waiting yet longer. Undoubtedly as there is reality in a believer's intercourse with God, so he can look for special guidance. But never let us forget that when we have not a distinct duty before us, we should forbear to act at all. I do not speak exactly of an impression, but of a plain call to duty, or the positive energy of unselfish love. Undoubtedly there is the guidance of the Holy Spirit often without the letter of a command, but not therefore without scripture. Both the active outgoing of love and the calls of duty fall within scripture, which shows us their fulness in Christ. For instance, a Christian does not know what to do, we will suppose, next Monday. But his mind is made up to serve the Lord; and he is not anxious about it. An individual comes while he is waiting on the Lord, and brings before him a claim to serve Him in a way not outside his measure. Is not the duty then plain enough? May that one be doubted in the slightest degree? Is it not the will of the Lord that one who loves Him should respond to a call of love?

If two come and represent similar things before you, have you scripture to tell you which to select? Will not perplexity ensue? So it might appear and may really be. But in fact such perplexities do not often arise, if indeed they ever do, without some distinct means afforded of the Lord for judging between them.

It thus resolves itself largely into a question of communion with God. The child of God that goes on in communion with Him will not be perplexed or know what it means, because he habitually walks with One who is light. Our Father takes the greatest delight in guiding a child whose object is only to meet His mind. Of course it is another thing if we have ends and purposes of our own; in such a case a Christian would not sincerely wait. But "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him;" and though there might not be a positive precept, yet there is the hearing of God's mind in scripture in many real though less direct ways. If there is a perplexity, it is time to stop. One cannot act aright without the word; and this is often missed through lack of communion, which itself implies the guidance of the Holy Spirit; but we must not sever this from the scripture.

From this long digression we return to our prophet, and there find ourselves on ground not only of such moral judgment as the word of God always contains, but of solemn and public dealings. The day of Jehovah is not His secret control by secondary causes or circumstances. It is the display of His judgment of man on the earth. Consequently the full sense of the day of Jehovah is that grand dealing when God will "judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath raised from the dead," to quote a well-known scripture from the New Testament that bears on it. "Judging the *world* in righteousness" is altogether a different truth from judging the dead. It is the habitable world. It does not contemplate the resurrection of individuals who once composed its population. The habitable earth as such is the real meaning of Acts 17. So the day of Jehovah falls here. The chief difference is that the day of Jehovah in the Old Testament is put in direct connection with the special place of Israel — their relationship to God, who had so revealed Himself to them. It is the age when man will be no longer allowed to thwart and hinder the purposes of God, and when He Himself will no more work merely in the ways of secret providence, nor even by the mission of the Holy Ghost as now in Christianity, forming and fashioning us by the word according to Christ, but when God will take the world under His direct government — first, for putting down evil; next, for the maintenance and spread of that which is good. Such is the day of Jehovah. Consequently "that day" embraces the divine judgments which will be executed by Christ as the Jehovah God of Israel, when He appears in glory, as well as the whole millennial period. It is all called the day of Jehovah.

But connected with this it is of all importance clearly to understand the difference of that day from all before it; but particularly to discriminate between that day and the previous act of His coming to receive those who are waiting for Him, whether saints who have died or those who shall then be found alive on earth up to that moment. The "coming of the Lord" is a larger expression than the "day of the Lord" (or "Jehovah"). "The day" is a particular part of His coming, when at His call the dead saints rise, and the living saints are changed, and both are caught up together out of the earth to meet Him in the air. This great event — the translation of those who are Christ's to heaven — has nothing in itself to do with the display of Jehovah's government of the world; and therefore to confound the coming or presence of the Lord with His day is a gross error.* After the saints have been taken to heaven, the world will go on seemingly much the same, but really very much worse. In no actual sense is it judged by the Lord's grace in taking His own to the Father's house. But the day of the Lord invariably supposes the judgment of the world, though inchoatively including lesser judgments in the Old Testament; not so His presence or coming, which will manifest fulness of grace to those whom He loved to the end. At the same time, when the day of Jehovah comes, it will still be the coming of the Lord; for in this clearly the two coalesce.

{*The distinction between these two, the παρουσία and the ἡμέρα of the Lord, is the key to 2 Thess. 2. The whole chapter, not to say the entire province of prophecy, is embroiled in confusion where this is not seen. For where would be the force or even sense of beseeching his Christian brethren by the presence or coming of the Lord not to be shaken by the rumour about His day, if the day and His coming be the same? Whereas it is thoroughly intelligible and pertinent to entreat them by a hope so full of good cheer as the presence of the Lord which is bound up with the gathering of the saints to meet Him above, not to be disquieted by the allegation, for which they falsely cited authoritative communications from the Spirit and a supposititious letter of the apostle himself, that His day — that day of judgment of the quick on the earth — was already present. One corrective of the error is the recall of the Christian to his proper hope of joining the Lord at His coming, so as to follow Him out of heaven for the day of His appearing The other is the making known certain awful developments of evil, the apostacy and the man of sin brought fully out, before that day can come.}

Thus in short the day of the Lord is the public and governmental side of His coming; but the coming of the Lord embraces events of another character distinct from and previous to that day. This may serve as a plain and compendious way of stating what could easily be proved by many scriptures. Only we must bear in mind that the coming of the Lord to receive the saints to Himself is exclusively a New Testament truth. The Old Testament proclaims the day of Jehovah, the New Testament endorses this truth, maintaining and clearing it yet more. But the New Testament adds another truth distinct from it; namely, that Christ will come to receive us to Himself, and present us in the Father's house; after which He will bring in the day of Jehovah, when the saints come with Him in glory. Then will be the day of Jehovah, because this is the time when He will destroy all His foes, the beast and the false prophet, or Antichrist, with all their followers; and further, the king of the north, or Assyrian, the very power foreshadowed by the mighty nation who troubled Israel of old, and who comes before us much more fully in the second chapter of our prophecy.

Before saying a little more as to the Assyrian, let me point out the allusion to the trumpets here. It is a clear reference to the use prescribed in the Book of Numbers. The trumpet was to be blown by the priests on two main occasions. One of them was for the journeying of the camps, and the other was for the calling of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle. If they went to war, an alarm was to be blown with the trumpets, and Jehovah remembered and saved them from their enemies. We may perhaps say then that this last was on the people's part to bring in Jehovah; while the more ordinary sounding was on Jehovah's part to gather the people in view of their solemn feasts and sacrifices before their God. These were the principal uses of the silver trumpets, and they are both employed by Joel. "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm." It does not require much skill in interpretation to see the meaning of that trumpet, because the Spirit of God has so plainly defined its character and object. "Sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of Jehovah cometh, for it is nigh at hand."

This warned of what was tremendous to Israel. Jehovah's day was at hand, — a day when not enemies only would be there, but Jehovah would remember Israel, not yet to save His people, but to use the foe as a scourge for them. This might well be a note of alarm; Jehovah would not be absent. It was not merely the day of the Assyrian, but of Jehovah. Is it thought that as the judgment that the Jews were warned against was so remote, they would be liable to say, "It will not come in our day or upon our children"? I answer that it did come in their day. The same Assyrian power, which came then close upon the time of Joel, will reappear in the latter day. This is the true key to all the difficulties men conjure up in the Old Testament. We must remember that those foreign nations are no more done with than the Jews are. Many of them have lost or changed their names, but they abide still. And when the time comes for the restoration of Israel through judgments at the end of the age, they too will reappear and be known as the Assyrian once more. Nations no more die than individual men never rise finally. As surely as a resurrection awaits men, there will be a revival of those Gentile foes of the Jews. It is remarkable too that their final acts will bear the same moral character as their initiatory course. This intimates clearly a divine principle of dealing at the close for the sins at the beginning, because they will repeat their old sins at the end. The same jealousy of Israel, the same determination to exterminate the Jew, the same unbelieving opposition to God's counsels which characterised them at their earliest epochs will also be found at their latest appearance. The circle of their historical unity is made apparent from a moral point of view — the same character of guilt reproduced with God's judgment upon them because of it.

It is not then that I have any doubt that the miraculous check of the Assyrian in the day of Sennacherib is the type of the final overthrow in the day of Jehovah; or that the past event was a day of Jehovah, not in the full sense, but a real though preparatory application of the day of Jehovah, and an unfailing pledge of the final catastrophe. This, which is nothing but the simple fact, seems to me to invest scripture with the greatest possible interest; and, more than this, it demonstrates its living character. Instead of merely looking back to things long since dead and gone, we read in what has been of what is going to be on a still grander scale, and with far more solemn, though also more cheering issues. Hence we can understand how that day had even then a practical purpose; but it had none the less the further bearing already pointed out.

It is here that the rationalistic party are so fatally astray, because they treat the Bible alike prophetic and historical as a mere mummy, if not a scanty corrupted compilation of the old records of the Hebrews, with glances at other tribes that once existed but are now passed away and for ever.

But that day surely comes, "a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains." It is impossible to apply this to the Lord's coming to receive His saints caught up to meet Him. Can one want a clearer instance of the folly of identifying the day of Jehovah, with its terrors for the earth, with Christ's coming to translate His own on high? Will His presence which gathers us to Him above be in any wise "a day of gloominess and thick clouds?" The confusion is a palpable blunder. But more than this, His presence is never called His "day." I have no doubt that the reason is that which has been already indicated clearly — the notion of His "day" always supposes manifestation. "That day" may have been of old in a simply providential sense, as for instance when Sennacherib was destroyed; but it is very evident that this was the hand of God displayed terribly on man, and this is what is meant by manifestation to the world; though by and by it will go much farther than anything past.

Christians, indeed, are said to be children of the day before the day comes, as contrasted with men generally who are "children of the night," as we may see in 1 Thessalonians 5. We are children of light and the day, because we have now the nature of Christ, and shall come along with Him when that day dawns. But it is a mistake to suppose that we must await the day before we are taken to our place in heaven; whereas it is certain from scripture that, when that day comes, we shall be previously in our own heavenly seats, and shall come with the Lord out of heaven. "When Christ our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

Next we have a most graphic description of the Assyrian army. "A great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations. A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them. The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run." No doubt that in this remarkably nervous sketch, where an unparalleled army is supposed to come up against the land, the prophecy goes beyond what then assailed the Jews. That is, we must take in the whole prospect, the binary star (what is past now prominent, the future still graver behind it), in order to meet the full strength of the divine expressions. The Assyrian then was a most formidable array, yet after all their vain-glorious insolence destroyed so completely in a single night, that Sennacherib returned in disgrace, evidently, consciously, confessedly beaten. But the future day will behold a far more appalling host.

Let me say here that according to scripture there cannot be the slightest doubt that Russia is reserved to play a most important part in this great future crisis. For the policy of that vast modern empire affects the same objects as the Assyrian of the last day. Russia from its position in the north-east is known to seek the lead as suzerain over the eastern powers, acquiring influence politically, so as to be able to mould and guide those vast hordes of central Asia down to the south. It is my conviction that western influence will ere long be completely annihilated in the east, and that the dominion of our own country in India is destined to be short-lived. But this is merely by the way, which if true serves after all to show the importance of having a scriptural judgment on these matters, and how they prepare the mind for what, when it comes, will shake if not paralyze those who have not believed it; whereas, on the contrary, the development of facts, which prepare the way for the immense changes of the latter day, falls in with the faith of those who believe the word of God. They are not moved from their steadfastness by these things; they are prepared to expect them, instead of being surprised.

Again, in verse 5, "Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array. Before their face the people shall be much pained: all faces shall gather blackness. They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks: neither shall one thrust another; they shall walk every one in his path: and when they fall upon the sword, they shall not be wounded. They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall; they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief. The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining: and Jehovah shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for [he is] strong that executeth his word: for the day of Jehovah is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?" In this remarkable way the prophet mingles the name and day of Jehovah with the Assyrians employed then to do His work. The same enemy is called in Isaiah 10 "the rod of his anger," "the axe" that boasted itself over Him that hewed with it. Surely therefore the Lord Jehovah will turn against that axe and destroy it. He will employ it to accomplish His purposes upon a guilty people; but inasmuch as it destroyed them unmercifully and without the slightest fear of God, He will turn upon that which exalted itself, taking advantage of His displeasure to destroy His poor people if it could be.

Consequently after this we find the practical appeal to repent. "Therefore also now, saith Jehovah; turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto Jehovah your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat-offering and a drink-offering unto Jehovah your God" (verses 12-14).

Then comes the second blowing of the trumpets; but this is distinct. "Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly." It is not now, "Sound an alarm," but, "Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly." It is the gathering of the people to God, not merely their loud call on God to appear for them in their great alarm before the enemy. "Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of Jehovah, weep between the porch and the altar." Thus there is the complete prostration of the people as a whole, even to the very bridegroom and bride and sucking child; including the priests too as well as the people, but not in their own place; for they have to come out, and are with the people in humiliation, not apart in official dignity. It is the most admirable picture of a nation humbling itself before God; so that all classes of society — in political, religious, and family life — give way to the sense of their sin before God. There is no such leveller as sin, or that which is the consequence of sin — death; but it is a blessed thing when the gracious call of God works repentance, which really means the heart taking the place of owning our own evil and accepting what God thereon has to say to us. There is nothing more admirable for a soul, unless it be the grace of God which produces it. But, morally considered, repentance is always wholesome for His people, conscious of having unworthily answered to the grace He had shown them. It cannot but lead to restored communion through self-judgment, and to a practical obedience according to it. So it will be with the Jew by and by. "And let them say, Spare thy people, O Jehovah, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where [is] their God?" The marginal alteration for "rule over" is "use a by-word against." But the text is confirmed by the ancient versions, as indeed the construction of the margin seems contrary to Hebrew idiom, the noun only (not the verb) admitting of the sense of derision.

But God hears. "Then will Jehovah be jealous for his land, and pity his people. Yea, Jehovah will answer" — not for alarm merely, but because of their genuine repentance before Himself. Instead of insensibility or efforts to improve themselves, they will draw near to Jehovah in the sense of their sins. It is when they shall turn in contrition to His word, when they welcome in their heart Him that comes in the name of Jehovah, that He will appear in answer to their cry. And now comes in the full assurance of comfort. The Assyrian enemy is disposed of. "But I will remove far off from you the northern [army], and will drive him into a land barren and desolate, with his face toward the east sea, and his hinder part toward the utmost sea, and his stink shall come up, and his ill-savour shall come up, because he hath done great things." "The northern" confessedly does not mean any locust irruption, for they come from the south. It is the great foe of the latter day, who will not perish in the sea as those insects usually do, but be driven to a land barren and desolate, with his face toward the east or Dead Sea, and his hinder part toward the hinder or Mediterranean Sea. Just judgment of pride! because he "magnified himself to do."

But it is God who will really do great things. "Fear not, O land" (remark this as definitely the hope of the Jewish nation); "be glad and rejoice: for Jehovah will do great things. Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field." They are called to undergo renovation, instead of drooping for want even of common sustenance. The millennial day of joy for the earth and all creation is before us here. Hence "the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig-tree and the vine do yield their strength." All is reversed. It is not Christianity with its spiritual blessings in heavenly places, and with scorn and suffering on earth for the faithful, but earthly blessing and reward, as well as divine and saving mercy, as we shall see. "Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in Jehovah your God for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil. And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the canker-worm, and the caterpillar, and the palmer-worm, my great army which I sent among you." Thus God will more than undo the mischief. He will restore what He took not away. He will efface by the fulness of His blessing all their past sorrows and shame. "And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of Jehovah your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed."

But could this satisfy? Could it suffice even for the renewed mind? Certainly it could not satisfy Him who must be God, not in righteous government only, whether of friends or of foes, but in His love for His people. Therefore we have an entirely distinct character of blessing introduced after this, where in the Hebrew begins the third chapter. It is matter of regret that, in this respect the Hebrew having a decided advantage over the Gentile arrangement, modern versions have not followed the former.

"And it shall come to pass afterward." It is here we find the distinct break. Perhaps it is not too much to say that the putting of these two sections together has tended to mar the force of this scripture. Verses 28 and 29 then are quite apart from what went before. It is blessing of a higher order, flowing from the love of God, but this evidently in a spiritual way. "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit." It is the very scripture, as we know, which the apostle Peter quotes on the day of Pentecost to show that the immense blessing of that day was in accordance with the highest favour promised for the kingdom, not that human excitement or moral folly which mistaken or deluded men were quick to impute to those who surpassed others in spiritual power.

But, observe, the apostle did not affirm that this scripture was fulfilled. He says, "It is that thing which was spoken by the prophet Joel;" and so it is. What was promised was the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. Without saying that the present fact was the fulfilment of the prophecy (which men have assumed, to the great misunderstanding of scripture and lowering of Christianity), he showed that it was of that nature, and such therefore as to be vindicated by the prophecy before their conscience; but the apostle's language is guarded, while commentators are not. They go too far. We do well always to hold fast to scripture.

As to the promise that the Spirit should be poured upon "all flesh," we must bear in mind that "all flesh" is in contrast with restriction to the Jew. This is another feature which made the Pentecostal gift so admirably illustrate the scripture. For the patent fact that God caused those who received the Holy Ghost to speak in the different tongues distributed over the Gentile world, not causing all the converts to speak the Jewish language (a poor thing if true, which it is not, but a mere dream of superficial paradox), but causing the Jews gathered from their dispersion among all nations to speak the tongues of the Gentiles was a magnificent witness of the grace that was going out to the Gentiles to meet them where they were. The judgment of God had inflicted these various tongues upon them, and completely broken up the ambitious project of joining together to establish an unity of their own through the tower of Babel. But the grace of God went out exactly where His judgment had placed them. If a crushing blow laid their pride in ever so many separate ditches, the grace of God went out to these ditches, and blessed them where they lay, raising them out of their fallen estate.

Such then is the first interruption, and really the beginning of a new strain, which is sufficiently plain from the way in which it is introduced. "It shall come to pass *afterward,* that I will pour out my Spirit" — makes therefore a break with what goes before, and thus again most admirably suits it to the use to which the apostle Peter applies it. But then we must remember that when the day comes for the Holy Spirit to be poured out afresh, not for the gathering out of a people for heaven, but for the earthly purposes of God's grace (for that is the difference), it will be manifest that the Holy Spirit will be given to men altogether apart from their being Jews. So on the day of Pentecost, when they were exclusively Jews, it was yet shown by the miracle of Gentile tongues that God did not mean to stop there, but to go out towards all the nations.

God will never give up that principle. He does not mean to be limited to the children of Israel again. He will bless the children of Israel once more, and will take up Judah also as such, and will accomplish every word He has promised to their united joy. There is no good that He has annexed to them in His word which He will not bestow; but He will never more restrict Himself to the Jew in the day that is coming. And therefore, when the Holy Ghost is poured out at that time, it will be strictly upon "all flesh," not meaning that every individual in the millennium will have the Holy Ghost; but that no race left after that great day will be excluded from the gift of the Spirit. No class of persons, no age, no sex will be forgotten in God's grace.

But it may be desirable to remark here that there is no thought of healing or improving the flesh, as the fathers and the theologians say. The light of the New Testament shows us the fallacy of such a view. The old nature is judged; our old man is crucified, not renovated. To our Adam state we have died, and enter a new position in Christ, and are called to walk accordingly as dead and risen with Christ.

The external signs here named will precede the day which is still unfulfilled. It is vain to apply verses 30, 31 to the first advent. "I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth" is evidently another character of things. "And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of Jehovah come." There will be a remarkable outward manifestation of divine power before the judgment is executed. God always sends a testimony before the thing itself. He does not strike before He warns. It is so in His dealings with us every day. What Christian has a chastening upon him before he is admonished of the Spirit of God? There is always a sense of wrong, and a lack of communion sensible to the spirit before the Lord inflicts the blow which tells of His watchful love over our careless ways. He gives the opportunity, if one may say so, of setting ourselves morally right; and if we do not heed the teaching, then comes the sorrow. And so it is here. These wonders cannot but attract the mind and attention of men, but they will not really be heeded. Infatuated and under judicial hardness, they will turn a deaf ear to all,

#30 Amos

Amos.

Lectures on the Minor Prophets.

W. Kelly.

"The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake."

If the prophet Amos was thus a contemporary of Hosea during some part of his ministry, there is, as we might naturally expect, considerable difference in the character and aim of the two prophets; for God does not write merely to corroborate. For Him to speak once must be sufficient. In grace He may be pleased to give confirmatory testimony, but it is never necessary. Hence, even though there may be ever such strong resemblance in accounts of the same transactions and during the same epoch, substantially at least God has always a special object before Him in the work that He assigns to each. So it will be found that Amos, inasmuch too as he was of Judah, has his own peculiarities and a distinct line from God.

The general tone of the prophecy differs from Hosea's in that the latter speaks with far more emotion, with stronger expressions of passionate grief over the condition of Israel. But there was also this difference, that Amos brings in the Gentiles incomparably more than Hosea, who is almost exclusively Jewish. Hence in the very beginning of our prophet we find the judgments that were impending over the various nations surrounding the land of Israel. We shall find further that the prophecy has a different character even in what is said of Israel and Judah; but this will properly come before us as we examine it in detail.

First then we may notice that this prophecy, though remarkably connected, consists none the less of different sections. The first two chapters compose a regularly constructed series of judgments, beginning with Damascus, then with Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Judah, and Israel. From the beginning of Amos 3 both families are taken up, the children of Israel, the whole family, as it is said, which He brought up out of the land of Egypt. From this point onwards each chapter composes a section of the prophecy; so clearly that even those who object to Hosea for the broken and disjointed character of his prophecies admit the orderly series of Amos. It has been already shown how unfounded is the objection to Hosea; but it is the more remarkable in the case of Amos that the connection should be so sustained and evident, inasmuch as the portions of his prophecy were clearly separate in themselves.

The truth is, man has an indifferent judgment of the word of God; and it is a great mistake that he assumes to himself or allows others to judge it at all. It is exactly right to use it for judging others, were it even an apostle that preached. The sure and only way to profit fully by it is first of all to receive it implicitly. When we thus bow our will to God and His word we learn; it cannot be otherwise safely, however grace may save us finally. Hence moral condition is always essential to understanding the word of God. If the will be not subject, spiritual intelligence is impossible. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." Surely this is worthy of God, and, more than that, it is wholesome for man. There cannot be a more dangerous thing than the appearance of high intelligence where the heart is far from God. Therefore it is the greatest mercy that spiritual intelligence is, as the rule, inseparable from a right condition of the soul with the Lord. It is very possible that the man may have bright thoughts, as indeed commonly is the case with the enemy, who contrives with positive heresy to mix up not a little which sounds plausible and like truth. There may even be attention drawn to neglected truth; but then it is not a truth that sanctifies, but *the* truth. A truth misused may be the means of the greatest injury and danger to the soul. *The* truth is found in Christ only, and therefore it is the possession of Christ before us which alone secures both the glory of God and the blessing of man.

In our prophecy then the prophet introduces himself according to his lowly origin and condition. There is no vaunt nor puff. There was love in the Spirit, and love does not behave itself unseemly. There was boldness, as we shall find; there was a courageous uncompromising readiness to oppose wrong-doers, were it the king of Israel, but no hiding that he himself was among the herdmen of Tekoa. Further, he speaks of the king of Israel, not merely of Judah. There was no narrowness of feeling; nor was there unworthy yielding to the condition in which Israel was. There was no excuse drawn from the circumstance of the rent between the ten tribes and the two; as if one by the providence of God cast among the two was therefore to be absolved from all painful duty as to the ten. None the less the mission of Amos as a whole was to Israel. He notices Judah; but the charge given him was Jeroboam's kingdom far more than Judah. In short, his heart being with God, he loved His people as such; he loved the whole of them therefore, and could not yield to the enemy that, if sin had compelled a schism, and this had been the occasion of deeper mischief which dishonoured God, a prophet must abandon his testimony for His name, and forget that all were sons of Israel, and the objects of promise, destined yet to taste of saving mercy, as surely as they were now on the ground of law and reaping the bitter consequences of their unfaithfulness. He could wait for the day when God would cast out all stumbling-blocks and renew the bond that had been broken, renewing it too never to be severed again, under its only rightful head, the true Son of David, the Lord Christ. This we shall find in his prophecy before this notice is concluded.

Further, as Amos does not hide that he was of lowly degree, nor his connection with the south of Judah, neither does he abstain from pressing the solemnity of Jehovah's utterance by him. His words were what "he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake:" warnings first in word, then in deed.

Observe this preface: "And he said, Jehovah will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem." Such is the opening of our prophet, who begins where Joel ends (Joe 3:16). These references to, or citations from, other prophets are designed of God, and serve to bind the various witnesses in one testimony, as another has profitably called to our notice. But how solemn it is that Jehovah utters His voice from the central spot of His worship and government, not to comfort and direct but to denounce; and to denounce not strangers and enemies but His own people! He "will roar;" and the effect is that the shepherds mourn in the south, and the beautiful blooming Carmel withers in the north.

Then we come to particulars. "Thus saith Jehovah; For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four,* I will not turn away the punishment thereof, because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron. But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael which shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad." The Spirit begins with the greatest but most external of the enemies here to be enumerated, the Syrians. Their ruthless and persevering efforts cruelly to exterminate the Jews east of the Jordan would not be forgiven. This filled the cup of Syria. "I will break also the bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitants from the plain of Aven, and him that holdeth the sceptre from the house of Eden: and the people of Syria shall go into captivity unto Kir, saith Jehovah." The Syrians were to go back captives to Kir (probably Kurgistan, Georgia), whence they had emerged as conquerors and settlers.

{*This formula is not to be taken as equivalent to three+four transgressions, but as the climax after several antecedent evils of lesser degree. (Compare Prov. 30:15-31)}

So also as to Gaza, and in similar style as representing the Philistines, their old, unremitting, and active antagonists, if not an internal, at least a borderer, foe.They had been guilty of transgression upon transgression, and therefore Jehovah would not here too turn back. He would deal summarily with their iniquity, not carrying them off merely, but annihilating them as a people. "The remnant of the Philistines shall perish, saith the Lord Jehovah."

Then comes before us Tyre, purse-proud as a city of merchant princes usually is, and by commerce connected with every part of the earth; its palaces should be devoured by fire, as in fact came to pass. "Thus saith Jehovah; For three transgressions of Tyrus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and remembered not the brotherly covenant: but I will send a fire on the wall of Tyrus, which shall devour the palaces thereof." They were false to their brotherly covenant, and delivered up a complete captivity of the Jews to Edom, the haughty hater of the people of God. Little did they think that He saw and resented their covetous traffic in Israel.

Edom is next threatened with a judgment of no less extreme character. Here the sin was closer, as the tie was of blood, not covenant only — pitiless pursuit of his brother, and the keeping up of undying wrath. "Thus saith Jehovah; For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever: but I will send a fire upon Teman, which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah."

Ammon yet political and calculating in their desire to destroy Israel for their own interests are doomed of God to go into captivity. "Thus saith Jehovah; For three transgressions of the children of Ammon, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have ripped up the women with child of Gilead, that they might enlarge their border: but I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it shall devour the palaces thereof, with shouting in the day of battle, with a tempest in the day of the whirlwind." "Thus saith Jehovah; For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime: but I will send a fire upon Moab, and it shall devour the palaces of Kirioth: and Moab shall die with tumult, with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet." It would seem that 2Ki 3:26-27, contains the fact alluded to, which most like Josephus have misinterpreted. "His eldest son" means the eldest son of the king of Edom, the heir-apparent and probably joint king, whom the king of Moab threatened to burn, and did burn his bones, when Israel refused to raise the siege.

After this we come in Amo 2:4 to the solemn announcement that God must deal with Judah as with their Gentile neighbours. With God sin admits of no respect of persons any more than righteousness. "For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn back." Here Jehovah's law was broken, and lies or idolatries were trusted.

Lastly we come (verses 6-8) to Israel's transgressions. Here there are apparently four classes of wickedness: hard selfishness (*summum jus summa injuria,* we may perhaps say); covetous grinding of the poor; licentious profanity; and idolatrous revelry. The prophet sets before them the gracious and faithful care of God both in the land and before it in Egypt, to shame them (9, 10), and His choice of their sons to be prophets and Nazarites; and what had they done? (verses 11, 12.) Patience was over; no resources should keep or deliver. "Behold I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves. Therefore the flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not strengthen his force, neither shall the mighty deliver himself: neither shall he stand that handleth the bow; and he that is swift of foot shall not deliver himself. And he that is courageous among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, saith Jehovah." Israel had failed as a nation before God; and certainly the righteousness that punished the heathen would not spare a more privileged people who bore His name. Yet we find that in these two chapters there is only a general dealing laid down, preparatory to all the details which follow. And this is the more remarkably shown by the fact that from Amos 3 what is special is said of the two houses or the whole family of Israel.

There is more henceforth than dealing generally with Judah and Israel. It was no small dishonour that they should come into the list of guilty nations in and around Palestine scourged for repeated transgressions always ending with the worst. But if Judah and Israel had sunk to the level of the Gentiles, this does not hinder His preferring a peculiar indictment against them, both as a whole and separately. Thus, though there was in chapters 1, 2 the general inclusion of Judah and Israel with the heathen round about them, in chap. 3 we come to what is far closer, more serious and characteristic, for they are here viewed as distinguished from their neighbours.

"Hear this word." It is thus that we enter on a new division of the book. There is a similar commencement of Amos 4 and Amos 5, though each may be regarded as distinct discourses. Then comes the obviously different "woe" of Amos 6, which is followed by other modes of introduction in the rest of the prophecy. But in the third chapter, "Hear this word that Jehovah hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt." What is the ground here taken by God? "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." It is evident that now they are singled out, not mixed up with the Gentiles. But the conclusion is extremely solemn. Because they were thus separated to the knowledge of Jehovah, they only being known as His people, "therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." The measure of relationship is always the measure of responsibility. The nearer one is brought, the stronger are the grounds, and the higher the character, on which one must be conformed to divine claims in obedience.

This is an invariable moral truth. It is no otherwise in human relationships. A man would resent in his wife what he could not be expected even to notice in another; he might justly and deeply claim a kind of subjection in his child, a different identification with family thoughts and interests in his son, from that which would be suitable in any other. The failure of a confidential servant, even in the eye of men of the world, is incomparably graver than that of a casual labourer. And so it is in all the details of daily as well as spiritual life. Hence under the law wickedness in a ruler was far more censurable than in one of the common people; wickedness in the anointed high priest had an import and consequences more solemn than in any other individual in Israel. We find this distinction where God measures the different offerings for sin. (Leviticus 4) It is a moral necessity. There cannot be a more misleading thought than that all individuals are exactly on the same level; and that consequently all sins have just the same criminality, no matter in whom they may have been. It is contrary to what every well-regulated mind is able to discern when set before him, and certainly in direct collision with the plain word of God. The fact is that we find ourselves in various relationships; and the higher the relationship, or the greater the privileges, so much the more deplorable is unfaithfulness in that relationship and to such privileges.

This is the reason why the sin of Israel is now dealt with on quite a different ground from what was seen in Amos 2. There the question was, if the evils of the Gentiles came under the divine notice and chastening, whether Israel could be exempted from the punishment of their faults; and God shows they could not. If the Gentiles were so dealt with, Judah and Israel could not escape. But then this does not hinder there being a second count in which they are tried and found wanting. In chapter 3 they are judged not merely as faulty — others were guilty and so were they; but Israel were under Jehovah as none other was, and therefore they were chargeable with treason in a sense that none other could be. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." Has this no voice for us? Have we no special relationships with God? Whatever might be the nearness of an Israelite, whatever the blessings heaped on that favoured nation, how can either be compared with the place of a Christian, or of the church, the body of Christ?

Hence it is that in the instructions of Luke 12 Our Lord Jesus lays it down that in the day of His return, while the servant that did not his Master's will shall be beaten, the servant that knew his Master's will and did it not shall be beaten with more stripes. It is impossible to conceive a principle more heinously false than that favoured lands in Christendom are to be passed over more lightly in that day than the dark wastes of heathendom. One meets too often with an impression, for instance, that this country in which the Bible has been circulated more than in any other, and whence it has been sent out beyond any other centre, will be exempted from those condign judgments of God which are predicted to fall upon Christendom. It appears plain that the revealed principles of the divine word point to a conclusion directly opposed. The truth is that the wide diffusion of the Bible creates an aggravated responsibility for those who treat it lightly, and who will assuredly under pressure yield to temptation and give up the truth. It is the evident tendency of the present day, in consequence of the difficulties of adjusting matters, to give up the public recognition of God in the country, to solve the difficulties of various sects and denominations by abandoning all distinct and positive assertion of His truth. Disgust at the selfish squabbles of religionists will lead to the setting up of secular education for instance, and to the division of the funds intended for religious purposes as spoil which will be diverted to the present interests of man. I am convinced that God will take such a notice of it as men do not expect, and that those who have despised even the defective and feeble testimony of His truth in Protestantism will pay dearly for their contempt of Himself and of His word.

No doubt a similar process of disintegration is going on in various ways throughout every other part of Christendom. Rationalistic indifferentism is at least as rife among Romanists. Hence it is that, as one part has more particularly exalted itself by its pretension to be above the others — mother and mistress of all, this very arrogance betrays its alienation from the mind of God; for the gospel is perverted into a means of the most egregious worldly ambition, and the holy name of the Crucified becomes the stepping-stone to rank and wealth, and the avowed successor of him who had not silver or gold vies with the kings and queens in the splendour of earthly show, in names of honour, and in every form of the pride and luxury of life. Greater abomination will surely yet appear; when the end of that which sincere men must acknowledge to be contrary to the word of Christ and the teaching of the apostles will be visited as no sin ever was since the world began. Such is the doom that impends over Babylon.

As to the local habitation of Babylon now, or its centre at any rate here below, no man who simply believes the Revelation can question that the seven hills are not spoken of in vain. It is plainly enough intimated where was the city which took the place not merely of being the great but the governing city, ruling the kings of the earth, and reducing them to tribute and vassalage. Rome possessed it first with a pagan profession, afterwards with at least equal ambition and cruelty but far more guilt as the metropolis of Christendom. Other systems may no doubt be bad enough, where all is arranged according to the will of man; but so-called Christian Rome has usurped the dominion of God over conscience, has compelled idolatry as a duty to Christ, has claimed through the cross dominion over the powers that be to the utter confusion of authority as well as holiness and truth, and consequently awaits a more dreadful fate than paganism or Judaism ever knew. Such is the Babylon of the Revelation.

On the other hand we must remember that it is a sorry employment merely to occupy ourselves with that which touches others. Let us seek always to bow to what God has revealed for us, and not only to what He threatens on the iniquity of others. Let us use His word for Christ's glory in our own souls, and this too with earnest desire to help others, especially such as are of the household of faith. If God has been pleased, in the greatness of His grace, to bring any of us into a better knowledge of His truth and into a larger sense of the favour He has bestowed on His church, let us remember that we are responsible exactly according to that measure.

The word "Babylon," I am aware, presents a great difficulty to many minds in applying the idea to Rome. But this arises from a misapprehension of the Apocalypse, which does not merely repeat Old Testament facts, but employs them for deeper purposes in view of the ruin of Christendom. The origin of the application of Babylon seems to be this; the essence of the name consisting in confusion, the meaning is a system of confusion; it is that which seeks and takes the place of exceeding loftiness in the earth, a grand centre, we may say, of races and peoples and tongues. But even before this the great idea was the strength and dignity which result from combination. Later still it was the beginning of the Image power — a dominion world-wide in principle. (Daniel 2) All these combine in the apostacy of Christendom.

Doubtless the church is not a mere aggregate of churches, still less an evangelical alliance. The Christian assembly as a whole was the house of God; there were many members and but one body. Babylon may seize the idea of unity to make a carnal commandment, seeking not the faithful but all the christened world for its own purposes of pride, power, and covetousness; but it has no real conception of the truth. There cannot be the unity of the Spirit in what is merely a fleshly compact, founded on a system of earthly priests and human ordinances, with decrees, canons, and ceremonies innumerable, which may distinguish, but can never unite souls. The sole power of unity in the church of God is the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Inasmuch as Christians have one Spirit dwelling in them all, those who have the Holy Spirit thus are by this great fact members of one and the same body. They are united after the very closest sort. For while there is a base union of flesh, as the apostle so solemnly tells us in 1 Corinthians 6, and there may be another legitimate and of God, what is either in comparison with the one body formed by the Holy Ghost? Flesh at best is a mere creature, and now being depraved and evil it finds its exercise in will and passion. But union in the Spirit is holy in its nature, and has for its purpose the exalting of Christ. Such is the object of the church of God here below, and anything that does not answer to this will ere long sink into a machinery for selfish purposes. It does not matter whether it be individuals or nations — anything that loses sight of God's object and is not carrying out God's plans forfeits its place really except for judgment. If we accept a name, is it not true that God deals with us according to the place we take?

This has been the case with Rome more particularly. No other can put in such a claim to be the Apocalyptic Babylon. But it is well to bear in mind that Rome will put forth her powers in ways for which most now are unprepared. It is my persuasion that those who are not founded on Christ and loving His word by the Spirit of God will merge in Babylon ere long. Thus Rome will think to have its own way immediately before its final judgment and ruin.

There are two spirits, be it never forgotten, struggling for mastery in the world now: one is that of infidelity, the other that of superstition. Of course the spirit of superstition is what triumphs in Romanism. But we must also remember that, although these powers be so opposed in appearance, there is between them a real link of connection and of kindred source under the surface. For in sober truth superstition is as really infidel in the sight of God as scepticism. The only difference is that scepticism is the infidelity of the mind, while superstition is that of the imagination They are both veils which shut out and deny the truth of God, as they both have their spring in a real ignorance of the true God, substituting what is of the first man for the Second, one of them in a reverent tone and with appearances of devotion which outdo the truth which is according to godliness, bowing down even to lick the dust of the earth or anything else that will abase man before his earthly priest as the visible emblem of God; for this is the essence of the system. It is man abased not before God but before man. The aim of the enemy is evident. Every mind taught of the Holy Spirit in this can see without hesitation that God has not His place; and that consequently infidelity is the real root of Popery no less than of open profane scepticism.

Hence they both work so as to help each other on; because the grossness of superstition provokes and produces infidelity as a reaction, whilst the barren misery and desolation of infidelity exposes souls to the high claims of superstition to meet the cravings of the natural heart, where God is not known and self is unjudged. Thus scepticism leads persons indirectly to superstition. The cold blank of infidelity, the hopeless absence of truth, its negative character in short causes the heart to yearn for something positive, something to lean on; and if they have not God and His word to believe, by an abuse of His name they have man at any rate to confess to. Thus to regard man is superstition; but it is evident that the deliverance from it is not giving up scripture, but bowing to God instead of man.

This subjection of heart to God and His word is the sole attitude which becomes one before God; to this we are called by the word of His testimony; and when we rest on Christ's redemption, His Spirit is given to be in us as thus brought to God. Such are those who have received the name of the Lord Jesus; for there can be no real faith in God now without accepting Christ, the Son of God and the Son of man. Impossible to please God without accepting that glorious person, who is as truly God as man, and who has wrought our reconciliation, which supposes indeed the reality of His Godhead and the perfection of His manhood, by a sacrifice in which sin has been completely and for ever judged before God. Consequently he that believes in the name of the Lord Jesus steps into all the blessing that is founded on the work of Christ and commensurate with the infinite dignity of His person.

Such is the position of a Christian. Hence all questions as to acceptance with God are absolutely settled for him, by His grace in Christ; and no matter who or what he may be, whether here or there, black or white, high or low (I do not speak of heterodoxy or sin), every Christian is to be accepted equally as a member of Christ's body. We must rejoice to accept them all as belonging to that one Head, not only for heaven by and by, but for church fellowship now. For what can be more self-condemnatory than to acknowledge a relationship for Christ which you are ashamed to own for yourself and others on the earth? Is it not of the essence of Christianity to act now on what is unseen and eternal? To allow circumstances to outweigh this does not seem to evidence real faith or genuine love. Be it our joy then as it is our duty to remember in practice that we are called now to be witnesses of what God has done for all that are Christ's, always supposing that there be no question of plain scriptural discipline. There will be no doubt of it in heaven; there should be none on earth among those who are of heaven. The trial is now, and faith and love should surely show their colours in the day of trial. It was all well to love David when as a king he sat on the throne; but the test of affection as well as of intelligence in the mind of God was when David was chased upon the mountains like a partridge.

Here it is exactly, though very far indeed from exclusively, where we are put to the proof now. Against those builded together for God's habitation in the Spirit, — which now, alas! has been disfigured and broken as far as outward manifestation is concerned, — against God's church, Satan has formed and fashioned that awful mystery of lawlessness, the greatest the world has ever seen, covering under fair forms and high-sounding names the most hideous corruption of truth and sheer rebellion against God. Such, in my judgment, is the system of the Babylon of the Revelation, where with the most shameless confusion the fairest names gloss over the foulest ways and ends, where under the profession of being the servant of servants there is at the same time really the most enthralling tyranny over conscience which can be conceived. In the same way there has been the theory of counsels of perfection, but along with it a system of indulgences for sin and a tariff of enormities for money. What wickedness cannot be bought? What evil cannot be atoned for by some corban given to what calls itself "the church"? Such a system as this must be judged to be a practical denial of God in the church, and a setting up of man in His place, under pretexts which make God a party to His own dishonour; as if the Holy Spirit had signed and sealed over the rights of Christ to men who claim to be the successors of the chief of the twelve apostles in powers which not all the twelve ever possessed, and which not one ever hints at as possible. It is needless of course to enter into more particulars. My point is not now to lecture on Romanism, but to show sufficient cause why its confusion of holy confession with the greatest practical unholiness, which characterises Rome, is called "Babylon."

It may be a question how far a Christian who has really faith in the Lord Jesus, and stands in the integrity of the results of the work of Christ, in whom therefore the Spirit of God dwells, may possibly participate in Babylon, or even manifest its spirit, its essential spiritual element.

That there have been children of God ensnared in Babylon cannot be doubted by those acquainted with early mediaeval, or even later facts. There have been children of God in the position of priests, nuns, monks, cardinals, and popes. That is to say, there have been persons who manifest by their ways and their writings that they were born of God. To me this, instead of being any reason for license, is rather a most solemn warning; because it furnishes evidence how far a converted soul may be beguiled. Nothing can be more false than to argue that Romanism cannot be so bad a system because there have been Christians in it. Rather say the contrary: see the pit into which a Christian may fall! See the appalling quagmire into which a Christian may slip by yielding to human tradition and refusing to use the word of God to judge everything by! Thus to my mind there cannot be the smallest doubt that, as Romanism is the greatest religious imposture under the sun, so there have been children of God drawn into its toils, not merely as lowly and obscure members, but perhaps in its highest seats. I do not doubt that Popes Leo and Gregory, both styled the great, were Christians; nor do I mean to insinuate that these were the only two of whom we may think as saints and brethren in the Lord. My acquaintance with their personal history is not at all minute; but I know enough of them fully yet charitably to believe that there may have been Christians among them. This is humbling and most profitable for one's soul, because it shows to what a pitfall the allowance of unbelief may expose a Christian. It is evident that any one might be ensnared into it, especially such as occupy themselves with a truth — not the truth. From one thing indeed I should expect a person born of God to be kept, at any rate not to abide in, namely, what directly destroys the glory of the person of Christ. Now although Popery has brought in the most horrible enormities, both of doctrine and practice, yet thank God they have never given up those fundamental truths which the soul needs for salvation before God. Popery is distinct enough as to all this. I was lately reading a Latin book on theology which I had the curiosity to examine, a modern work of ability, partly because printed in America by a Roman Catholic Archbishop.* And not a little was I pleased, in the midst of feeling what a sorrowful system it is, to find greater tenacity about the foundation truth of God in that book than in many Protestant ones of our day. For instance, one of the works strongly condemned for their looseness of doctrine and heterodoxy is Barnes's *Notes on the New Testament,* a very popular book. I believe it has been published in Great Britain by various editors who are thought orthodox. But this Popish bishop is quite right, because Barnes denies the eternal Sonship of Christ; and although I should be sorry to express any opinion doubting the author's personal salvation (we have nothing to do with that which belongs to God), I have no hesitation in pronouncing the Protestant commentator unsound and Archbishop F. P. Kenrick justified in his strictures as far as that charge goes.

{*Theologiae Dogmaticae Tractatus tres, do revelatione, de ecclesia, et de verbo Dei, quos concinnavit Revmus Dnus Franciscus Patricius Kenrick, Epus Arath. in Part. Infid. et Coadj. Ep. Philadelphiensis. Philadelphiae: typis L. Johnson in Georgii vico. An. MDCCCXXXIX. Voll. iv. I believe there is a supplement of some three 8vo vols. of practical divinity. The dogmatic portion I found enough for my purpose.}

And again, who does not know that many have allowed themselves in unholy thoughts about Christ's humanity, where Popery has been quite consistently opposed? Anything like Irvingism would have been denounced by the standards of Popery, no less strenuously than Arianism and of course Unitarianism — which is only another word for infidelity. Thus whatever error directly touched the person or natures of Christ has found decided opposition from the theologians of Rome. For this one may thank God as keeping firm the basis of grace for the myriads of souls all over the world who have been entangled in that system. For surely so far as such errors go they are fatal. He who denies the supreme deity of Jesus, or His perfect humanity, is guilty of the deepest affront to God who gave His Son in infinite love, and has sent the Spirit to uphold and testify His glory. There is nothing in the Athanasian creed objectionable on this score. I believe it to be a singularly sound production, though not meaning by this that I should think it right to subscribe to it. I have long done with endorsing the dogmas of men, however excellent in themselves. At the same time, while not willing to bind myself to human definitions of faith, I am of opinion that, put forward merely as an exposition of truth on the human and divine natures in the person of Christ, it is admirable though perhaps too scholastic in form. As for the outcry about damnatory clauses, it is all a mistake. For our Lord Himself says, "He that believeth not shall be damned." Does the Athanasian creed go farther than this? No doubt some who want to do away with that creed believe it: I should be sorry to think that they do not; but if so, it seems to me that they stumble over small things.

From this digression, which may not be unseasonable or without practical use suggested by the then objects of judgment, we will pursue the course of the prophecy.

We have seen the great principle as true of an individual as of a people, and of Christendom as of Israel, that the Lord exercises righteous government with a closeness proportioned to nearness and privilege. It is in vain for unbelief to complain; for this is exactly what righteousness is and should be. The more favoured you may be, so much the more responsibility increases. This was the reason why God made so much of David's sin. How many others, even among the people of God, have been no less guilty than David, but have never been so exposed as he! For he was chastened not only himself as few ever were, but in his family also beyond most; yet spite of his grievous sins, he was one of the rarest men for faith and devotedness that ever lived in Old Testament times. It is plain that God was acting on the same principle with him individually that we find here with the nation. Impossible if one had been so favoured as he and nevertheless had made practical shipwreck — not indeed of his faith — but of a good conscience, that the Lord could righteously withhold the dreadful chastening inflicted both on him and on his family after him.

This is a peculiarly solemn consideration for us, because the Christian of all men has the greatest privileges, and hence is exposed, if unfaithful, to the severest correction. Never was there such an unfolding of grace and truth as that which came by Jesus Christ our Lord; never such a position of peace and liberty as that to which we are entitled now by the gospel — peace and sonship and nearness to God within the rent vail, not to speak of life and incorruption brought to light. As to the last the Old Testament saints too were quickened and will have incorruption, as I need scarcely say. They had a new nature as we have; they will have incorruption at Christ's coming no less truly than we. But now these blessings are "brought to light;" now there is no veil; for us darkness thoroughly passes away and uncertainty. For faith everything now is brought to an issue. Man stands convicted at the cross. Again God has made plain what He is in love and light. Consequently in such a day as this no doubt nor question becomes the soul which believes the word of God. And what is the result for man within the range of the Christian profession? That there are heavier judgments at the conclusion of Christendom than at the crisis of Israel.

There is one practical point on which I must again insist. The hope of special exemption, true of all saints, is an illusion for Great Britain, which on the contrary, as it will play its part in the dreadful tragedy of the falling away, so also cannot go unpunished.

But there is another thing of closer interest to note. The God who will judge in righteousness deals graciously. He does not soften, much less neutralize, judgment by grace, but brings in grace before the judgment in order to deliver from it those who bow to Him. We must never mingle the two together. If grace and judgment be thus jumbled, never will anything be seen aright; you may even forfeit the certainty that you are a Christian, and cannot hope to have peace in your soul. Judgment or mercy must each have its full character as well as measure — must be given a free and undisturbed course. Mercy interposes to deliver those that believe; judgment will fall on those that through unbelief are disobedient.

So here Jehovah warns His people through the prophet. He had explained to them the moral principle; now He lets them know His ways in certain brief parables or comparisons. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed? Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing? Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no gin is for him? shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all?" First, what communion could there be between God and His people in their then state? Next follow intimations of the sorrow in store for them; the lion's roar for his prey; the snare for the bird, the loud blast of warning for the careless people, all indicate it. "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and Jehovah hath not done it?" Not moral evil: Jehovah never does anything of the sort. It is impossible that God should be tempted with evils in that sense, neither tempteth He any man. But evil here and in other places means execution of judgment — a tremendous thing in itself, of course, as it is God who acts.

So much has been made of this phrase that it may be well to seek that it be cleared yet more. The very expression, "Shall there be evil in a city?" indicates that it is not in view of a man's heart or life. "Evil in a city" means plague, capture, or any other severe chastening falling on it. This is all that is referred to here.

The passage speaks of Jehovah's punishment as an evil to be borne, and so it is, a fearful scourge inflicted on a city. It is Jehovah then that has done it. Others may look at the secondary instruments; but there is nothing without Him. According to the highest authority, the Lord Jesus Himself, not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father; how much less can any judgment that envelopes a city take place without Him? Surely therefore, as He does all things, He knows all; and as He knows He communicates what He sees fitting of each judgment to those who hear His mouth and make known His mind. "The Lord Jehovah will do nothing, but he revealeth his secrets unto his servants the prophets."

The Christian stands on this wonderful ground now, inasmuch as he has a place not only priestly but prophetic. By this last I do not mean the power to utter predictions, but that he is graciously let into the secret of what God is going to do. This is the declared privilege of the disciple (Joh 15:15), and the apostles extend it to Christians in general. (1Co 2:10-16; 2Pe 3:17) Ought we then to have a doubtful uncertain mind? I do not mean by this that we may not be exercised in the details of every day, or the claims of duty, and especially the service of the Lord. But trial of faith is one thing; the vague driftings of unbelief another. The Christian should have a sound judgment first of all as to his own soul — a thorough judgment as to self in the past as well as the present, with no cloud as to the future; a clear and simple mind both as to God's children with their hopes, and as to the course of things in the world. Some no doubt may be enabled from above to act more powerfully in this respect; but it is the Christian's privilege to know beforehand with a lowly but sure confidence in God for himself. This is what I mean by the possession of a prophetic place. It is any thing rather than a pretension to new revelations; it is really the place of one who is a believer in God's revelation, who receives His written word as that which he is bound to hold, loving to confess it as the one source of divine truth and the only standard of it. Assuredly this is very important, because in our priestly place we draw near to God, and in our prophetic place we are intended to be witnesses of the truth before the time comes when the world too must know it. The world will shortly be forced to learn in bitter sorrow how true was the word of God it despised; they will feel its force by the judgment which He will execute, by the evil which He does not only in a city then, but all over the world in various but righteous measures. The Christian ought to be familiar with it all beforehand. "Seeing ye know these things before," says the apostle, "what manner of persons ought ye to be!" It is a wholly false maxim that the Christian has to wait till the predicted things are accomplished before believing them. The very essence of his faith, as far as this is concerned, is believing them beforehand. When the world itself cannot but bow to their truth, when it will no longer be a question of men's believing them but of being broken and punished for their previous unbelief, when the judgments of God are in the earth and the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness, it will be too late for those who have trifled with the name of Christ and the privileges of Christendom. It will be too late when the long-suspended sentence falls on the guilty. The power, the peace, the comfort, is in receiving the truth before the things appear to man; there is a great blessing for the soul in it, as glory brought to God by it.

This is the moral reason for heeding prophecy in general, which the prophet Amos sets out particularly here. "The lion hath roared, who will not fear? Jehovah hath spoken, who can but prophesy? Publish on the palaces at Ashdod, and on the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say, Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Samaria." God would expose them to their neighbours near or farther off; nay, invites these from the heights to behold the disturbances and oppressions of Samaria. They were become reprobate of mind, whose only store consisted of violence and oppression in their palaces. Then we have a description of their evil and what must follow it. "Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, An adversary there shall be even round about the land; and he shall bring down thy strength from thee, and thy palaces shall be spoiled." So that out of that strong people which enjoyed the pride of life in the corner of a bed (or divan) and a couch, the merest refuse of a remnant should be rescued. "As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear;* so shall the children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria in the corner of a bed, and in Damascus [in] a couch." Possibly Damascus itself is meant as the couch by a strong figure. The Lord will not permit utter destruction to His people. He will allow an extreme judgment because of their sin; but He will preserve a remnant, out of which His grace will make a strong nation. Such is the destiny yet for Israel.

{*Some have conceived that the rescued morsels have a specific meaning: the one indicating that by which one walks, the other whereby we hear the word. To me such a force here seems more than doubtful. They appear to mean rather relics of an all but complete destruction, though possibly they may suggest more for the saved remnant by and by.}

In Amos 4 this is pursued in a still more precise manner. "Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria." The reference is to those that dwelt at ease and are self-indulgent in Israel, the figure being taken from the herds which grazed on the rich pasture lands coveted by the two and a half tribes on the eastern bank of the Jordan. This soon leads to unfeeling indifference and oppression of others; and so the prophet proceeds to charge them: "Which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink." Intense selfishness is here laid at the door of Israel. It was the time of their most flourishing state politically, not of their real honour and glory, which was under David and Solomon. But after the rent from Judah, it might outwardly seem to man that Israel was a highly favoured people. Alas! their independence was coeval with their apostacy. They had abandoned the true God, they had set up the calves at Dan and Bethel. They were under the self-asserting government of Jeroboam, whom God had allowed to succeed as a scourge to the guilty house of David. But His eye was in no wise unobservant of their ways. Yet the very fact that He noticed oppression of the poor and other effects of their intense selfishness shows the low condition of Israel.

This I cannot but think an important principle. Suppose the church of God were occupied with rectifying the squabbles of such as did not know how to behave themselves, with frauds in business, or such like faults, moral or social, would it not indicate an exceeding low state? For, properly speaking, these are the mere evil ways of fallen men. What normally belongs to the church or the Christian, while passing no evil by, is to judge spiritual defilement according to God, offences against the holiness and the truth of God, indifference as to such evil, or connivance with it in others. Of all this natural conscience takes no cognizance, and of course they are outside the province of human law. Not that these evils of a spiritual nature are not very real and profoundly bad before God, and even more destructive to the soul than moral ones (for these are at once discerned and would trouble all save for the time the guilty actors); but doctrinal evil is subtler and taints the spirit and conduct of man insensibly. Hence it is worse than practical evil, although they are both of them inconsistent with Christ. Still it is clear that where Christians go astray the evil is naturally apt to be more of a spiritual kind, as that of the world is of a coarse and open sort.

The very fact, therefore, that God here charges upon Israel habits and practices which might be found among the heathen is a flagrant proof of the degraded state into which His people had fallen. He must judge: "The Lord Jehovah hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks. And ye shall go out at the breaches, every cow at that which is before her; and ye shall cast them into the palace, saith Jehovah." It is borrowed from helter-skelter confusion among cattle. The last phrase is rather "Ye shall cast yourselves to the mountains of Monah," meaning perhaps Armenia. He does in His government notice, as He always must, the evil of His people that affronts and grieves Him; and He shows further that, as there were such fruits, there was a stock and root also. Their practical evil sprang from idolatrous rivalry of Himself. "Come to Beth-el and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression." These names, of such striking association with God, the places where God had manifested His grace and character of old, were now converted each into a focus of corruption. It was at Beth-el where their father Jacob had first seen the vision of God; at Gilgal the reproach of Egypt was rolled away for ever from the sons of Israel on their passage of the Jordan after they had left the wilderness behind. But now, alas! God was degraded as far as the wit of man could in Beth-el, as the people degraded themselves in Gilgal. The true glory of Israel had departed for a season.

The prophet then mockingly bids them come to their haunts of idolatry, but in such terms as to intimate the contrariety to God. "And bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years: and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith Jehovah." It was dismal, the mingling of heathenish will-worship with the relics and reminiscences of Jehovah. It is bad enough to be careless and unfaithful in the true worship of the true God; it is the gravest insult to mingle nature worship or false gods with the true, keeping up a measure of imitation, but with marked departure from the revealed ritual.

Such was the state of ruin in which Israel now lay, and the Lord shows how He had smitten them with one affliction after another to rouse them from their self-will to feel His dishonour. "And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah. And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. So two or three cities wandered into one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah. I have smitten you with blasting mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig-trees and your olive-trees increased, the palmer-worm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah. I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah."

Thus far they had been incorrigible; even though, as they are reminded, He had overthrown some of them as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. "And ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah" (verse 11). Now He takes a new method and more ominous than any blow. They must meet Himself. "Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel. For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and "readeth upon the high places of the earth, Jehovah, The God of hosts, is his name."

It is the strange habit of some to apply this text to a soul which is under the hand of the Lord when brought to believe the gospel; but it is evidently a threat of final judgment. Fully as we may desire to own the exceeding breadth of the divine word, we should not blunt the keenness of its edge in this way. It is excellent to guard one's spirit from the least approach to a captious or critical tone in one's thoughts of the use of scripture made by any simple mind; but we should not confound grace and judgment, or the day of Jehovah with the gospel call to the sinner. There is no lack of suited appeals. There are abundant examples in point. How much more blessed to take those which are intended as a call to mercy, than to turn such a summons of God as this to meet His judgment into an invitation to hear His message in the gospel now! However this by the way.

In Amos 5 is the third call to hear with a lamentation over the ruin of the virgin of Israel. The prophet only speaks of the present government of God: in no way does he deny an after raising up of Israel, but that their unbelief precluded any means now of staying the evil that had set in. The city that went out (that is, to war) [by] a thousand shall retain a hundred, and that which went out [by] a hundred shall retain ten for the house of Israel. Then Jehovah appeals solemnly to Israel to seek Him and live, not to seek Beth-el, nor to enter into Gilgal, nor to pass to Beer-sheba; "for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Beth-el shall come to nought." When idolatrous superstition turns names and places invested with religious associations against the truth, faith must look simply and solely to God Himself. Here again it is said, "Seek Jehovah, and live; lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Beth-el. Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth." It was but vanity or worse to cry up the sacred character of spots where God had once spoken, now alas! openly turned to the purposes of idolatry, not consecrated to God, but by the will-worship of His people. "Seek him that maketh the seven stars [the Pleiades, which consist of seven greater stars, but of many more lesser] and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night; that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: Jehovah is his name: that strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress. They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly. Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right. Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time."

In verses 14-17 the appeal is more moral, but in conformity with the call to seek Jehovah. "Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so Jehovah, the God of hosts, shall be with you as ye have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that Jehovah the God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph. Therefore Jehovah, the God of hosts, the Lord, saith thus: Wailing shall be in all streets: and they shall say in all the highways, Alas! alas! and they shall call the husbandman to mourning, and such as are skilful of lamentation to wailing. And in all the vineyards shall be wailing: for I will pass through thee, saith Jehovah."

One evil was then prevalent which the prophet particularly notices, the boldness with which the people said that they desired the day of Jehovah. "Woe unto you that desire the day of Jehovah! to what end is it for you? the day of Jehovah is darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; and went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall and a serpent bit him. Shall not the day of Jehovah be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?" This is indeed presumptuous sin, not to believe the gospel but so to brave the day of the Lord. It is not so uncommon. We may often meet with it in Christendom. Have you not heard men say, in the midst of the present confusion, while helping it on, "It is true that the condition of Christendom is awful; but there is one comfort, that the Lord is soon coming to put it all right." Is not this desiring the day of Jehovah in a sense not remote from what is denounced here? "To what end is it for you?" If there were separation practically from what His word condemns, and devotedness to the objects He enjoins on us, it would be another matter. For the day of Jehovah can be an object of desire if our souls are free as far as our conscience knows. We may, as we ought, and must then love His appearing. Far from this being inconsistent with His will and word, it becomes us. If walking in obedience and holiness, we should surely desire it; but it is an empty and bold illusion to settle down deliberately in what is contrary to scripture, and then to talk of longing for the day of the Lord. This seems to be precisely the sin of Israel here denounced. It was an evident sham; not only a powerless word without force in the conscience, but the witness of heart-indifference to the will of Jehovah.

In general indeed there is nothing more dangerous or dreadful than to dislocate scripture from its appeal to the conscience. If I make the hopes of scripture to be simply an imaginative vision before my eyes, instead of hearing it as that which judges what I am doing, what I am saying, what I am feeling now, it is evident that I am not in communion with God about it. I do not speak only of those who, not being real Christians, have necessarily no portion in the blessing, but even of those who appearing to be Christians do nevertheless exhibit the counterpart of Israel's bold unbelief. Assuredly their state is bad, and the thought is displeasing to God. The truth is that one object the Spirit has in setting His return before us is for leading us to clear ourselves from everything inconsistent with His will. As the apostle John says, "He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself as he is pure." It is not merely that the Lord will purify when He comes. He will; but this will be in the way of judgment. Let no man venture to await this process of purification: what we have to do is to seek it from God by His word and Spirit now. We know Christ's love; we delight in His glory; we have Him as our life; and therefore we cannot endure that any thing should be tolerated in our ways contrary to His word. Such is the only right course, if waiting for Christ.

30 Amos contd

But the sons of Israel were in a very different spirit. They were superstitious and withal, as usual in such a case, distrustful of God. They talked piety, but there was no substance, no reality, in them; and therefore the prophet can but warn what that day must be to such. "Shall not the day of Jehovah be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it." That day ends all fond conceits, and will admit of no lightness of heart; that day will not deal gently with sins or dishonour to the Lord. That day may well call for sackcloth and ashes, for repentance and humiliation of heart; as this day is one of rebuke and blasphemy. Happy is he who is now in the secret of the Lord and in communion with His feeling as to both. So Jehovah says, "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." The pretence of honouring Him in sacrifice and feast-day, in song or harp, was odious, joined as all was with self-will and departure from His word, and the setting up of idols. Then He reminds them that this departure from God was no new thing in Israel. "Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images,* the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves. Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith Jehovah, whose name is the God of hosts." When the Lord judges, He always goes back to the first sin. This is much to be noticed. It is not otherwise when grace works in our souls. Suppose a Christian, for instance, to have been walking practically at a distance from God. To begin merely with what he was doing today or yesterday is not enough: we must go back to the beginning The Lord will have him to look well and judge, and see what was the root of fruits so evidently bad. Thus even a fall is used by grace as the means of rousing the conscience by the Spirit of God. One is thus made to feel the low point to which one may have come. But the object of God in permitting it is to lead to a retracing of the steps to the first point of departure from Himself.

{*The version of Maurer and others, "The sacrifices and offerings ye presented to me during forty years in the desert; but now ye bear the shrine" is inadmissible as a question of Hebrew idiom, and destroys the whole scope of the truth intended; for it contrasts their early fidelity to Jehovah with their actual idolatry. But the Heth is not here the article but interrogative: else it must have been repeated which it is not. Henderson also gives several instances which prove that the insertion of the compensative Dagesh in the letter Zain has not the force alleged. So the Targum and the Syriac, the Septuagint and the Vulgate, took the sentences interrogatively as in authorised version. But some moderns even so understand the sense to be the absolute denial of offerings in the wilderness, which contradicts several express statements of scripture.}

Here we have this principle applied to the judgment of Israel. It is not merely the calves that Jeroboam set for politico-religious purposes at Dan and Beth-el. They are reminded when and where their idolatry began, that is, in the wilderness. False gods were objects of worship there, the Moloch and the Chiun, that they took up all the time that the Levites were carrying the ark of the tabernacle, with the sons of Israel so demurely following. They had not got rid of the gods of Egypt then. They brought these vanities along with them into the wilderness; and now this is charged upon them. "But ye have borne the shrines of your king, and the basis* of your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves." Mark the circumstances. "Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity" (the deportation to the cities of the Medes) "beyond Damascus." Stephen says beyond Babylon (and so indeed was the fact) perhaps to distinguish from the Babylonish captivity. Such was the result of the old sin in the wilderness. No doubt that sin was more glaring at the end; the dark stream was always gathering further contributions to its volume. The mass of waters flowed more mightily down at its mouth than at the beginning of its course. Nevertheless God always goes back to the source, and at last declares that because of the first departure did the final blow come. The captivity of Israel was the consequence of their forefathers' sin in the wilderness, and not merely of the sins they had added to it in the land God allotted them. Of course there were many and bitter aggravations in the land; but the evils which abounded in the land were the consequence of a failure to judge the wickedness in the wilderness. It is the same thing practically with every Christian.

{*Such is probably the meaning of the difficult word Chiun.}

No doubt grace can and does act in the case of a Christian now, even where he might have slipped seriously aside, but where there followed deep and thorough repentance, and the sense of forgiveness which the Spirit grants. This would become the last starting point, so to speak, and grace if it went back beyond it would use it for good. Not only is He faithful and just to forgive and cleanse, but He loves to bring him who has failed when restored into a better condition than he had ever known before. Witness Simon Peter at the end of the Gospels and the beginning of the Acts. And so it will be with Israel in a future day. But self-judgment, wherever it is thorough, wherever there is a vindication of God against one's own sin, always brings one in the measure of the repentance into a corresponding measure of depth in God's grace never possessed before. There are few things more common than to see a person converted in what may be called a superficial manner. Where this is the case, there is commonly a falling into open failure of one kind or another, sometimes a shameful break-down, by which the man really becomes nothing less than a bag of broken bones, thoroughly brought to nought in his own eyes. After this, when grace has lifted him up, he will be incomparably humbler and will have a more grateful as well as chastened sense of what God is than he had when first converted. Hence, although it be a shame to him that he required such a humiliating process, it is the triumph of divine grace to use his folly for putting him that is restored into a better condition than before he went astray.

But if Peter knew and needed this, Saul of Tarsus did not require it; and I have no doubt that in the early work in the latter's soul the iron entered incomparably more deeply than into any one of the twelve. It is always indeed a matter for thankfulness, when a soul goes through a sound and grave work at the starting point; that is, when it is not all joy and comfort, but the conscience is enabled fully to be before God as to our sins, when we realise gravely all that we have been, and are thoroughly sifted out in His presence. Surely this inward work should not hinder confidence in God. This ought never to be; for grace is preached in the fullest and most absolute way when man is called and enabled to search out and confess what he is in God's sight. On the other hand, there is no need that one should have gone to great lengths of outward evil in act, in order to a profound feeling of depravity and ruin. Paul had been, we may be sure, a more scrupulously moral man all his days than any of the apostles: yet none fathomed the iniquity of his heart as he did. It is therefore very possible by grace to combine the two things, which indeed go together according to God and are dangerous if separated: a rich and unwavering sense of the grace of God in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; and a deep (the deeper the better) moral process in the soul when it judges itself, and not its acts only, before God. It ought to be evident that this is the kind of conversion which morally most glorifies God. It is that which we see exemplified in the case of Saul of Tarsus. Hence there never was a man who had less of self-righteousness, as far as I know, — never one who equally recognised the grace of God. Consequently wherever was a man made so great a blessing to the whole church of God? But where one at first has been drawn more by affection than by conscience, there always follows the work in conscience where the conversion is real; even so, where the inward work has been comparatively superficial, there may be the need of many a moral dealing, sometimes in pain and shame, as we see in the case of Peter. I do not think that Peter would have been allowed to deny his Lord, and to repeat and swear to it too, in a very public manner, unless there had been a good deal of self-righteousness along with ardour which carried him easily into danger but was unable to bring him safely out. Still the Lord is always good, and His grace is tender and considerate, as well as wholesome and holy. Differences there are in men; but never anything but what is good in God.

Amos 6 is a fresh appeal of Jehovah to those wrapped up in self-security, warning them of sure sorrow. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came?" Here they are shown that the resources of nature are impotent to hide from the judgment of God; impotent too their place of honour in being raised above the nations, with the house of Israel looking up to them. "Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great: then go down to Gath of the Philistines: be they better than these kingdoms? or their border greater than your border?" Calneh was far east, a very ancient city and of long continuance. (Compare Gen 10:10 and Isa 10:9) Hamath was a Canaanitish kingdom north of the land. Gath lay in the west. Where were they now? What cause Israel had to fear, worse and more guilty than they! "Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." Thus whether some pretend to court the day of Jehovah, or others dare not to look "the evil day" in the face that they might oppress and enjoy without remorse, it comes to the same end of judgment from God, who is not mocked in either case. Hence in verse 7 they are told that they shall be with the first that go captive, and the noisy banquet (or revel shout) of the outstretched shall depart. It will be turned into mourning and the cry of despair.

The prophet then solemnly pronounces the hatred God feels against the ways of Israel, so dishonouring to Him and so corrupting to man. "Jehovah hath sworn by himself, saith Jehovah the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein. And it shall come to pass, if there remain ten men in one house, that they shall die. And a man's uncle shall take him up, and he that burneth him, to bring out the bones out of the house, and shall say unto him that is by the side of the house, Is there yet any with thee? and he shall say, No. Then shall he say, Hold thy tongue; for we may not make mention of the name of Jehovah. For, behold, Jehovah commandeth, and he will smite the great house with breaches, and the little house with clefts." It is a picture of utter desolation and despair.

Lastly, the absurdity of expecting any other result than destruction from their ways is set strikingly before them. "Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plow there with oxen? for ye have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock: ye which rejoice in a thing of nought, which say, Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength? But, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith Jehovah the God of Hosts; and they shall afflict you from the entering in of Hemath unto the river of the wilderness." The Assyrian must teach Israel with thorns.

In Amos 7 a gradation of three judgments on Israel is set forth: first (verses 1-3) by the grasshoppers or creeping locusts, next (verses 4-6) by fire, and lastly (verses 7-9) by a plumbline, which intimated the strict measure applied to mark their iniquities; when patience had exhausted itself, further delay would have been connivance in evil. These troubles were accomplished historically, it would seem, in Pul, Tiglath-pileser, and Shalmaneser, who finally swept away the kingdom.

The priest Amaziah strives to arouse the fears and jealousy of the king against Amos (verses 10, 11), while he also pretends to counsel Amos for his good, his aim being to get rid of the divine testimony, which he dreaded. "Then Amaziah the priest of Beth-el sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land. Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: but prophesy not again any more at Beth-el: for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court." It is remarkable how his language betrays him. Religion in Israel was political arrangements, spite of their effort to imitate the ritual of God. So here even Amaziah speaks of the king's sanctuary as naturally as of the king's court. Just so men call their religious associations by the name of their country, an invented polity or a favourite dogma. A divine source and authority is unthought of, save to adorn the structure, not for subjection of heart and obedience.

The course of this world is traversed by a godly unsparing testimony, which does not fail to be regarded as troublesome to the government. Amos sought no arm of flesh, but openly confessed who and what he was, when God summoned and commissioned him to prophesy. "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit." He had not been brought up in the school of the prophets, nor had he hitherto enjoyed any other natural advantages. He could boast of no learning acquired among men. Birth or property had done nothing for him. His claim to speak was the fruit of divine grace. Any power that Amos possessed was as a true prophet of Jehovah, and solemn is the message he delivers: "Now therefore hear thou the word of Jehovah: Thou sayest, Prophesy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac. Therefore thus saith Jehovah: Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land." In the reiteration of Israel's doom the presumptuous opposition of Amaziah meets with a special, relative, and personal humiliation.

Amos 8 opens with a fourth symbol — a basket of summer fruit, betokening how near as well as sure the end was for Israel. "I will not again pass by them any more. And the songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord Jehovah; there shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence." The command of the king, the intervention of the priest, would in no way stay, but rather accelerate and increase, the punishment of their iniquity. Thus a still more solemn and complete chastening is proclaimed on Israel. Their oppressive conduct is exposed with vigour, and Jehovah's sworn judgment is repeated. Nothing yet executed meets the term of verse 9. Their worst famine should be one of the word (verses 11, 12): they shall feel the want of what they despised. The most fresh and vigorous should not escape the suffering (verses 13, 14).

Then in Amos 9 all is crowned by the vision of the Lord standing on the altar to execute without further delay the judgment Himself. "And he said, Smite the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake: and cut them in the head, all of them; and I will slay the last of them with the sword: he that fleeth of them shall not flee away, and he that escapeth of them shall not be delivered." It is no longer a question of sprinkling the lintels of the door with the blood of the paschal lamb. Now, on the contrary, it is His own people who are the object of inevitable destruction. Jehovah is not viewed here as staying His hand and passing over His people, neither does He judge others in His displeasure; He is punishing not the Egyptians or the Gentiles, but Israel. A solemn sight and sound! The theme is pursued throughout the chapter, where the Lord declares that, as His eyes were on the sinful kingdom to destroy it from the face of the earth, so on the other hand He would not destroy the house of Jacob, but He will command, and, spite of their scattered estate all over the face of the earth, He will not permit one grain to escape.

The kingdom which began in sin went on in sin and must perish. There is no prospect of restoration held out to the kingdom founded by Jeroboam. But Jehovah promises the intervention of mercy (not to Judah merely but) to "the house of Jacob." When in the latter day restoration is taken in hand, God will assemble the outcasts of Israel no less than the dispersed of Judah. The chaff, of course, must perish in the fire. The true grain of the Lord's sowing should not fall to the ground. "All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword which say, The evil shall not overtake nor prevent us." It is not the eternal judgment of the dead raised, but a divinely inflicted judgment of the quick in this world, not while the gospel goes forth, but afterwards in view of the kingdom of the Lord over the world in power and glory. The exclusion of the power of Satan over man and the earth, and the public display of the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ, are painfully ignored by the current theology, Catholic or Protestant, Arminian or Calvinist. It is a serious gap both for Christ's glory and the right interpretation of scripture. It is a wrong both to the word of Him who never lied and to His saints who deeply need it, among those especially who are plunged in the usual uncertainty generated by this system of teaching. For if the divine word can fail as to Israel's restoration and pre-eminent glory in their land and the universal joy of the nations as such, how can we trust it for the eternal life of the believer, and for the heavenly privileges of the Christian and the church at this present time? The symmetry of the dispensations of God is also destroyed by the error to any mind capable of a comprehensive grasp of their course as a whole.

Nay, more, it is declared not only that God should preserve what was of Himself in the solemn day which is still future, but "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David." He would not permit merely a flourishing state of Judah and of Israel as separate powers. He will reunite them and establish the rights of the united kingdom. "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof." Weak as that rude booth or hut looked in itself, a fallen thing too, God would raise it up in the day when the strong and high and haughty must fall. Their breaches will He wall up; for many were the breaches sustained from internal weakness and external violence. Nay, He would raise up the ruins of David, and build it as in the days of old; "that they may inherit the remnant of Edom, and of all the Gentiles which are called by my name, saith Jehovah that doeth this." Here is the well-known principle which was applied by James at the council of Jerusalem to the divine right of recognising under the gospel the Gentiles without being circumcised. His argument is that they do not require to become virtual Jews in order to get the blessing of God and to bear His name. For to be circumcised is practically to be no longer a Gentile, but to become a Jew. Whereas now God is really making not Jews but Christians. Therefore to force circumcision on such Gentiles as believed was a total mistake.

On the other hand Jehovah has not yet raised up the tabernacle of David; nor is this at all intimated by James's quotation of the passage. Neither he nor any other apostle ever says that the church of God is the same thing as the booth of David. The whole system which identifies them is foreign and opposed to scripture. It is only the allegorical habit of the fathers which invented the fiction that Zion or Jerusalem, that Judah or Israel, mean the church. But this error lowers our own dignity, and deprives the ancient people of that hope for which God's providence reserves them spite of their actual unbelief. Assuredly God will bless the Jews by and by, and His name will be called upon the Gentiles. Even the most obstinate of Pharisees could not gainsay James's proof of this. If then God were pleased to call His name on Gentiles now by the gospel, who can deny the principle if he believe the prophets? Their own scriptures agree to this, and oppose the narrow-mindedness which would convert them practically into Jews in order to be called by His name. No Israelite could have conceived that God had then raised the fallen hut of David; but he could not gainsay that God spoke of all the nations on which His name should be called when that day comes. It was not inconsistent but in keeping with this, if as Gentiles they were called by His name now. James does not speak of this or any other prophetic citation being fulfilled at present. He simply quotes the broad fact from the Septuagint version, as agreeing with the principle generally laid down by the prophets that all the nations should be called by Jehovah's name. This is indeed the characteristic of the millennial day, when all Israel shall be saved, and shall inherit the remnant even of their bitterest foe as well as of all the Gentiles. Undoubtedly, when it is fulfilled, the subjection of the nations will be for ever, and the kingdom of Jehovah over all the earth, though it be of course the kingdom of the heavens. The apostle cites this then only for present use in sanctioning the reception of Gentiles without circumcision, which it did unanswerably.*

{*Even Dr. Henderson confesses that "all attempts to apply what is said respecting the booth of David to the Christian church are unwarranted and futile."— Minor Prophets, p. 181, second edition.}

The rest of the prophecy speaks of the blessed restoration of the people to their land in the mercy and to the praise of Jehovah. "Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith Jehovah thy God." Undoubtedly it will be a day of blessing for the souls of all that are born of God; but the prophet's description, though of what is surely beyond nature, is not therefore of heavenly things but of the earth, then indeed the sphere of boundless blessing from God without hurt or danger to man. It is in no way an emblem of the pathway of faith which makes its way by the power of the Spirit against the adverse course of the world; for Satan will then be bound and the Lord reigning not in secret but manifestly, righteousness at ease and in honour, and iniquity, if it display itself for a moment, as speedily suppressed and judged. Hence the natural emblems are here used to set out the abundance to be bestowed here below, when the Redeemer vindicates and manifests the Creator's bounty. It only misleads when the Christian reads such a passage with a view to his own circumstances. It may be lawful to apply the principle in illustration of the rich grace of our God; but we must beware of allowing such a use to deny its just and full meaning, and the evident scope and purpose of the Holy Spirit in it.

It has been well remarked how Amos, a prophet of Judah but for Israel, joins on his own prophecy to that of Joel, whose office was peculiarly toward Judah and Jerusalem, thus purposely identifying their work of testimony (Amo 1:2). Here is a fresh instance, though Amos, evidently taking up the rich promise given at the close of Joel, goes beyond it in strength when he says that all the hills shall (not merely flow with milk, but) melt (verse 13).

But it is not wise to slight the earthly things of that kingdom which, though now exclusively spiritual and heavenly, will really embrace both the heavens and the earth in the day of the Lord's displayed glory. If the tiniest insect or the least of herbs were left outside His reconciliation, the enemy would have gained a victory over God and His Christ, which can never be. Hence the bringing again of the captivity of Israel is to be understood in its obvious import, though surely in that day the spiritual will in their case coalesce with the earthly. To interpret it, exclusively at least, of churches of Christ is infatuation, and gives sanction to a "delusive alchemy,"* which is already turned by less scrupulous hands to efface the incarnation and atonement of Christ and all other foundations. Nor have any of the allegorists any sure means of defending the truth on such principles as these. The partial return from Babylon is the pledge of a complete restoration in the day of Jehovah, as well as a condition of His coming and work whose rejection has made the promises sure in His death and resurrection. The complete fulfilment is the very reverse of ended by His coming; for He will come again, and Israel shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of Jehovah, and the sure mercies of David will be enjoyed to the full. This takes nothing from the church, gives much to Israel, and glorifies Christ in all. But the error is not only unjust to God's word and His ancient people, but it is dangerously false as tending directly to blind Christendom to her impending judgment for her sins and the apostacy close at hand by holding out the false expectation of universal and perpetual triumph.

{*So R. Hooker called the habit of allegorizing without warrant or measure.}

31 Obadiah.

Obadiah.

Lectures on the Minor Prophets.

W. Kelly.

The history of Edom throughout scripture is one of much interest, as exhibiting the ways of God with a people akin to Israel, but with fortunes more and more diverging from the chosen people of God. We find first fraternal consideration, even in Obadiah — tenderness and yearning over brother Edom. The inevitable crisis comes, the judgment of the early sin, which becomes more and more pronounced, until at last patience would be a sanction of wickedness. At the same time in the history of Edom we see thoroughly maintained the principle of moral responsibility which God never abandons, but holds inviolably true and sacred, as it is equally applicable to the enemies of God and to His friends. Nevertheless we find also what is necessary to bear in mind along with this — the sovereign wisdom of God, who from the first needed neither to learn anything of man on the one hand, or grounds to decide His will on the other. He exercised His own mind and purpose, even before the birth of the children of Isaac. It was so ordered that the character of the flesh should be manifest, not merely where there was wickedness in the family, but where there was faith. Isaac stands out remarkable for piety, doubtless of a domestic and equable character in the retired calm of a godly household, as decidedly as Abraham does for a stronger and more self-renouncing communion with God. Abraham's faith was exercised in a field more varied and conspicuous. There was more of a public testimony in the man whom God deigned to call His friend. As Isaac was more retiring, so also apt to yield overmuch when tried. Himself the chosen heir to the setting aside of the bondmaid's son Ishmael, it was in his family, among the twin sons not merely of Isaac but of Rebekah, of the same father and the same mother, that God afresh exercised His sovereignty. Impossible to find greater closeness in point of circumstance. This therefore made it all the more striking when we find God even before their birth pronouncing on the ultimate and distinct destiny of the two sons. As noticed in another place, if God had not been pleased to choose, it is evident that the two could not have exactly the same place. Was God then to abrogate His title? or to leave it to man with only Satan to influence? It was most fitting then that He should choose which was to have the superior place. Equality never abides; and they could not both be invested with first-born rights. One must be chosen for the better place. The order either of flesh or of God's choice must prevail. Which is most right? Assuredly God, whatever may be His grace, maintains always His own sovereignty. He chose therefore Jacob the younger, and not Esau, for this could only have given importance to man in the flesh — man as he is in his fallen condition without God. Impossible that He should make light of the fall or of its consequences: He therefore chooses and acts.

At the same time it is remarkable that, while the first book of the Bible points out the choice of God from the beginning, He does not pronounce morally on Esau in a full, complete, and absolute way until the last book of the Old Testament. It is only in Malachi that he says, "Esau have I hated." I could conceive nothing more dreadful than to say so in Genesis. Never does scripture represent God as saying before the child was born and had manifested his iniquity and proud malice, "Esau have I hated." There is where the mind of man is so false. It is not meant, however, that God's *choice* was determined by the character of the individuals. This were to make man the ruler rather than God. Not so: God's choice flows out of His own wisdom and nature. It suits and is worthy of Himself; but the reprobation of any man and of every unbeliever is never a question of the sovereignty of God. It is the choice of God to do good where and how He pleases; it is never the purpose of His will to hate any man. There is no such doctrine in the Bible. I hold therefore that, while election is a most clear and scriptural truth, the consequence that men draw from election, namely, the reprobation of the non-elect, is a mere reproduction of fatalism, common to some heathen and all Mahommedans, the unfounded deduction of man's reasoning in divine things. But man's reasoning in the things of God, not being based on the divine revelations of His mind in His word, is good for nothing, but essentially and invariably false. It is impossible for man to reason justly in the abstract as to the will of God. The only safe or becoming ground is to adhere to the simple exposition of His own declarations; and this for the very simple reason that a man must reason from his own mind, and his own mind is far indeed from being God's mind. Reasoning means deduction according to the necessary laws of the human mind. Here, however, the groundwork being the will of God, faith to reason aright must reason from what God is according to what He Himself says. The danger is of inferring from what man is and from what man feels. Such is the essential difference between what is trustworthy and what is worthless in questions of the kind. Man must submit to be judged by God and His word, not to judge for Him. No man is competent to think or speak in His stead. But we may and ought to learn what He has told us of Himself and His ways in His word.

Nor is there any serious difficulty, still less opposition to what is here said, in the scriptural fact which is often brought up in discussing points like this — the hardening of Pharaoh. It can be readily shown that such a judicial dealing on God's part is unquestionably righteous. Scripture lets us see the proud, cruel, and blaspheming character of Pharaoh before the hardening; nor does it speak of the Lord hardening his heart till he had fully committed himself to self-will and contempt of God. But as to the thing thus expressed, I believe that it is a real infliction from God because of a rebellious opposition to His demands and authority. There may be such a dealing now with a man, but He never hardens him in the first instance that he should not believe; but after he has heard and refused to believe, God seals him up in an obdurate state. In no instance, however, is this the first act of God, but rather the last, judicial and retributive, when he has slighted an adequate and faithfully rendered testimony. Every one's heart when simple bows instinctively to the truth of God. If unsophisticated (I do not say converted), we feel how righteous, wholesome, and good it all is. Anything that distorts or even ignores the revealed character and mind of God is false, and will always be found to issue in wrong deductions. But in general the fault does not so much consist in mistaken deductions from scripture, as in human preconceptions and mere theorizing. There are Calvinistic speculations just as much as Arminian. It seems to me that both schemes are beyond question partial and do violence to the truth. The practical lesson is to cherish confidence only in God's word. We may safely rest, as we are bound to rest, in His revelation. The best of men, those who help most in ministry, are liable to err; and we must beware lest merely changing names we fall into the old snare of tradition or confidence in man. Our own day presents no better security than another. May we trust to God and the word of His grace, which is able to build us up! Nothing else in the long run can preserve souls from illusion or falsehood. On the contrary, when men begin to presume, they go and lead wrong, no matter what their position may be. Need I say to you who are here that, if this should be a just feeling in itself, it should be felt quite as strongly respecting ourselves as about others? Our only safety is in simple and implicit subjection to the word of God. For this we need the guidance of the Spirit. But we are never sure of having the directing power of the Spirit with us, except the eye be single to Christ. Thus these three safeguards are always together where we are right; and unless they are all verified in us, there is no real deliverance from self nor assurance of the mind and will of God. The attempt to use the word of God without the teaching of the Spirit lands one in rationalism. The presumption to have the Spirit of God without the word leads into fanaticism. But we need, in addition to both the word and the Spirit, a bond (if I may so say) between them, in order to keep us firm and steady yet dependent and humble; and this bond of attractive power which binds together both the word and the Spirit of God is having our eye fixed upon Christ. Thus, instead of self (the real root of all mistake), Christ becomes our object — the Second man and not the first.

Such then, omitting the notice of the hardening of Pharaoh, is the early revelation as to Esau, himself the progenitor of the Edomites; but we have also the history pursued through scripture. They early emerged into considerable strength and importance. Genesis 36 gives us the rise and progress of their national greatness, the line first of their dukes, as they are called, which would answer probably in modern language to the sheiks of their tribes; and then later of the kings that reigned in the land of Edom before there reigned any king over the sons of Israel. These kings we should, I presume, call emirs, that is, not in the absolute sense of a king perhaps, but rather of a chief for common purposes; for among these sons of Edom there was a great deal of independence, considering that they were Orientals. Indeed it is so still in the kindred children of the desert. Although the emir may have considerable rights and privileges, the under-chiefs reserve not a little independence for themselves. These various stages of polity were both developed in the early history of Edom. They had dukes and even kings flourishing in their midst when the children of Israel as a whole were obscure and unsettled. They had even their regular line of kings — as we know with certainty from a verse of great interest which furnishes rationalism a fresh occasion for exposing its ignorant and self-sufficient unbelief — long before the children of Israel called Saul to the throne; nay, I should judge, before they emerged from the wilderness. I suspect, without being positive respecting the matter, that it was the sojourning of Israel in the wilderness, which was about the epoch of change from their having simply dukes, as they are called in scripture, to their having kings. My reason is this, that while in Exodus 15 we hear of the dukes of Edom being amazed, in Numbers 21 we read of the king of Edom who would not permit the children of Israel to pass through his land. Although they promised not to drink of their waters, or touch their fruit without paying for it, he refused absolutely and churlishly this favour, of no cost to himself, but of moment to the people of God. It would appear, therefore, that at the entrance of Israel upon the wilderness there was still the old condition of a number of independent chiefs, but before they left the wilderness kings in rapid succession reigned, as might well be at such a time and state of things.

But however this may be judged, the approach of the sons of Israel brought the feelings of the Edomites to a head. It is always so. Nobody knows himself till he comes into contact with what is of God. It is the true and crucial test for the soul. Hence Christ is the perfect criterion as well as standard, because He only is the perfect manifestation of God. He is God, but then He is God in man; and therefore, coming down to us, living, speaking, acting, suffering in our midst, He becomes the most complete, and indeed absolute, test of human nature. As the true light He made manifest every soul He came across. And so it is to this day, although He be not here below. Assuredly He is in heaven; but the proclamation of His name and truth has the same substantial effect as His presence when here below, if not even greater, because now there is proclaimed in the gospel the weightiest conceivable addition to the power of His person in the efficacy of His work. Alas! human nature is stumbled by both. It is an offence to man to find somebody who a man, and the lowliest of men, yet infinitely greater than Adam and all his other sons — some one that man never can match or even approach, who, at the same time, condescends in grace to the vilest and the worst to pity and save them by faith. Now there is nothing more trying to man's mind than such condescension, especially from one he has wronged, because it just tells him how worthless, guilty, and ruined he himself is. Consequently the saving grace of God is incomparably more offensive in Christ than if He had been a lawgiver like Moses, because this at any rate would have left some scope for man's ability, for his reason, and for his merits; but to be treated as nothing save a sinner is the greatest possible offence; which consequently the cross of Christ does not fail to entail without disguise before man, because it is the fullest manifestation of human worthlessness on one side, and of God's grace on the other.

So it was in measure, though certainly ill-represented, in Israel as the object of God's choice before Edom and his children. These might have been ever so decent individually — probably, as a rule, far from being as dark and depraved as their Canaanitish neighbours; but when the destiny of Israel began to dawn, the enmity of their hearts came out fully. Although nothing could be more respectful and upright than the overtures of Moses and the children of Israel, the hatred of the Edomites became quite unmistakable. They would listen to nothing but the malignant and proud suggestions of their own hearts. God shows His character in the most admirable manner. According to His will the people turn back, called though they were by His decree to be the first of nations in this world. They take the unprovoked insult of their brother Edom with quietness, and this at the express command of God who would teach His people patience. It is always good for those who may ere long wield power to learn the exercise of patience. But did not God in this tell out, as far as it went, what He is in so directing and training His people? They turn back, meekly accepting the insolence of their relatives, and quietly abide by the guidance of Jehovah who was slighted in their slight. But even more than that, they are admonished to cherish the most friendly feelings towards these Edomites, a command incorporated into the substance of the law. Whatever might be the exclusion of others, from the book of Deuteronomy we find it expressly laid down that an Edomite was to enter the congregation of Jehovah after the third generation. An unusual license this, if one may so call it, and a peculiar privilege in itself; but how striking that it should be extended of all others to those who had taken such decided ground in contempt of their kinsmanship with Israel as these sons of Edom.* All this seems the more instructive, because in the case of an Ammonite or Moabite entrance was refused until the tenth generation. Such is the true God: none but He would have thought of such a course; only Himself would have enjoined it on His people; for it was what became such as love His name to feel and act on.

{*There was similarly a command not to abhor an Egyptian, which natural feeling would be prompt to do through a proud remembrance of Israel's former abasement and suffering in the land of their old bondage: — God would have them cultivate generous, not vindictive, recollections.}

But there is another principle. The greater the patience of God, the worse man behaves in presence of His goodness and patience, so much the more tremendous must be the judgment when it comes. This we may read in the ultimate history of Edom. Doubtless there are many in these days of unbelief who fancy that Edom is done with; and assuredly it would be difficult for any ethnologist to trace out satisfactorily where and who the Edomites are just now, and for many centuries before our day. But when we talk of difficulties, we must remember whose they really are. Beyond controversy, if it be a question of man, enormous obstacles are in the way; but it is outside our measure and belongs simply to God and His word. I therefore stand to it in the most deliberate and distinct way that the Edomite is not extinct — that he remains under other names impossible for man to trace now. But there is another and connected fact, equally wonderful but more commonly acknowledged. The ancient people of God, the twelve tribes of Israel, are yet to emerge as a whole.

Thus therefore it is according to the analogy of the divine dealings with His people that He should also summon their enemies to come forth. Hence at the same critical moment when God causes the chosen nation to emerge from the dust of ages, wherein they had lain buried and for the greater part unknown, He will also remove the vail which as yet conceals among others that kindred Edomite race with their undying hatred against the sons of Israel. The great and final conflict of the age will then ensue without farther delay. Such, beyond a doubt, is the representation of the prophets; and them I believe, not present appearances or the hopes and fears of men.

Let me here refer to a familiar chapter in Isaiah in proof of what has been just now remarked — Isaiah 11. The time spoken of is when Messiah shall establish His kingdom here below, of which indeed the chapter undeniably treats, when that blessed picture of peace and joy shall be realised, when Messiah shall judge with righteousness the poor and reprove with equity, after He shall have smitten the earth with the rod of His mouth and with the breath of His lips slain the wicked. This we know is the very passage which the apostle Paul applies to the appearing of the Lord Jesus in glory, when He destroys the man of sin. No intelligent believer but knows that this judgment has not yet been accomplished; that it awaits Christ's coming again. Further, the very features of the earth and its inhabitants, rational and irrational, render any proof needless in order to certainty that the change is future; for at what time since sin entered the world did the wolf dwell with the lamb, or the leopard lie down with the kid? There is a day, but it has never yet shone, when there shall be seen the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. Then, not before, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea." Is it too strong to call it as absurd as a fairy tale for any to say that there is or ever has been the smallest approach to such enjoyment in the world? I own deeper joys of the Holy Ghost in the midst of hearts separate to Christ from the world; but here the earth, the race, the creatures of God in general are in the scene. It is the beautiful future of God when His Anointed shall reign in Zion, when it will not be as now heavenly glory opened to us by grace to faith, but when the earth and all creation shall know the blessedness of Him who shall come to be the King, who, being its Maker, none the less died in order that He might reconcile not only the believer but all things unto Himself. The Lord will do it in His own time.

In the midst then of Isaiah's fascinating description we read, "It shall come to pass in that day, that Jehovah shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea." And lest there should be the slightest doubt, he says, "He shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah." What can be conceived plainer than this? "The envy also of Ephraim shall depart." It will not be merely the restoration of the ancient people, but their spiritual renovation. Hence it is that "the envy of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off. Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim." Now for the revival of the manifest existence of their old enemies. "But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west." The Philistines will be burden-bearers. As they treated the Israelites with the greatest indignity in early days, they will be obliged to be their servants now A very good thing then that they are even allowed to be servants. God in strict righteousness might have cut them off; but He is good, and so it is said, "They shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west; they shall spoil them out of the east together; they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab."

Does not this intimate what I want to prove — that Edom is one of those districts and races which will be the object of the dealings of God in the future restoration of Israel? We must remember that the millennial work of God will not be all wrought in a day — undoubtedly in *the* day, but not in a day. The day of Jehovah is a considerable time. In my opinion it embraces the whole millennium, and a little more. It embraces a space before the millennium begins, and a space after, when the millennium properly so-called is over. It embraces the preparatory dealings of Jehovah, in which He will lay the ground for His reign of peace and glory over the earth; and it will also contain a margin after the millennium is over, when Satan, let loose from the abyss will make his last effort by Gog and Magog to his own destruction as well as that of his followers. All these events, and indeed the great white throne — that is, the eternal judgment of the wicked dead from the beginning — are part of the day of Jehovah. It is evident, therefore, that the day of Jehovah is an expression which embraces, as we have seen, for its central part the thousand years' reign of Christ, but includes also events of an important kind which both precede and follow that reign. It is all the day of Jehovah. So scripture speaks, and scripture cannot be broken.

This then may serve to show that Edom is not done with, as is commonly assumed, to no inconsiderable straining of the prophetic word. The Edomite is not extinct, though for the present unseen as such as he has long been — certainly unknown by us westerns. But that race surely exists for God, just as the ten tribes do; and when the day comes for His retributive dealings with the nations of the world, all these different parties must reappear for good or ill. Such is the voice of scripture. All this, it is obvious, attests the living value of the word of God, even in what might seem external and remote. Instead of merely speaking of nations dead and gone, whose dead bones are with painful uncertainty drawn by historians out of their tombs to be looked at as objects of curiosity, we find set out distinctly in the scriptures the unquestionable characteristics not only of God and His people, but also of the nations who opposed them; for with these God will yet surely deal.

Accordingly it will be found, as it struck my mind many years ago, that as men have certain moral traits which constitute a character, so nations may be said to have. Thus the prominent trait of Edom was envious dislike of the people of God. We do not find it so pronounced in any other nation. Take another people associated with Edom as we shall find in this very prophecy of Obadiah. Could it be said that enmity against Israel was the specific and unfailing line of Babylon? Undoubtedly Babylon was the greatest scourge but one that Israel ever had: "but one," I say, because the Romans laid a more terrific chastisement on the Jew than even Babylon, as the prophet Isaiah expressly intimated. For all that, neither in the case of Babylon nor even of Rome, was there such personal persevering spite as seemed to be concentrated in Edom. There can be no question that the character of Edom answers to what the Lord lets us know through Isaac. "Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above; and by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck." It would be hard to conceive a prediction of this nature where every word was more truly verified in the whole history of man than in the life and changes of Edom and Israel respectively. Nevertheless there is no intimation in this of their spite and vengeful hate. Living by the sword does not necessarily mean enmity; because ambitious activity often leads to a career of conquest and determination to have their own way where there is no particular enmity at work.

Many a race, again, would far rather not take up the sword; but still if others do not bend who stand in their way, they do not scruple to use force. This is more perhaps what we see in Edom's conduct to others. Hence, as we know, they coveted the possessions of the Horims at mount Seir in early days (Deu 2:22), a peculiar race that lived in caves and dens of the earth. But the sons of Edom destroyed them and succeeded in their stead. Again, they have one of the most remarkable cities in the world, consisting of what is called troglodyte habitations where the old race had dwelt, as afterwards themselves. They were dwellings, and not uncomfortable dwellings, cut out of the yielding sandstone of Petra and other places of Idumea. The climate being remarkably dry, and the stone exceedingly suited for such works, great or small — private dwellings as well as public reception rooms — they used these caves to live in. The remains are remarkable even to our own day. The Edomites coveted such a natural fortress as suiting well their destiny; for, being of a remarkably warlike character, they saw with clear instinct that, exposed as they must be in the edge of the desert to the predatory attacks of robbers, their Ishmaelite connections or others, the rocky abodes of mount Seir would prove an admirable means of easy defence against surprise. Never were the outward circumstances of a land more adapted to national characteristics and a purpose defined by prophecy, though I do not say that they were conscious of being so governed in their choice.

Whoever may live there now, the Edomites will be found there at the close. This appears to me intimated by the word of God, which is the sole conclusive authority always and in everything; and scripture leaves little ground for hesitation to the believer about the matter. It is not the case of a nation simply transplanted into another place, striking root there, coalescing with others, and forming in some sort a new stock. A solemn doom awaits that land and race by and by. They may have others to supplant them for the moment (of this I am not giving any opinion); but it is clearly known from the word of God that the Edomites will be in Idumea, and that there the judgment of God will not fail to overtake them at the last, when the Messiah stands at the head of His ancient people.

It would seem then that their special character, gradually if not from the first, is a relentless hatred of the children of Israel. Of old the good hand of God in Israel's favour, and the glorious purposes that He has in store for them, will have had but one effect on Edom. Instead of reaping any comfort from the thought, that if they were themselves not the most honoured, at any rate those who were near to them had that highest place by the gift of God, Israel's gain, on the contrary, will draw out as before nothing but deadly jealousy; and this increasingly and above all in the distresses of the Jew, which should have drawn out their pity.

This gives the occasion for Obadiah's prophecy. Nor is the theme confined to him. The pencil of Isaiah has drawn a most awful picture of the judgment that awaits the Edomites. Hence, our prophet being very brief, I purposely connect a few other scriptures with it.

In Isaiah 34 we read that "the indignation of Jehovah is upon all nations." It is evident enough that in its full import this is a future scene. There may have been and was no doubt the indignation of Jehovah on particular nations in times past; but it would be hard to say it was on all nations in the marked manner which is described here, when "all the hosts of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig-tree. For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea." How can sensible men, not to say believing and reverent men of God, apply it all to what people call the day of judgment? For when the wicked dead stand before the great white throne to receive their doom, it will be no question of Idumea or any other land. It is undeniable that, when the elements of the universe are dissolved with fervent heat, there will be no question of one country or race more than another, but of a wholly new and final state of things. Here it is the judgment of the earth while it still subsists, not that eternal judgment where the old creation disappears in order to the "new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." In fact the judgment of Idumea, though beyond anything in the past, is very far short of this radical and final change for eternity.

As a whole then the prophecy, whatever partial accomplishment it may have received, awaits its complete and punctual fulfilment before the time and the scene of the great white throne in Revelation 20 at the end of the millennial reign of peace and blessedness, which therefore in the nature of things it must precede. Compare also the connection with the following chapter, Isaiah 35. The millennium certainly is to follow the most tremendous blows of divine judgment; and this on Idumea is one of the worst. "For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment. The sword of Jehovah is filled with blood, it is made fat with fatness, and with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams; for Jehovah hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea."

Bozrah was one of their chief cities. Not only therefore have we the land in general, but even the city retains its existence or reappears ere that day. "And the unicorns shall come down with them, and the bullocks with the bulls." Of course the language is highly figurative; on all sides this is admitted. The question is, Figurative of what? Of heavenly things or of earthly? Of eternity or of time? Unquestionably the latter. "And their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust made fat with fatness. For it is the day of Jehovah's vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion." It is not the new heavens and new earth, but the earthly people are coming forward — Zion, the city of the great King, the Messianic royalty, the universal kingdom of the Son of man. Therefore it is that the judgments of the nations can be no longer deferred. It is emphatically the earth which is in hand, and solemn questions as to the nations which must be solved before the Lord reigns as the true Solomon. This makes the real nature of these judgments abundantly plain.

Hence it is that nothing can exceed the strength of the language of the prophetic Spirit. As he says here: "The streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever; from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever."

We are all aware of the haste with which some readers (prophetic students they can scarcely be called) have tried to show that this has been accomplished already. An impression existed widely ever since the beginning of the present century, that if a man attempted to go through the land of Idumea he must surely die; and if not on the spot, at least very soon after. All this was in principle a mistake. Without speaking of natives here and there, not a few travellers have passed through Idumea, and have lived to write and publish their accounts, so that, ignorant as we may still be, we know considerably more about the country than had been known for centuries. Therefore even if we take the lowest ground of matter of fact, it became evident, not that the prophecy had failed, but that the time for its accomplishment is yet future. Such is the only just inference. It is to be a land where people no longer dwell, and where no strangers pass through for ever. It will be made an outstanding example of utter consumption through the unsparing wrath of God before the whole world.

What brings all out more strikingly is that the awful description of Edom's absolute desolateness, and this under the mighty hand of God, is at or just before the time when the wilderness and the solitary places shall be glad on account of the overthrow of their former desolators, when that which is now a wilderness shall exult and blossom as the saffron. Who can avoid seeing in this the predicted, long-expected, millennial day? Not that "that day" is to be either a mere difference in degree from the present day, nor on the other, as some suppose, the perfect extinction of all evil. "The new heavens wherein dwelleth righteousness" will be a scene of absolute good, when all evil shall have been judged and consigned for ever to the lake of fire. Thenceforward the separation is eternal. The tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, their God. Good is then alone; evil is punished and put away for ever. But the millennial state only will be a pledge of this; there will be a real and public testimony to it, but not the thing itself in its fulness, leaving nothing more to desire.

In the millennium, for instance, there will be death, not as the rule, but as the exception. Still death, though only a judicial infliction, will not be quite extinguished as yet. There will also be the need of healing, as we gather from Rev 22:2, as well as Ezekiel 47. There will even be judgments from God where needed, as is plain in Isa 65:20, Isa 66:24; Zec 14:17-19; though it is granted few and under exceptional circumstances, without reckoning the last outbreak of the distant Gentiles at the end of the millennium. (Rev 20:7-9)

Plainly then the gracious power of God will both restrain mercy and vouchsafe unprecedented bounty and goodness among men, not the elect merely as now. That day will be a period of government which in itself always supposes evil that requires to be controlled; whereas in the new heavens and new earth there will be none left. Then righteousness will not merely govern, as often noticed, but will dwell where all things are made new, and there is no need of governing more, but rest and joy, love and praise, abide for ever. Thus therefore Christ's kingdom over the earth for its allotted term, when partial application occurs of the new heavens and earth, will be characterized by righteousness reigning, the eternal state of the new heavens and new earth by righteousness dwelling. Such is the scriptural distinction between the two. In the millennium righteousness shall control any evil which, still subsisting, may show itself; which will be rare because the great leader of evil is bound, and the glory of the Lord will shine and His goodness supply freely and to the full. But in the new heavens and new earth there will be no evil save in its own place, and Satan never more prowl about to lure men to rebellion and destruction, making God appear a mere Judge, instead of leaving room for the flow and fulness of His love. All judgment will have passed before the appearance of the new heavens and the new earth. All who have taken their side with Satan definitively will have been definitively judged; and so there will be a lasting separation between that which is of God and with God for ever, and what is finally rejected to suffer the consequences with Satan, whom they preferred to God and His Anointed.

Such is the statement of scripture, and a more solemn reality cannot be. The same revelation which lets us see beforehand the everlasting state shows us the lake of fire no less than heaven and earth. Thus with equal plainness we learn the everlasting wretchedness of those that are lost as certainly as the eternal blessedness of those that are saved. If I have ground from God to believe the one, I have the same authority to believe the other. Can the man who allows himself to choose out of scripture be considered a believer? He who believes only what he thinks reasonable is a believer in his own mind, not in God's word. A believer is one who accepts what God says, and all question for him is at an end.

It is needless to go through the other scriptures that speak of Edom, but I may direct attention to Isaiah 63 as the prophecy of Jehovah's return after the judgment has been executed, which was first threatened in chap. 32. Compare also Jer 49:7-22, where, it will be observed, contrary to the hope held out to some enemies, Jehovah does not say that He will bring again their captivity in the latter days, any more than from Philistia, Damascus, and Hazor: their fate is sealed though for different reasons. Edom especially must have this marked and definite character of judgment. The joy of the age to come will not reverse its sad sentence. As long as the earth endures, Idumea will be given up to desolation; the unrelenting implacable hate of Edom's sons for the Jews will bring on them justly merited destruction.

Just so in the New Testament we may see that the Babylonish system of Rome, the great centre of idolatry and of corruption, will be similarly the object of judgment without mercy from God. This appears to include Rome physically or geographically, according to the aspect defined in 14:8, Rev 16:19; Rev 16:18, more particularly in Revelation 18. The smoke is described as rising up for ever and ever; a solemn and public exhibition that the age of universal blessing to the honour of the Son of man will be no less the time of judgment on some pre-eminently guilty. What a warning to all nations! "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness."

Nor will divine vengeance fall on certain Gentiles only: those in the last verses of Isaiah, I conceive, are or at least comprehend apostate Jews. Though the form of the word may not be the strictest term for transgressing the law of Jehovah's covenant, it is applied to Jewish as well as Gentile impiety, as may be seen clearly in Amos 1, 2. The mass or "the many" spoken of in Daniel will suffer supremely, as well as the Gentiles who will either join the antichrist or fight against the Christ. But the description first of this sin in Isaiah 65, then the standing witness of the punishment in Isaiah 66, inclines me to infer that some at least must have been under the law. Gentiles are never called transgressors in the sense of violating the law or covenant, but rather "sinners of the Gentiles," though we have seen that it may be said in the general sense of an impious rebellion or ungodly opposition to God. We never hear of such a thing as transgressors (παραβάται) of the Gentiles. The Jews, being under the formal or positive conditions of the law, are consequently brought to a point; and if they violate that law, they are not merely sinners like the Gentiles but also transgressors; that is, they are guilty of the distinct violation of the known law of God. Consequently their guilt is greater, and hence a special example will be made of them, though not of them only, as we may see in Mat 25:41-46. They will have renounced the true God of Israel, Jehovah; they will have accepted him who comes in his own name, the antichrist; they will have become again worshippers of idols. Thus, having refused the true Christ and received the false, rejected the testimony and the Spirit of God, they will be given up to the last great lie of Satan and their lawless chief, and be met by divine judgment in that condition. They are accordingly described as made a perpetual shame and warning in their suffering before the eyes of their fellow Jews, as indeed before "all flesh," exposed to view, as God will know how to effect it, in the valley of Hinnom, outside the city of the great King. There will be this spectacle, the more awful from its proximity to the earthly centre of glory and blessing in that day.

No doubt it is founded on such illustrations as this that so many have formed their notions of hell. But a great mistake lies under it, though not at all in the direction of aggravating the horrors of perdition. If we believe the scriptures, it is impossible to exaggerate the awfulness of eternal judgment; but in my opinion the Jesuit conceptions of hell are low and vulgar and earthly. They bring in elements almost ludicrous to natural minds and expose the truth of God to derision. At the same time they are founded upon a perverted truth. There is no reason to think that the everlasting judgment of those that reject the gospel of Christ will be an earthly spectacle such as this is. Those who have sinned in an earthly way will be punished after an earthly sort; but he who disbelieves the gospel now will be punished in a way suitable to that which he rejects. There is always a righteous measure in the dealings of God, a perfect graduation of punishment to sin, though man may not be an adequate judge of it. To reject the gospel is yet worse than violating the law; because it goes far more deeply against the divine glory than the mere failure of man in his duty to God and his fellows. This is the law. But to reject the gospel is to reject the grace of God in His Son; it is to reject the truth that God is willing to save sinners at His own sole cost through the redemption that is in Christ, throwing back, as it were, the infinite gift in His face.

Some indeed have a dogmatic system which tells us that all men are judged simply according to the law, on the assumption that such is the one ground of responsibility for all men, Gentiles and Jews being viewed as alike under it. But the assumption is not erroneous only; it evinces the most painful insubjection to or ignorance of scripture. It has every fault which a vicious hypothesis can possess. The facts are neglected, and the true principle untouched; theirs never did apply as they suppose it always does; and at the present time no part of it applies, because a deeper responsibility is come in. It makes too much of the old state of the Gentiles; it makes too little of the judgment now impending over every soul that neglects the great salvation. The scriptural way of presenting judgment therefore makes it incomparably more profound and tremendous. It is plain that the Jesuits are as feeble in appreciating either the privileges of the gospel or the judgment of God, as their main point is a human use of terror in order to act upon the dark heart and guilty conscience. They have been thus accounted great as preachers; but their way is a dramatic representation as of the sufferings of the damned, so also of the external circumstances of the cross of Christ. Undoubtedly all this has its real place; but God's part is habitually left out.

There will then be at least three distinct applications of judgment for those on earth immediately before the millennial reign. To the north and east of the land will be those that play their part in the earthly history as the antagonists of Israel: to the west those that will come forward as friends after the gospel to the Gentiles. To these must be added those who come forth from themselves, the apostate Jews of the latter day, who will make common cause with the Latin kingdom and western powers. All is in perfect order: all we need is more simple faith in scripture and in God's willingness to give us the right understanding of it by the operation of His Spirit.

Thus it would appear from Ezekiel 25 that the divine vengeance on mount Seir and the Edomites is to be by the hand of Israel. And the great burden of all the numerous prophetic warnings is that the presence of Jehovah is to be manifested in it; next, that it will be at the time when all nations and all the earth are to come under the hand of God: and thirdly, that the epoch of the judgment is to be just when blessing comes beyond example and unchangeably to Israel and to the earth in general. Compare Isaiah 11, Isaiah 34; Lam 4:21-22; Ezekiel 25, Ezekiel 35, Isa 63:3 in no way excludes (what is elsewhere affirmed) that Jehovah will execute His judgment through Israel; for "of the people" should be understood "of the peoples" or nations, without including Israel amongst them. No extraneous instrument will be employed in this work: Jehovah with Israel as His means will do it effectually.

In the prophecy before us Obadiah unveils the future to the same purport. "Thus saith Jehovah concerning Edom: We have heard a rumour from Jehovah, and an ambassador is sent among the heathen, Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle," because of their resistance to God's manifest will who made Edom a little people, with the fastness of mount Seir as a natural hiding-place and security. But they sought great things and detested the dignity of Israel. "Behold, I have made them small among the heathen; thou art greatly despised." This is not so where a man or a people is content with the lot assigned and becoming; it is especially the doom of such as aspire beyond their measure. Then to be despised is of course particularly painful; and such was the history of Edom. For as we see pride in Esau from the first, so we see it in the Edomites to the last. They seem to have been after all as mercenary strangers usually are — despised by those who served themselves and employed them. It is the doom of one false to his kin to sell himself to aliens for an odious task, and then to be thrown completely off when their purpose is served and he seems of no more use. Somewhat like this would appear to have been the experience of Edom: "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock." Their naturally impregnable position would prove no protection when God invited the instruments to pull them down from their proud heights. Be it that their "habitation is high;" be it that Esau, if not with his lips, "saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground?" the word is gone out from God, "Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith Jehovah." Their fall should be so much the more complete and hopeless.

But even worse than this remains. Not only should their security turn out vain in the day of trial when Jehovah took them in hand; but further the retribution of their rapacity would be unsparing. They had lived by the sword and by the rapine which generally follows the sword; and so should be their punishment. "If thieves came, to thee, if robbers by night, (how art thou cut off!) would they not have stolen till they had enough?" Even such as live by plunder ordinarily would be satisfied when they had stolen what they could carry off in their hasty visit and flight: and those who honestly toil among the vines do not so thoroughly gather as to leave no remnants here and there; for "if the grape-gatherers came to thee, would they not leave some grapes?" and Jehovah will expressly make it good of Israel by and by, when their pruning will come in order to the establishment of His earthly kingdom in their midst. This, as all know, is usual. But not such should be their doom. "How are the things of Esau searched out!" There is nothing left behind whatever — nothing to pick up when the spoilers are gone. "How are his hidden things sought up!" What made it so bitter was too the fact that those they counted friends and partisans helped it on. "All the men of thy confederacy have brought thee even to the border." Those words plainly show that those they had fully trusted turn out their enemies at last, able to injure them the more because more familiar with their persons, their habits, their dwellings, and their possessions. "The men of this place have deceived thee, and prevailed against thee." "Thy bread" (meaning those who eat the bread of Esau) "have laid a wound [or "snare"] under thee." Plainly, therefore, "there is no understanding in him." "Shall I not in that day, saith Jehovah, even destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mount of Esau?"

They had plumed themselves on their special wisdom and prudence; but it failed them in the hour of their need. When the tide turned against Judah, they tried to turn to their own account the enemies of Judah, as well as to gratify their undying hatred of the fallen. They made friends with the Babylonians, with Nebuchadnezzar and his captains who came up against Judea. But this is the retribution which God will award them. "And thy mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed, to the end that every one of the mount of Esau may be cut off by slaughter." Yet what happened then was not the end. This, it is trusted, has been already proved. It has been shown from scripture that, when the final scene comes at the end of the age, Edom is one of the objects of divine judgment on earth. Consequently there must be a reappearing of that race in their land in the latter day; but what took place under Nebuchadnezzar is a remarkable pre-figuration of what will be re-enacted in the beginning of the millennium, or rather during the brief crisis which precedes it, as has been repeatedly explained. "For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever. In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that the strangers carried away captive his forces, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem." This refers clearly to their conduct in Nebuchadnezzar's day. Then "even thou wast one of them," taking part with the Chaldean spoilers. "But thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy brother in the day that he became a stranger."

It is not yet the stern irreversible sentence of judgment against Edom. There is still a kind of transition in the tone of Obadiah. Jehovah is slow to wrath and full of compassion. Hence we find a tone of aggrieved affection in the prophecy as yet. When Malachi opens his mouth, all that is gone: — "Esau have I hated." This could be said then, and only then, in its depth of feeling. There is a preparation for it, as we saw, in Jeremiah, who probably was after Obadiah, and incorporates in his prophecy not a little of the very burden of judgment we are now considering. There can be no reasonable doubt that Obadiah was rather the more ancient of the two; but then, as each warning was given and Edom did not take either, but persisted in enmity and anger against the Jews, the words of God became still more unqualified in the denunciation of the wrath of Jehovah against them. "But thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy brother in the day that he became a stranger, neither shouldest thou have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; neither shouldest thou have spoken proudly in the day of distress." There is nothing that exhibits more malice and wickedness than to take advantage of another when he is ruined or sorrow wastes the spirit and divine chastening. It is a heart altogether depraved that could take advantage of another's fall to trample yet more on him when he is in the dust. This course is exactly what Edom did then, and will I presume repeat in the day that is coming. For we do well to remember that there will be further dealings of God in cutting down the transgressors of His people, and Edom will take part once more in the displeasure of God with the children of Israel before God establishes them in their place of supremacy. History will repeat itself. Even in human things it is in a measure verified; but in divine history it is exactly and invariably true, because all scripture has more or less a typical character or prophetical character. Hence, therefore, what has been is that which shall be, and what has been in part will be once more in full. In such a world as this we cannot wonder that it applies to the evil quite as much as the good. Thus it will be conspicuously seen in the future of Rome, there will be special traits peculiar to the day when it reappears as the beast ascending from the abyss. But as a rule it is true of all. Even in our blessed Lord we may see the lovely connection between what He was in all His character of grace in humiliation with the glory in which He shall be revealed at His appearing and kingdom.

"Thou shouldest not have entered into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity; yea, thou shouldest not have looked on their affliction in the day of their calamity, nor have laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity." He repeats as a kind of refrain the words "in the day of their calamity." "Neither shouldest thou have stood in the crossway, to cut off those of his that did escape; neither shouldest thou have delivered up those of his that did remain in the day of distress. For the day of Jehovah is near upon all the heathen." This, we easily see, is the emphatic link, and proof too, of connection between the future and the past. The day of Jehovah in its full and proper sense has never yet arrived. In a partial sense it has come on Egypt; it has come on Babylon; it has come on other great powers which have successively fallen under the divine dealings; but in the full sense the day of Jehovah on all the heathen has never yet shone. The proof is that in that day this earth is to be one united whole, all tribes and tongues, not at the end or gradually in its course by secondary means, but by the gracious and almighty intervention of Jehovah, blending in His praise when all idols shall be completely and for ever gone. This has never been since idols were forged by Satan's craft for this world, and never will it be till the day of Jehovah dawn: then it will characterize its course from first to last. Even the rebellion when the reign for the thousand years is over will be no restoration of Satan's wiles in idolatry. "For the day of Jehovah is near on all the heathen. As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee." For Edom we find condign retribution. "Thy reward shall return upon thine own head. For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been."

But we may distinguish between the past troubles of Edom, which the heathen or Gentiles inflicted, and a still more appalling one in the future which seems distinguished in this brief prophecy, when by Israel as a whole mount Seir shall be given to desolation more than ever, because of the indignity they did to the sons of Zion, who shall then be saved and blessed. So it is written here, "Upon mount Zion shall be deliverance." It is not the beginning that decides a war, but the end. And this is a grave thought for us to keep in view habitually in all our ways. One often sees a good deal of ardour for a while; but they are wise who look on for another day, yea, who labour for eternity; they are wise who look not to what things appear now, but what they will be in the estimate of the Lord at His coming. There is no real test except that best of moral ones — the will and judgment of the Lord of all. To help us in this, the power of the Holy Spirit deals with our souls by the word of God. This certainly we ought to know intelligently; for there is no such means of keeping us sober yet humble, happy yet grave, feeling too that the Lord is the only ultimate and adequate judge of everything, and exercising ourselves to have a conscience void of offence: and this in no small measure by letting in the light of the day, that is the future, to deal with the present. Can there, in fact, be a proper outlook of faith without that day before our eyes? To judge without it will be largely according to appearances, and so far not divinely righteous.

In this prediction then we find how completely the tables are turned in that day, and that mount Zion is to be the place of deliverance, not the sign of Israel's desolation, and that the scum of the Gentiles tread the capital of Immanuel's land. "And there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall inherit their inheritance." That this is in no way the gospel, but the kingdom when the two things shall be distinguished, instead of coalescing as now in Christianity, will be still plainer from the words that follow, which it is really absurd to apply to the church, and alike ignorance and error to explain away. The divines labour in vain to explain how a remnant of Judah can be called "the house of Jacob," and "the house of Joseph." But this difficulty is only created by the false system which exaggerates the past, and indicates the future, and deprives the ancient people of God of their hope: a Gentile conceit (see Romans 11) and not the truth.

These verses, like others in the prophets, contemplate the bright future for the earth, and the earthly people once more restored and united in their land. "And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for Jehovah hath spoken it. And they of the south shall possess the mount of Esau: and they of the plain the Philistines: and they shall possess the fields of Ephraim, and the fields of Samaria: and Benjamin shall possess Gilead." As the places are particularly specified by name, it shows that we should not fritter it away by what people call spiritualising. In fact spiritualising is an incorrect term; it should rather be viewed as allegorising. To deny the hopes of Israel has not an element of spirituality about it. In these matters true spirituality consists in understanding the word of God in the sense in which He intended it. We may apply the principle of scripture, and this may be quite legitimate. We can take up what God says of Israel and enjoy it fully; for if God loved His people then, we may be assured that the church is well beloved now, and every member of that holy body. If we see how truly Jehovah loved the Jew as such, we should not doubt but believe that the Christian is loved yet more. All this is quite true, and therefore we can take the dealings of God with Isaac or Jacob, David or Solomon, with Isaiah or Hezekiah. We can listen to them all as full of instruction for the Christian.

At the same time we must remember that there were also points peculiar and special; and so, in this very scene, the mention of Samaria and Gilead and the like shows that it is no question of heaven or eternity, nor of the church or the gospel. The Jews have been just as guilty as the Gentiles of the same allegorical style of misapplying God's word. For instance, they interpret the Edomite as meaning the Christian, crowning their wickedness with the blasphemous lie, that the Lord Jesus, their true Messiah, was an Edomite. Yet Gentile doctors, being scarcely less censurable for their perversions, though of course desirous of honouring the Lord, have little reason to take high ground in condemning the rabbis.

31 Obadiah.contd

Luther, for instance (blessed man as he was), through not holding fast to the general scope and connection, as well as the propriety of each phrase in detail, so far lost the true force of the prophecy as to suppose this chapter means the gospel. Can any further proof be asked of his lamentable deficiency in the knowledge of the Bible? He must have a most surprising imagination who brings the gospel into anything that has been read here as yet. The golden rule is never to force scripture: otherwise we never fail to enfeeble the truth by confounding things that differ. I do not say this out of the smallest want of homage for the great Reformer; for he was assuredly to be respected by all who love the truth. But the truth has higher claims; and his name must never be used to weaken its authority, as when he through ignorance (for instance, of the hopes of Israel and the future judgment of the quick) nullifies its meaning. But he was both rash and feeble in his thoughts of the inspired word. Thus we all, I suppose, are aware that he treated the Epistle of James as not scripture at all, and that he doubted about other parts of the word of God. In point of fact this is what has given the rationalists of Germany a certain ground of advantage, which they have not failed to press on their more orthodox adversaries. For after all the party which cry up rationalism are much influenced by tradition, just like those who seem most opposed, their reasoning, in my opinion, being of the most superficial kind. However this may be, even Luther did give his sanction to the school of interpretation which turns away the testimony of the prophets from the people who are directly in view; namely, the Jews.

The truth is Israel are as much the centre of the Old Testament as Christians are of the New; and unless those two facts be held fast and in view, one is always in danger of mistaking and misinterpreting the mind of God.

Obadiah then speaks of an earthly deliverance, in verse 17, by God but on earth. It is the restoration not of the church but of Israel; and the Spirit speaks of mount Zion literally, as afterwards of the mount of Esau, the plain of the Philistines, and the fields of Ephraim and of Samaria. The figures of fire and flame devouring others as stubble in no way represent grace, but judgment when the world-kingdom of our Lord is come. Man, and even believers, may doubt; but "Jehovah hath spoken." "And the south shall possess the mountains of Esau; and the plain the Philistines; and they shall possess the fields of Ephraim and the fields of Samaria; and Benjamin, Gilead. And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel, between Sidon and Tyre, which is [with] the Canaanites, unto Zarephath [Sarepta]; and the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad [Sardis, the metropolis of the Lydian kingdom], shall possess the cities of the south. And the saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau: and the kingdom shall be Jehovah's." These deliverers spoken of are, no doubt, instruments that Jehovah will employ in the day that is coming, for He means to put great honour on His ancient people when brought to Himself; He promises to make the feeblest among the inhabitants of Jerusalem like David, and the house of David as God, like an angel of Jehovah before them, as said Zechariah. These seem to be the persons here referred to. The connection excludes any reference to the Maccabean times; still less can Obadiah be considered justly to refer to the Christian state of things. It is plain that he speaks of the days which precede the millennium when the kingdom shall be Jehovah's. It is impossible to connect the statement with the eternal state when God shall be all in all; for then, as we are explicitly taught, the kingdom will have been given up to the Father, that God (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost) may be all in all. Here it is the previous era of the kingdom.

I believe there is no exposition of the scripture which satisfies all the conditions of the context and of the rest of the Bible but this. Who would deny that scripture must have as its ultimate force some fixed determinate meaning? There must be a true and full object for the word of God, and this is in no way adverse to the principle of applying particular passages meanwhile. This is all right, and would not be objected to for a moment; but we must distinguish between the application of scripture and its just interpretation. The latter means the full mind of God, the intention and scope whether of prophecy or of anything else. Application is justifiable according to apostolic precedent as a practical use of it before "that day."

It is well known that the Edomites pushed their successes as Israel and Judah decayed; so that they even took some of the southern districts and towns of Palestine. They became much mixed up with the Jews. Then came the people called Nabatheans, descended from Nebaioth the eldest son of Ishmael, who took possession of the land of Idumea, and turned the sons of Esau out to a great extent. In consequence of those men pushing up into Edom, the previous inhabitants thronged into the Holy Land, where some of them acquired considerable possessions, part of which they were obliged to give up before the time of our Lord, as is notorious. Yet it was an Idumean family which got the upper hand in the land. Antipater was the forefather of Herod the Great, who was reigning in Jerusalem when our Lord was born, and sought to kill Him. But this state of things is rather the converse of the prophecy than its accomplishment. In fact the close of our prophecy awaits the great future day of Jehovah for its fulfilment. It is a miserable idea that Obadiah predicted under such bright terms anything like the successes of the Maccabees for somewhat more than a century, followed by the Idumean family which reigned over the Holy Land. The days of Herod the king were far from the time when the kingdom should be Jehovah's.

Christianity on the other hand knows but one Saviour. The bright promises of Obadiah are as yet unfulfilled. They, like all others which concern the nations and the earth, await the appearing of the Lord Jesus and His kingdom. It is not the eternal state, when God shall be all in all; for then the kingdom will have been delivered up to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He shall have put all His enemies under His feet. "The kingdom" will be that long period when divine power, administered by the Son of man, shall cause the earth to manifest blessed results according to God's will and word for His glory. But it will be a time of just rule on the part of the great King; that is, a time when power, combined with righteousness, shall openly reward on earth the good given abundantly and sustained in mercy, and withal shall put down whatever evil dares to show itself. Not so the eternal state which succeeds the kingdom; for then will have taken place, consequent on the judgment of the dead, the everlasting separation; the new heaven and earth in the absolute sense, where God dwells with men without death, or sorrow, or crying, or pain, more; and the wicked are consigned to the lake of fire, which is the second death.

32 Jonah.

Jonah.

Lectures on the Minor Prophets.

W. Kelly.

The most cursory reader can hardly avoid seeing that Jonah has a peculiar place among the prophets. There is none more intensely Jewish; yet his prophecy was addressed to the Gentiles, to the men of Nineveh in his day. Indeed here we learn nothing at all of his service in Israel. He is severed by God's call to this then most extraordinary mission and testimony. Thus, as it has been well observed, Jonah seems outwardly as singular in the Old Testament among the prophets as James is apt to sound strange to many ears among the New Testament apostles. Perhaps every one has felt the difficulty: certainly we know that in some eminent servants of the Lord the difficulties have been allowed to interfere with the reverential confidence due to an inspired writing, as I am assured most mistakenly. Nevertheless such remains the notorious fact. Even a man known for the wonderful work God gave him to do like Luther put a signal slight on the Epistle of James. No argument is needed to prove that he had not one good reason, that his unbelief was quite unjustifiable, and that the error wrought exceeding evil in proportion to the eminence of the man. For the influence of a leader's words, if he go seriously astray, is so much the more dangerous. Hence the Lutheran party in Germany have always shown the strongest tendency towards what some have called "a free handling" of the word of God, but it is to be feared in anything but a becoming spirit. Who can wonder that this has at length developed into the various forms of decided rationalism in the present day, though indeed more or less ever since the Reformation? They may ever so little reflect or sympathize with what was of faith and of divine excellence; but they are none the less disposed to cite Luther as giving an anticipative sanction to their own sceptical spirit towards the word of God.

The truth is that the value of the books of both James and Jonah is chiefly owing to, and seen in, their peculiarity. God is not narrow, though man is; and our wisdom lies in being lifted out of our own pettiness into the vast mind of God. Hence it will be found that, so far from James being one who slighted grace, his epistle is unintelligible unless a man really understands and holds fast the grace of God. He is the only apostle who uses the remarkable term "the perfect law of liberty." This supposes not law but grace. Therefore it was really the feebleness with which grace was apprehended which made people fancy and shrink back from the bugbear of legalism in the Epistle of James. Had they read it in the liberty of grace, they would have seen the real power of the Spirit of God in giving the Christian to realise his liberty.

Just so it appears to me that Jonah in the same way, although personally he might be eminently Jewish in his feeling, nevertheless was used of God for a final Old Testament testimony to the Gentiles. Nineveh, the capital of the then Assyrian kingdom, was at that time the great power of the world. It was before the days when Babylon aspired to supreme empire, and was permitted to acquire it; for Babylon was of itself a most ancient city probably before Nineveh; but it was not allowed to rise up into supremacy until the complete trial of Israel, and the proved failure even of Judah and David's house. Jonah was an early prophet. He lived in or before the days of Jeroboam II. I believe that modern speculation has put him a hundred years perhaps too late. However, this is a small matter. The grand point is the bearing of his prophecy. There is another difference too that is worthy of note in Jonah, and that is, that the book differs from others of the minor prophets by being for the most part prophecy in fact and not so much in word. The whole history of Jonah is a sign. It is not simply what he said but what he did, and the ways of God with him; and this it will be my business to endeavour to expound.

The New Testament points us out some of the most prominent parts of this prophecy, and will be found, I think, to give us the key to the bearing of it in a distinct and material way. Our Lord Himself refers to it, particularly also, it may be added, to that which has drawn out the incredulity of many divines. Now it is well known to those who are acquainted with the working of mind in the religious world, that they have found enormous difficulties in the facts of the book of Jonah. The truth is that, as elsewhere, they stumble over the claims of prophecy; it is here the difficulty of a miracle. But to my mind a miracle, although no doubt it is the exertion of divine power, and entirely outside the ordinary experience of man, is the worthy intervention of God in a fallen world. It is a seal given to the truth in the pitiful mercy of God, who does not leave a fallen race and lost world to its own remediless ruin. So far therefore, from miracles being the slightest real difficulty, any one who knows what God is might well expect Him to work them in such a world as this. I do not mean arbitrarily, or at such a time as ours; for although there be answer to prayer now and the most distinct working of God according to it, it is all to my mind a simple thing. We must never confound an answer to prayer, precious as it may be, with a miracle. For an answer to prayer is no more unintelligible than that your own earnest request to man should bring out a special intervention to your mind. What greater difficulty is there for God to hear the cry of His children? Have baptized men and women sunk into degrading epicureanism? It is then truly monstrous to shut out such a gracious interference of God every day, and there cannot be a stronger proof of where and what man has come to in Christendom than the notion that special answers to prayer are irreconcilable with the general laws God has established to govern the world as well as mankind. Now there is no doubt that there are general principles, if you will, as to everything, — as to the universe, as to the moral ways of God with men, and also as to His dealing with His own children. But then we must never shut out that He is a really personal God, who, even when a miracle may not be, knows how to make His care a living and a known reality for the souls of all that confide in Him.

In the present case then we have one authority weighing infinitely more than all the difficulties which have been mustered by unbelief. For it is plain that our Lord Jesus singles out the particular point of greatest difficulty and affixes to it His own almighty stamp of truth. Can you not receive the words of the Lord Jesus against all men that ever were? What believer would hesitate between the Second man and the first? The Lord Jesus has referred to the fact that Jonah was swallowed up by the great fish, call it what you will: I am not going to enter into a contest with naturalists whether it was a shark, a spermaceti whale or another. This is a matter of very small account. We will leave these men of science to settle the kind; but the fact itself, the only one of importance for us to affirm, is that it was a great fish which swallowed and afterwards yielded up the prophet alive. This is all one need stand to — the literal truth of the fact alleged. There is no need to imagine that a fish was created for the purpose. There are many fishes quite capable of swallowing a man whole: at any rate such have been. If there was one then, it is enough. But the fact is not only affirmed in the Old Testament, but reaffirmed and applied in the New by our Lord Himself. Any man who disputes this must give an account of his conduct before the judgment seat of Christ ere long.

Turning then to our prophecy, we read, "Now the word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of Jehovah, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of Jehovah." But in Jonah is seen the stiff-neckedness of man. Jehovah told him to go east, and he at once hurries west; that is, he flies exactly in the teeth of the divine command. To some this seems unaccountable in a prophet; to the rationalist it is incredible, and casts a doubt on the historical character of the entire book. But we have to learn that flesh is no better in a prophet than in ourselves. For the real difference between men is not that the flesh of some is better than that of others, but that some have learned to distrust themselves altogether, and to live another life which is by faith, not by flesh. Therefore it is that the believer only in fact lives to God so long as he goes on in dependence on Him. The moment he ceases to do so, wonder not at anything he says or does. Here we have a flagrant witness of it in Jonah. He was told to go to Nineveh; but "he rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of Jehovah, and went down to Joppa," — that is, to the neighbouring port of Palestine on the great sea, the Mediterranean, in order to go west.

"And he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of Jehovah. But Jehovah sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep." Now it cannot be doubted that there must have been some strong (however unjustifiable) impulse which gave a contrary bias to this godly man, as undoubtedly the prophet was. What was the motive? To our minds singular enough, but none the less influential over him for all that. Jonah was afraid that God would be too good! If Nineveh repented, he suspected that He would show it mercy. He feared therefore that his own character as a prophet would suffer. He did not choose them to hear the threat that God was giving to destroy the Ninevites for their wickedness, lest they might humble themselves under his preaching, and the threatened judgment might not be put into execution, and Jonah would thus lose his honour. What a miserably selfish thing is the heart even of a prophet, unless just so far as he walks by faith! Jonah did not so walk, but allowed self to gain a transient mastery. I do not speak of what Jonah felt as a man, but of his jealousy as he thought for his office. He could not bear that his ministry should be jeoparded for a moment. How much better to trust the Master!

Now I need not say at any length that we have the exact and blessed contrast to this in a greater than Jonah, who deigns to compare in a certain respect His own ministry with that of His servant. A greater proof of divine humility there could scarcely be. But in all things Jesus was perfect, and in nothing more than this — that He, knowing all things, the end from the beginning, came down into a scene where He tasted rejection at every step — rejection not merely as a babe when He was carried away into Egypt, but rejection all through a life of the most blameless yet divinely ordered obscurity; then through a ministry which excited growing hatred on man's part. There is nothing a man more dreads than to be nothing at all. Even to be spoken against is not so dreadful to the poor proud spirit of man as to be absolutely unnoticed; and yet the very much greater part of the life of Jesus was spent in this entire obscurity. We have but a single incident recorded of Jesus from His earliest years until He emerges for the ministry of the word of God and the gospel of the kingdom. But then He lived in Nazareth, proverbially the lowest of poor despised Galilee — so much so that even a godly Galilean slighted and wondered if any good thing could come out of Nazareth. Such was Jesus; but more than this; when He did enter on the publicity of divine testimony, there too He meets opposition, though at first there was a welcome which would have gratified most men, yea servants of God. But He the Son, the divine person who was pleased to serve in this world, saw through that which would have been sweet to others when they, astonished and attracted, hung on the gracious words that fell from His lips. And how soon a dark cloud passed over it! For even that self-same day in which men heard such words as had never fallen on the ears of man, miserable and infatuated they could not endure the grace of God, and, had they been left to themselves, would have cast Him down headlong from the precipice outside their city. Such man was and is. How truly all that was fair was but as the morning cloud and early dew. But Jesus, we see, accepts a ministry of which He knew from the first the character, course, and results, perfectly aware that the more divine grace and truth were brought out by Him, the sterner rejection He should meet with among men.

God deals very tenderly with us in this respect. He does not fail to send somewhat to cheer and lift up the heart of the workman in praise to Himself; and only just so far as there is faith to bear it does He put on him a heavier burden. But as to the Lord Jesus there was no burden that He was spared; and if none in His life, what shall we say of His death? There indeed a deeper question was raised, on which we need not enter now, only referring to the first great principle as the contrast to the conduct of Jonah in going directly in the teeth of the Lord's distinct commission.

Another trait we find marked in Jonah — his Jewish feeling. He was intensely national. He could not bear that there should be the slightest apparent failure of his word as a prophet in the midst of the Gentiles. He would rather that every Gentile had been swallowed up in destruction than that one word of Jonah should fall to the ground. It was precisely here where he had to learn himself short of the mind and heart of God. The wonders that were wrought were not too great for teaching the needed lesson. We have already referred to Jesus, but we need not even go so high as to the Lord of glory. In some respects the working of the Spirit of God in the apostle Paul may aptly serve for us, because he was a man not only of flesh and blood, but of like passions as we. Who ever suffered like him the afflictions of the gospel? Who with burning love to Israel so spent himself in untiring labours among the Gentiles — labours too so unrequited then, that among the Gentiles themselves who believed he so often knew what it is to be less loved the more abundantly he loved?

On the other hand Jesus had no sin. Although perfectly man, every thought, feeling, and inward motion was holy in Jesus: not only not a flaw in His ways was ever seen, but not a stain in His nature. Whatever men reason or dream, He was as pure humanly as divinely; and this may serve to show us the all-importance of holding fast what men call orthodoxy as to His person. I shall yield to none in jealousy for it, and loyally maintain that it is of the substance and essence of the faith of God's elect that we should confess the immaculate purity of His humanity, just as much as the reality of His assumption of our nature. Assuredly He did take the proper manhood of His mother, but He never took manhood in the state of His mother, but as the body prepared for Him by the Holy Ghost, who expelled every taint of otherwise transmitted evil. In His mother that nature was under the taint of sin: she was fallen, as were all others naturally begotten and born in Adam's line. In Him it was not so; and, in order that it should not be so, we learn in God's word that He was not begotten in a merely natural generation, which would have perpetuated the corruption of the nature and have linked Jesus with the fall; but by the power of the Holy Ghost He and He alone was born of woman without a human father. Consequently, as the Son was necessarily pure, as pure as the Father, in His own proper divine nature, so also in the human nature which He thus received from His mother: both the divine and the human were found for ever afterwards joined in that one and the same person — the Word made flesh.

Thus, we may here take occasion to observe, Jesus is the true pattern of the union of man with God, God and man in one person. It is a common mistake to speak of union with God in the case of us His children. Scripture never uses language of the kind; it is the error of theology. The Christian never has union with God, which would really be, and only is in, the Incarnation. We are said to be one with Christ, "one spirit with the Lord," "one body," one again as the Father and the Son; but these are evidently and totally different truths. Oneness would suppose identification of relationship, which is true of us as the members and body of our exalted Head. But we could not be said to be one with God as such without confounding the Creator and the creature and insinuating a kind of Buddhistic absorption into deity, which is contrary to all truth or even sense. The phrase therefore is a great blunder, which not only has got nothing whatever to warrant it from the Spirit, but there is the most careful exclusion of the thought in every part of the divine word.

And here it may be of interest to say a few words of explanation as to our partaking of the divine nature, of which Peter speaks at the beginning of his second Epistle (2Pe 1:4). It does not seem to be the same as oneness with Christ, which in scripture is always founded on the Spirit of God making us one spirit with the Lord after He rose from the dead. Christ when He was here below compared Himself to a corn of wheat that was alone: if it died, it would bring forth much fruit. Though the Son of God was always the life of believers from the beginning, He promises more, and thus indicates that union is a different thing. They must never be confounded. They are both true of the Christian; but union in the full sense of the word was that which could not be till Christ had died to put away before God our sins, yea to give us our very nature judged, so that we might stand in an entirely new position and relationship, made one by the Spirit with Christ glorified on high. This I believe to be the doctrine of scripture. Along with this observe that the only one who brings out the body of Christ asserted dogmatically in the New Testament is the apostle Paul. Our spiritual oneness is referred to frequently in the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel of John; but this is not exactly the same thing as being one with Christ according to the figure of the head and the body, which is the proper type of oneness in scripture. Now it is by the apostle Paul alone that the Spirit sets before us the body with its head; and this it is which figures the true notion according to God of our oneness with Christ.

To be one with or have life in Him is not the same thing. This may be clearly illustrated by the well-known instance of Abel and Cain. They had the same life as Adam; but they were not one with Adam as Eve was. She only was one with Adam. They had his life no less than their mother. Thus the two things are never the same and need not be in the same persons. Oneness is the nearest possible relationship, which may or may not be conjoined with the possession of life. Both are in the Christian. The pattern of oneness or its proper scriptural model is found under that of the head and the body, which is the more admirably expressive as the head clearly and of right directs all the movements of the body. In a man of sound mind and body there is not a single thing done by the extremity of the foot which is not directed by the head. Such exactly is the pattern spiritually. The Spirit of God animates the assembly, the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the true bond of oneness between the members on earth and Christ in heaven. By and by, when we go on high, it will be represented by another figure equally apt, though also anticipatively applied while we are on earth. We never hear of the head and the body in the day of glory, but of the Bridegroom and the bride. So we read in Revelation 19 that the marriage of the Lamb is then come. This takes place in heaven after the translation of the saints and before the day of Christ's appearing. Scripture avoids speaking of the marriage until the whole work of God is complete in His assembly, so that those who are baptized of the Spirit into that one body may be caught up to Christ together. These between the two advents of the Lord are all in one common position. But those before Christ came were surely quickened of Him; sons of God, they were partakers of the divine nature. So are Christians now; so will be the saints when the millennial kingdom is set up under the reign of Christ manifest to every eye. But to be one with Christ, members of His body, is only true now that He is in heaven as the glorified man, and that the Spirit is sent down to baptize us into this new body on the earth. That one body is now being formed and perpetuated as long as the church remains on earth. The marriage of the Lamb (of course a figure of consummated union and joy) will only take place when the whole church is complete, not before, whatever may be the language inspired by hope ere then.

As to the difficulty of some minds, whether Christ partook of our nature as it is here, or we partake of Him as He is in heaven, the answer seems to me that both are true; but they are not the same truth. Christ partook of human nature, but not in the condition in which we have it. This has been already explained, as it is essential not only to the gospel but to the Christ of God. The man who denies this denies Christ's person; he wholly overlooks the meaning of the supernatural operation of the Holy Ghost. Such was the fatal blot of Irvingism — a far deeper mischief than the folly about tongues or the pretensions to prophesying, or the presumption of restoring the church and its ministries, or even its gross Judaising. It made null and void the Holy Ghost's operation, which is acknowledged in the commonest creeds of both Catholics and Protestants. These all so far confess the truth; for I hold that as to this Catholics and Protestants are sound but the Irvingites are not, although in other matters they may say a great deal that is true enough. Certainly the late Mr. Irving saw and taught not a little neglected truth. Notwithstanding they were, and I believe still are, fundamentally unsound in holding the human nature of Christ to be fallen and peccable through the taint of the fall, thus setting aside the object and fruit of the miraculous conception by the power of the Highest.

Hence then our being partakers of the divine nature is one thing, the gift of the Holy Ghost quite another. Both we have now. The first is the new nature that pertains to us as believers, and this in a substantial sense has been true of all believers from the beginning. But besides this there is the peculiar privilege of oneness with Christ through the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Clearly this could not be until the Holy Ghost was given to baptize the disciples of Christ into one body; as again the Holy Ghost could not be given to produce this oneness till Jesus by His blood had put away our sins and been glorified at God's right hand. (Hebrews 1; John 1, 7) Those who should be saved had been in every kind of impurity, and they must be washed from their sins before they could be righteously set in that position of nearness and relationship as "one new man." Esther was chosen and called to a high position; still, according to the habits due to the great king, there must needs be a great preparation before the actual consummation. I grant you this was but a natural place; still it is the type of a spiritual relationship; so that we may use it to illustrate God's mind. It is not consistent with His ways or His holiness that any should be taken out of the old things and put into the wonderful position of oneness with Christ until the work of redemption completely abolished our old state before God and brought us into a new one in Christ. Such is the order of scripture.

But there is more to come. For although we have already the Holy Ghost as well as the new nature, there is a third requisite which the glory of Christ demands for us: we shall be changed. That is, we Christians, who have now not only humanity but this fallen, are destined at Christ's coming again for us to be changed. Christ had human nature but not fallen. In His case alone was humanity holy, free from every blemish and taint, and pure according to God. It was not only not fallen, but fit without blood to be the temple of God. This is far more than could be said about Adam in his pristine innocency. When Adam came from the hand of God, good as he was, it could not be said that he was holy. There was absolute absence of all evil. God made the man upright before he sought inventions. There was untainted innocence. But holiness and righteousness are more than creation goodness and innocency. Holiness implies the intrinsic power that rejects evil in separation to God: and righteousness means consistency with the relationship in which one is set. Both these qualities we see not in Adam but in Jesus even as to His humanity. "That holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." He was the Holy One of God, "Jesus Christ the righteous." Indeed He was the only one of whom it was or could be said of His human nature that it was holy; as it clearly is of humanity in His person that the expression "that holy thing" is used. The divine nature was not born of the virgin; and it was little needed to call that holy. There was the highest interest and moment in knowing the character of His humanity. Scripture as to this is most explicit. His humanity was holy from the very first, spite of being born of a fallen race.

And this agrees with all other truth. Thus had the human nature of Christ been tainted by the fall, how could He have been the "most holy" sin-offering for sinners? There was no instance about which there was so much scrupulosity of care as the meat-offering and the sin-offering. These two are remarkable and remarkably opposed types of Christ: the one of His life, the other of His death.

But we shall have much more in the way of power and glory by and by. When Christ comes, human nature in us will participate in the victory of the Second Man, the last Adam, as it now shares in the weakness and ruin of the first man. Then indeed is the time when human nature will be promoted to a good degree; that is to say, it will be raised out of all the consequences of the fall of the first man, and will be placed in all the power and incorruption and glory of the Second Man as He is now in the presence of God. Never shall we be made *God:* this could not be, and ought not to be. It is impossible that the creature can overpass the bounds that separate the Creator from it. And more than that, the renewed creature is the very one which would most abhor the thought. No matter what the church's blessedness and glory may be, it never forgets its creature obligations to God and the reverence due to Him. For this very reason he that knows God would never desire that He should be less God than He is, and could not indulge or tolerate the self-exalting folly which the miserable illusion of Buddhism cherishes, along with many kinds of philosophy which are afloat now as of old in the west as well as the east — the dream of a final absorption into deity. This is altogether false and irreverent. All approach to such thoughts we see excluded in the word of God. In heaven the lowliness of those whom the sovereign grace of God made partakers of the divine nature will be even more perfect than now while we are on the earth. Human nature under sin is as selfish as proud. Fallen humanity always seeks its own things and glory; but the new nature, the perfection of which is seen in Christ, (that is to say, the life given to the believer, what we receive in Christ even now, and by and by when everything is conformed to it) will only make perfect without a single flaw or hindrance that which we now are in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Returning from our long digression, I would now direct attention to the plain fact that Jonah too faithfully represents the Jews in his unwillingness that God should show mercy to the Gentiles. The effect of this uncomely narrowness and indeed failure in bearing a real witness to the true God is, that far from being the channel of blessings to the Gentiles, he brings a curse upon them. So with the Jew now, and it will be yet more verified at the end of the age. The ringleaders of the actual rationalism in the world have derived a vast deal of their cavils from Jewish sources. The miserable Spinoza of Amsterdam, the theological pantheist of the seventeenth century, is really the patriarch of a great deal of the philosophy that is overrunning the world now and ever since. And this will grow far worse. It is granted that this did not begin with him, but with heathen unbelievers, yet made more and more daring by Jewish and then Christian apostacy. I have no doubt that there is yet to be, from the dragons' teeth which they are sowing over Christendom, an abundant crop of men given up to lawlessness.

Here however it is a very different state: we see a godly man spite of all faults. Nevertheless the result of his unfaithfulness is that he brings a tempest from Jehovah on the ship; and his error brought no small danger on unconscious Gentile mariners, who little thought of the question between God and His servant, or of the deep reason that lay underneath so singular a controversy. But Jonah knew what the matter was, though he had never dared to look it fairly to the bottom: as men never do whose conscience is bad. And this he showed when the shipmaster came and waked him up from his sleep with the cry, "What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not." Even then he does not reveal the secret. "And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us." When men are ashamed and will is still active and unjudged, it takes no small discipline to set them right again. So Jonah held his tongue as long as he could, though he knew right well who was the culprit. "They did cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah." As it was not possible to hide his secret any longer, "Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us? What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou? And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear Jehovah, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land. Then were the men exceeding afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of Jehovah, because he had told them. Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous."

The prophet then directs them like a genuine soul, as he was at bottom: all of which we have spoken freely and plainly, as the word of God warrants us to do, seems quite consistent with it. For all his short comings, his narrowness, and his official self-importance, he did not fear to trust himself in God's hands, as we shall see. For "he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea." Is it not evident and sad the mixture one sees even in a real believer? It is plain that he has not the slightest doubt of his own relationship to God; he entertains no question that all will be well somehow with Jonah. Yet had he really been, as he was often in danger of being, impatient, self-willed, and presumptuous. Jonah knew God well enough to dread that He would be better than his own message and warning to the Gentiles. He did not mind that God should be ever so good to the Jews, but he could not bear that his threat should seem vain through divine mercy to repentant Gentiles.

Jonah, I say, tells them to take him up and cast him forth into the sea. "So shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you." The shipmen, not having the heart to do it, "rowed hard to bring the ship to land; but they could not: for the sea wrought and was tempestuous against them." And they too cried unto Jehovah. A remarkable change, as we may here discern, takes place in them; for up to this time they simply owned God, but only after a natural sort, because they called on their gods withal. This was inconsistent enough. They did not see the grievous incongruity of worshipping false gods and at the same time owning the true God. Such however was exactly their state; but now they cried to the true God. They had heard His name was Jehovah, and they were struck by the reality of His government in the case of Jonah before their eyes. "And they cried unto Jehovah, and said, We beseech thee, O Jehovah, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O Jehovah, hast done as it pleased thee."

A remark may be made by the way in proof of the excess of the folly rationalism displays in judging of these names of God. In these days most people who read are aware that freethinkers have tried to build up the theory that each of the early books at least of the Bible must have been written by different authors at different times, because among other phenomena there occur two or more accounts sometimes of the same or of kindred features, in one of which the name God or "Elohim" is more prominent, in another the name "Jehovah." Their hypothesis is that the difference of these terms, backed up by other differences of thought and language, can only arise from distinct authorship. Superficial and transparent folly! As if even human writers do not vary their style with their subject and object: how much more when God gives according to His fulness and depth! There is not the slightest sense in the theory. And here is a proof before our eyes in the prophecy of Jonah. There is no question of early documents in this case. As compared with the books of Moses, Jonah after all is rather too late in the day. They contrived to eke out the case that in the dim and hoary age of Mosaic antiquity various documents had somehow been muddled together, and out of the later manipulation of these different records at length emerged the books of Moses as we have them: pretty much, one might suppose, as Jehovah plagued the people because they made the calf, which Aaron made, when he "cast the gold into the fire, and there came out this calf."

But, however this may be, the prophecy of Jonah rises up to refute this pretentious folly. Bear with me if I cannot but use strong and plain terms in speaking of that which is so irreverent and revolting. One should never find fault with a man for ignorance;* still less can one justly lay blame on any man for not being wiser than God has been pleased to make him. It is our business to make the best use of the little which God may have vouchsafed; but that man should allow his mind or acquirements, whatever be his measure, to rise up in judgment of the precious and perfect word of God, to unsettle and destroy as far as his influence extends the absolute divine authority of everything that God has written, — this I cannot but condemn with all my soul, and believe that it is the truest love even to the wrong-doers. We cannot exaggerate the heinousness of the sin. May the Lord forgive every one guilty of it! But we ought not to forgive the thing itself. Can one conceive that God would have the believer forgive the sin of speaking against His own word? Grace can forgive the worst of sinners; but never let us allow any thought about the sin except that it is most hateful to God. To have the strongest sense of sin is in no way incompatible with the utmost pity for and interest in him who is deceived and guilty and condemned. On the contrary it is as much a Christian's duty to abhor that which is evil as to love that which is good. So true is this, that the man who does not abhor evil can never be justly thought to have real love in his heart for what is good; because it is always in proportion to moral power that one hates the false and evil, and loves the true and good. As for the shilly-shallying that calls itself charity but really is indifference to either good or evil, it is at bottom either intense self-seeking or mere love of ease without a single quality which becomes a man, because there is no thought nor care for what is due to God. Against such heartlessness may all God's children watch diligently; for the air now-a-days is full of it. Depend on it, there is no grace in such laxity. It is as far as possible from Him who is our only unfailing test.

{*The last words of the famous Laplace were, "Ce que nous connaissons est peu de choses; ce que nous ignorons est immense." Alas! he died without the knowledge of God, without eternal life in Christ. But he is no bad witness of the unsatisfying nature of the knowledge of one who knew much in comparison of most men, though he knew nothing of what man most needs to know.}

In his distress then we find Jonah turns to the true God. Even for the heathen sailors it was no time for thinking of their false gods. They felt themselves evidently in the hand of Jehovah. Accordingly they cry to Him, and as we are told, "They took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging." What a sight! What solemnity must have filled these poor Gentiles! Thereon, we are told, they "feared Jehovah." They had cried to Him before; they feared Him now. If they cried to Him in their danger, they feared Him yet more when the danger was over. That is right, and shows reality. However common, it is a fearful mockery when a man fears the Lord less when he professes to have his sins forgiven by His grace. It is truly awful and perilous when the goodness of God weakens in the smallest degree our reverence for Himself and jealousy for His will. "Our God is a consuming fire", but this need not hinder our perfect confidence in His love. So here the mariners offered a sacrifice unto Jehovah, and made vows at the same time. "Now Jehovah had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."

Next (Jonah 2) we come to a very great change. It is not a man sent out on an unwelcome errand from Jehovah; nor his endeavour to escape from the execution of God's commission; nor yet again the divine dealings with him when he proved refractory and kicked against the goads. We see by the way that Jehovah is exceedingly pitiful and of tender mercy as regards the Gentile mariners, when they forsook their vanities and were brought to worship the only true God, Jehovah the Lord of heaven and earth. But now we have the silent and secret dealings of God that went on during those three days and three nights when Jonah lay in the depths and spread his misery before God. "Then Jonah prayed unto Jehovah his God out of the fish's belly, and said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto Jehovah, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice."

In this there can be not the slightest doubt to the believer that Jonah is a type of the blessed Lord Jesus Christ when He too was for three days and nights, as He said Himself, in the heart of the earth — the crucified Messiah. But then how different! Jonah's singular fate was because of his sin — his manifest insubjection to God. Christ suffered for others exclusively. It was for the sins of His people. Nevertheless the result was so far similar that our Lord Jesus Himself being without sin was utterly rejected, not because He did not the will of God, but because He did it to perfection, offering His body as a sacrifice once for all. Thus our blessed Lord obeyed unto death, instead of disobeying it like the first Adam. Jonah then cries, and Jehovah hears. Deeply does he feel the position in which he found himself; and this was well. Discipline is meant to be felt, though grace should not be doubted.

But I believe on the other hand that his confidence, as was natural, was not unmingled with fear. For if a type of Christ he was a type of the Jewish people. Indeed he sets forth not inaptly the people failing in their testimony, misrepresenting God before the Gentiles, not yet a channel of blessing on them according to the promises to Abraham, but rather a curse because of their own unfaithfulness. Nevertheless, just as Jonah was preserved of God in the great fish, so also are the Jews now preserved of God, and will be brought out to be a joy and praise to His name in the earth, whatever their present lost estate. That day is hastening apace. In Jonah's history we find its pledge; in Christ's its righteous ground and the means to accomplish it when Jehovah pleases to His glory.

It is a principle with God that "in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." This I do not doubt to be at least one reason for the three days, whether one looks at the case of Jonah, or of Christ, or of any other. It means a fully adequate testimony, as in our Lord's case, to the reality of His death when He had been rejected to the uttermost; so with Jonah. Two would have been enough; three were more than sufficient, an ample and irrefragable witness. So our Lord Jesus, though by Jewish reckoning three days and three nights in the grave, literally lay there but the whole of Saturday — the Sabbath, with a part of Friday not yet closed, and before the dawn of Sunday. For we must always remember in these questions the Jews' method of reckoning. Part of a day regularly counted for the four-and-twenty hours. The evening and the morning, or any part, counted as a whole day. But the Lord, as we know, was crucified in the afternoon of Friday; His body lay all the next or Sabbath day in the grave; and He rose early the Sunday morning. That space was counted three days and three nights according to sanctioned Biblical reckoning which no man who bowed to scripture would contest. This was asserted among the Jews, who, fertile as they have been in excuses for unbelief, have never, as far as I am aware made difficulties on this score. The ignorance of Gentiles has exposed some of them when unfriendly to cavil at the phrase. The Jews found not a few stumbling-blocks, but this is not one of them: they may know little of what is infinitely more momentous; but they know their own Bible too well to press an objection which would tell against the Hebrew scriptures quite as much as the Greek.

In Jonah 3 we come to another point. The word of Jehovah comes to Jonah again. How persistent is His goodness, and how vain for His servant to think of evading! A fresh message is given in these terms: "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of Jehovah." And the Spirit of God tells us, "Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." The people listened to the word. And here is another use for which our blessed Lord employs Jonah. He does not merely cite the most marvellous part of Jonah's history as a type of His own rejection in Israel, or of the consequence of that rejection for Israel, but He holds up before the proud and hard spirit of the Jew in His day the repentance of the Ninevites at the preaching of Jonah, two wholly different references which are main incidents in the history of the prophet. "So the people of Nineveh believed God." They did not go so far as the mariners: they "believed *God."* There was a certain conviction that His moral character was justly offended by their wickedness; for well they knew that they were living as they listed, which practically means without God at all. "They believed God," it is stated, "and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth."

Does this again warrant the inference that the book had two authors? Later on, as at the early part, all is recounted with the most perfect order morally, and as naturally as possible flows from one and the same inspired mind. The fact is that the application of the different names for God is quite independent of the question of one or more authors, and is owing to a different idea which the author meant to convey: and this is true throughout scripture early or late, Old Testament or New. Indeed all the holy writings are parts of the same web; but it does not follow that there may not be a different pattern in different parts of it. To make it all the same monotonous colour or shape is not always necessary even among men. How strange that vain man should sit in judgment on God, not even allowing Him to do as He pleases with His own word! Of course the use of the names is adapted to a different apprehension of God on the part of men, the one being mainly the general expression of His nature, the other of that specific relation in which He was revealed to His chosen people of old; the one *what,* the other *who* He is. Hence under the hand of the Holy Spirit we may surely reckon that God furnishes the terms used with the most perfect propriety. Never is it either arbitrary or unmeaning; but we may not be able always to discern aright. So far indeed is it from being true, that I am persuaded a variety of authors would rather have struck these differences out. Thus, supposing there were two authors giving really conflicting reports, I consider that an editor, finding the two documents at variance, would have in all probability tried to assimilate them; for instance in this case either by striking out "Jehovah" and putting in "God," or by striking out "God" and putting in "Jehovah." This would have been no hard task, and most natural if there had really been a mere editor dealing with old relics which he wished to reduce into a tolerably harmonious whole for perpetuation.

Let me endeavour to illustrate the truth by a familiar figure. An artist of intelligence would not represent the Queen in the same way opening the Houses of Parliament as if reviewing the troops at Aldershot. He who could fail to see the reason of the differences in paintings of the two scenes' even if drawn by the same artist, would simply prove that he had no discernment of propriety. In the one case there might be a horse or a chariot; in the other there would be the throne. Horses would not be suitable in the House of Lords any more than a throne at the camp. Every one can see in such a case as this that the difference of the surroundings has nothing to do with a question of this or that artist, of few or many, but is due exclusively to the difference of relationship.

So even we in ordinary life do not always address the same person in the same way. Suppose the case of a judge, and of a barrister who is the judge's son addressing him in court. Do you think the barrister would so far forget the court as to call the judge his father when addressing the jury, or even the judge? Or do you suppose when at home in the intimacy of his father's house that his son would call the judge "my lord," just as he and all else would in court?

It is to me then certain that the objection raised is due to nothing else than an astonishing want of discernment; but I should never blame one for this if he did not pretend to teach and in his effort dishonour God's word, and injure if not ruin man. If people cannot form a sound and holy judgment as to such questions, it is their own loss. But they are not entitled to publish the fruits of their ignorance of scripture, and palm them off as something new, profound, and important, without being sifted and exposed, especially as the necessary tendency if not the object of all they say is to destroy the true character of scripture as divine. Were the learning in which such efforts may be arrayed ever so real, which it rarely is, I do not think a Christian ought to make a truce for an hour.

Here then we learn that God was believed by the men of Nineveh, who accordingly took the place of the guilty in repentance before God. When the matter came to the king, "he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything: let them not feed, nor drink water: but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God." Here the place of humiliation is kept up in a thorough, if somewhat singular, manner. "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" They have not long to wait for an answer of mercy. "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry." Yes, Jonah is the same man still when proved to the core. It may appear to us wonderful that so it should be after all the dealings of God with him. The mercy shown was too much for him whose message covered Nineveh with sackcloth. What he had warned he had warned; and he could bear no mitigation lest it should detract from himself. This feeling was too deeply ingrained in his nature to be altered even by such discipline as he had passed through. No experience can ever correct the evil of the fleshly mind. So thoroughly hopeless is it in itself that nothing short of death and resurrection with Christ, given to faith and kept up in dependence on Him, can avail. To be swallowed up by the great fish and to come forth again was used for good doubtless; but no such measure sufficed to meet the demand. We only live by present dependence on God; and there can be no greater ruin for a soul than to attempt to live on the past alone, still less going back to one's old thoughts and feelings.

Jonah indeed practically set aside the fruit of the solemn discipline for his soul which he had gone through in the depths of the sea. But God was the same God; and had His own way of setting Jonah right. "He prayed unto Jehovah." Here we find the propriety of the language again. The prophet does not fall back merely on the place of man as such with God; he speaks to Him as one who knew Him on special ground, according to the covenant name of Jehovah in which He is known to the Jew. "He prayed to Jehovah, and said, I pray thee, O Jehovah, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil." This was the secret spring of the prophet's dread — God's mercy! "Therefore now, O Jehovah, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live." He could not bear to live if his word were not accomplished to the letter. He would rather see that word carried out rigorously in the extermination of all the Ninevites than that it should seem to fail. How proud, selfish, and destructive is the impatient heart even of a godly man! And how beautiful it is to find in the apostle Paul what I referred to at the beginning! A man of like passions with Jonah and with us, who nevertheless gives patience as the special, chief, and most memorable sign of an apostle. He says truly that all the signs of an apostle were found with him in reproving the ungrateful Corinthians; but what does he allege as the first great sign of it? Not tongues or miracles. Be assured of this — that patience is better than any such powers; and patience in every form God wrought in the heart of that blessed man. Yet it does not seem to my mind from all we read that Paul was a patient man after his own nature. Does it not rather seem that he was amazingly quick of feeling, and as rapid in coming to a conclusion as he was firm in holding to it when formed? Nevertheless, though he had a mind as fitted for deep-sea fathoming as for taking in the various sides of whatever came before him, we know that he was thoroughly a Jew — "a Hebrew of Hebrews" as he says himself, to whom his nation was unspeakably dear. At the same time he was a man most energetic in carrying out practically whatever conscience and heart received as according to God. This he was even in his unconverted days; and certainly he was not less so when broken down by grace and filled with a love which poured forth from every channel of his large heart. But the permanent quality that marks Paul as apostle, as he urges to the Corinthian doubters and for the good of all saints, is patience. I doubt that any other thing is so great a sign of spiritual power. There is a day coming when power will not be shown in patience; but the truest sign of divine power morally carried on now is this ability to endure. Now this was what Jonah completely failed in. He had known wonders of divine power and mercy in his own case; but there is nothing like the cross, no lesson like that of death and resurrection as Paul had learnt it. Some may think it a very unusual expression of our hearts, bad as they are, to put one's own reputation above the welfare and even the lives of the people of the great city; and that few or none of us would be tempted to feel so hardly. Be assured however that the flesh is untrustworthy; and that self is as cruel as it is paltry when allowed. This may seem to some a dreadful thought; but is it not true? Man is the first man still; and it is in the Christian ready to repeat itself, unless by faith held for dead.

"Then said Jehovah, Doest thou well to be angry?" How admirable His patience! "So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city." There sat the prophet coolly and deliberately waiting with what comfort he could muster to see if God would then and there exterminate the people he, Jonah, had devoted to destruction. And now we see the wonderful way in which Jehovah corrected the mischief. "Jehovah God prepared a gourd." It is not now simply "God," nor only "Jehovah," but the blending of nature with special relationship. Such seems the reason why it is Jehovah God in this instance. He "prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd." Simply as God, we may say, He prepared the gourd; but as Jehovah God He prepared it to be a comfort for His servant Jonah. "But God prepared a worm." Observe the appropriate change. It is not "Jehovah God" now, but Elohim — the author of creation. "*God* prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live." Indeed impatience must always be about self. The thing that ever most provokes human nature is such a wound. It is never God; nor need the test by which God puts one to the proof provoke impatience, which is found when analysed to be just a finding fault with Him. Do you think that God has not His eye on every thing and every one? Do you forget that God is measuring all the grief and trial and pain inflicted and borne here below? Of course He concerns Himself actively with each and all. Hence it is only when we lose sight of this that the impatience of nature breaks forth; but it is assuredly always there ready to break forth. So it did break out with the vexed prophet. "And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death." How manifestly we see the same soul hot but feeble: "I do well to be angry!" "Then said Jehovah, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six-score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" You would like the gourd spared. What is the gourd to Nineveh? You value its ephemeral shade: what is it in mine eyes to that great city with its teeming myriads of such little ones as know not their right hand from their left? Yes, God even thinks of and feels for the cattle. What surer or more evident sign of greatness than to be able to take in what we consider petty along with what is to us boundless in magnitude? And such does our God; He despises not any. Such exactly is the God whom Jonah knew so little and was so unwilling to learn. There is no real knowledge of God except in crushing nature in its impatience, pride of heart, self-confidence, everything And it is right that it should be so. It is a poor gain to acquire considerable knowledge of God without its having at the same time a deep moral effect on the soul. God at any rated would have the two things together associated in us.

How admirably complete are His ways and His working! He who prepared the fish prepared the palmchrist and the worm and the vehement east wind. All things serve not His might only, but His gracious purposes. It is as characteristic of our prophet as of all scripture to state calmly every incident just as it was, all under God's hand, the least as truly as the greatest, and this too not to his own credit, but to the praise of mercy so infinitely above the thoughts of man. And this is imbedded among the Jewish prophets, written in the Hebrew tongue, by one who felt as keenly as ever Israelite did what it was to warn the destined captor of Israel, with the certainty that God would repent Him of the menaced judgment, if they by grace repented themselves of their ways against Him. And so he proved after that he, given back from the grave of the sea, had performed his mission, type of One risen from the dead, as much greater in His grace to the Gentiles as in the glory of His person and the perfectness of an obedience which went out only in doing the will of His Father. But God is as wise as He is good; and the prophet's grief over the perishing palma-christi is made a reproof to his own rash spirit, and a justification from his own mouth for the mercy of God to the men of Nineveh. Once more out of the eater comes forth meat, and out of the weak, as erst out of the strong, comes forth sweetness.

Such then is the book of Jonah, and I cannot help thinking that, as far as it goes, a more instructive book for the soul, and in view of the dealings and dispensations of God with man and creation, there is not in the Bible.

33 Micah.

Micah.

Lectures on the Minor Prophets.

W. Kelly.

The prophecy of Micah, like all the rest, has its own distinctive properties, though falling into the general current of testimony to Israel, and so far with the others different from the prophecy of Jonah, which was last before us. On the surface we can see a strong resemblance between Micah's line of things and that of the prophet Isaiah. On the other hand, there is the obvious difference that, while Isaiah is large and comprehensive, Micah presents his testimony in a brief and therefore compressed if not more distinct form. The various points of truth which he was commissioned to declare are here together in a short compass.

The prophecy is divided into two if not three clearly marked sections. The first two chapters comprise the introduction: Micah 3, 4, 5 give us the climax of the prophet's testimony; and then Micah 6, 7 are the appropriate conclusion.

In the first portion the prophet summons all people, and the earth itself, and all that exists, to hear Jehovah's testimony, alas! against Samaria and Jerusalem. Adonai from His holy temple, He is "coming forth," as He says, "out of his place." A striking expression it is. The dealings of grace are properly connected with where He is; God is in His place when He is showing His own sovereign mercy. For judgment He comes out of His place. In His own nature God is not a judge, but One who gives and blesses. Judgment is "His strange work," as it is said elsewhere — a work therefore that, if it must be done, He will do shortly. He must make a short work, as says Isaiah. He does not like to dwell on judgment. It is a painful necessity which the wickedness of man compels, and that too because if He declined the judgment of iniquity He must abandon His own moral character. But grace is His normal work, the activities of divine love in spite of evil, not winking at it, but raising out of and above it. Grace suits God and is His delight, as it is the energy of His nature in the face of ruin. Judgment is the provisional guard of His nature, being imperatively that which is rendered necessary by the iniquity of the creature — whether of the fallen angels or of rebellious man. So here the prophet declares that Jehovah comes forth out of His place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth. "Jehovah cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place" (verses 3, 4).

It is in vain therefore for Israel to build themselves up in the conceit of impunity. This cannot be where Jehovah is the judge. "For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel." Sin is always evil, but never so humiliating as in the people of God. "What is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria? and what are the high places of Judah? are they not Jerusalem?" Samaria was the chief seat of Israel, as Jerusalem was of Judah, where the house of David reigned; yet they were both high places of iniquity against Jehovah, Samaria completely and Jerusalem growingly. "Therefore I will make Samaria as an heap of the field, and as plantings of a vineyard: and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will discover the foundations thereof. And all the graven images thereof shall be beaten to pieces, and all the hires thereof shall be burned with the fire, and all the idols thereof will I lay desolate: for she gathered it of the hire of an harlot, and they shall return to the hire of an harlot. Therefore I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked: I will make a wailing like the dragons, and mourning as the owls. For her wound is incurable; for it is come unto Judah; he is come unto the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem" (verses 6-9).

Some rationalist commentators for objects of their own are disposed to regard Micah as a very late prophet; but there need be no scruple in rejecting their theories. The prophet himself says it was "in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah." There is not a tittle of evidence against the genuineness of these words, which assert that he was an early prophet. But rationalists have always at hand a summary reason for any conclusion to which their will impels them: another writer, or even so many more as each difficulty can be conceived to call for! For who at bottom is so credulous as the rationalist? It could easily be shown that the wonders which their system obliges them to receive are in their way less reasonable and worthy than the testimony to which faith bows implicitly: but then they are wonders of imposture and bad faith. Men can believe anything that lowers the credit of a prophecy, pretending withal that they honour the writer and in no way question his good faith or holiness. What a singular notion theirs must be of truth and holiness! If a writer assuming to be a man of God pretended to prophesy at a time when he was not born, and gave out as prophecy that which was only written after the fact, is he not a cheat and his writing an imposture?

If their proofs be demanded, it will be found that, under an elaborate heap of details in style and phraseology, the real difficulty is the assumption common to them all, that there is no such thing as prophecy. If the prophet therefore gives himself out as having lived before the events, they imagine that this is only a figure of speech meant to give more poetic effect for the vulgar mind, but in point of fact the writer coolly wrote about facts which had already taken place as if still future. Thus we may see infidelity always has this plague-spot underneath it, that, with the loudest profession of searching after truth, it really denies all the moral grandeur and beauty of God's revelation, destroying too dignity or even decency in man. In its anxiety to leave God out of His own word, it robs the faithful of the great witness to His knowledge of the future and of the grace which communicates that knowledge to them here below. By this degrading pseudo-criticism what is truly divine is ruthlessly explained away and reduced to the level of hypocritical imposture. It may be denied; but such is my judgment of the results of that modern infidelity which gives itself the fine name of the "higher criticism:" a poor but not unsuited conclusion for self-vaunting human learning to arrive at. It is possible that its leaders, still more readily its followers, may not be conscious that in the main it is only a modern furbishing up of the weapons of older Deism. But this it really is, with a gloss suited to the taste of the day. Is it not horrifying to think that the tinge of apostacy deepens manifestly among those who profess to study the Bible? If there be the sad assurance of deceiving men and women going on in Romanism, learned and Protestant Germany not merely plunges living men into the wretched uncertainty to which Popery always reduces those who turn away from Christ to Mary and saints and angels and the church so-called, but denies the holy fire which no fable-love stole, but divine love gave and kept for men in the written word of God, to which under a multitude of sounding words neology imputes a mass of errors of all kinds.

On the other hand to the believer the subject presents no difficulty worth mentioning. He sees that it is as easy for God to speak about the future as about the past; and in fact it is a denial of prophecy to exclude the future from the vision of the seer. Again, it is one of the principal marks of God's love for His people that He acquaints them with the future. So He dealt with Abraham, telling him what concerned not merely himself but the world. This is an immense boon: not alone nor so much the information as the grace which gave it them. That God should reveal what pertains to our own proper portion is simple enough if we are His children; but it is a special sign of His interest and intimacy to let us know of others, and this He does in prophecy. The Christian, the church of God, ought to be thoroughly acquainted by this means with what is coming to pass on the earth. We ought never to be unacquainted with the signs of the times. It is of great value to have the sense of them morally; but we ought also to know the times prophetically, and, if we honour God and His word, be assured that we shall.

There is no presumption in this. It is presumption to speak about the future, unless as far as we have learnt humbly from the prophecies God has left us in His word It is no presumption to believe any part of His word, but genuine humility of faith. It is all a question of honouring God's word. Now He has spoken, and spoken of the end from the beginning. Take the very first word in Eden, where we have the truth in twofold form. Is there any thing really grander in the Old Testament? On the one hand the serpent was to bruise the heel of the woman's Seed; on the other, the woman's Seed was to bruise the serpent's head. One of these has been accomplished; the other remains to be. That which is the moral foundation of all, namely, what God had wrought when the serpent bruised the heel of the Messiah and He suffered supremely under God's hand on the cross — what God wrought there for His own glory and for the blessing of man is the one ground-work of peace for our souls this day, and for any of God's saints any day. But the other part remains still future. In its full import we may perhaps say it remains for the far future from God; for it is evident that, although at the beginning of the millennium the serpent may receive a considerable bruise on his head, not until the end of the millennium will the bruising be completed. Thus we see the first prophecy of God stretches out to the very last; so far is it from being true that God does not communicate it for the practical good and joy and blessing of the simplest of his children.

Again, it is altogether and plainly false that prophecy is only to be received and studied when fulfilled. The truth is, when fulfilled it takes another shape and acquires another use; but it ceases to be prophecy and becomes history, one use of which then is to stop the mouth of an infidel. But the proper value of prophecy is to give the child of God before it comes to pass the certainty of his peculiar privilege — communion with God, who sees the things that are not as though they were. If that be our place, assuredly we ought to value and use it. This therefore may suffice as a plain and distinct answer, not only to the particular facts of Micah's prophecy, but to the general principles as regards all prophecy.

In the latter part of Micah 1 we have a very animated account of the approach of the great enemy typified by the Assyrian of those days. We know that they were one of the most formidable adversaries that Israel ever had. Whether one looks at Shalmaneser or at Sennacherib, the Assyrian was the enemy that was before the eyes of Israel. Later we find Babylon; but the case then is altogether different from Assyria. We must never confound the two. The uses that God turned Assyria and Babylon to in prophecy are as precise as they are different. They have been very commonly confounded, but there is no ground for it in scripture; and not only historically were Assyria and Babylon wholly distinct, but the future enemies which each of them typifies are just as different; for as Assyria was before Babylon in developing into a great kingdom on the earth, and was the grand head of the combined nations which were allowed to overthrow the ten tribes of Israel as well as to menace Judah, so on the other hand Babylon was that particular power which arose to supremacy not merely as a kind of suzerain head of nations bound up by a compact with each other, but as a supreme head of subject kings. In short an imperial dignity belonged not to Assyria but to Babylon. For the latter power rose up after Israel had been swept away, in order to carry Judah captive when the last hope of the house of David had completely fled, and David's son was the chief instrument of the devil for binding idolatry on Judah and on Jerusalem itself. Then God allowed Babylon to come into its marked supremacy — the golden head of the Gentile image according to the figure which Daniel explained in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar. Now this had to do pre-eminently with Judah, and so it will be found in the future. The last head of the Gentile powers typified by that image will rise up and will join in an apostacy with the man of sin: the one being the imperial head of the western powers, or revived Roman empire; the other the religious chief in Jerusalem, accepted as Messiah but really antichrist. When the Lord shall have judged these (Revelation 19), the last Assyrian will come against not the Jews only but Israel, for these will have flocked back to their land then: at any rate representatives of all the tribes will then, as I suppose, be found in the land.

It is of this Assyrian (not of the intermediate Babylonish power which comes in after the first Assyrian and before the last) that Micah speaks; not the past so much as the future Assyrian. This is of immense importance. We must bear in mind that the great image in Daniel is an intercalated system — what may be called a parenthesis which runs its course after the early Assyrian empire and before the Assyrian of the latter day. This may help to explain the case. The four great empires have their place between those two points. Now this intervening system is not taken up in Micah. Isaiah presents us with Babylon and "the king" as well as the Assyrian. Being one of the most comprehensive of all the prophets, he gives us both subjects, and this in their connection or relative order; but then Isaiah shows us exactly the same issue. When the Lord will have completed His whole work in Jerusalem, by putting down the last representative of the powers that began with Babylon, the destined captor of Jerusalem and Judah, what then? He will punish the stout looks of the king of Assyria. The Assyrian, we may see, is the last earthly enemy before the kingdom, as death is the last judicial enemy (1Co 15:26) which remains till its end. But the Assyrian is none the less sternly dealt with at last: such is the positive statement in Isaiah. The ultimate and greatest is he that is described here historically under the Shalmanesers and the Sennacheribs of the past. It would seem too that with this final enemy of Israel may be identified the king of the north in Daniel 11.

Though notoriously the Assyrian is often taken for the Babylonish king or imperial head, this is certainly a mistake of moment. So the king of the north is altogether distinct from "the king" or "man of sin" who will be leagued with the little horn or chief of the Babylonish empire of the last days. The truth is that the man of sin will be the false king of the Jews — the one who will come in his own name and be received of the Gentiles that rejected the true Messiah. He will be in Jerusalem, the apostate power (that began with Babylon) being not in the east but in the west. Rome and Jerusalem are the two great cities of the prophetic word, Jerusalem of all the record, Rome of the intermediate prophecy in its last phase. But when these leaders have been destroyed by the power of God exercised at the appearing of the Lord Jesus, then the king of the north will come forth as the head of the combined nations of the earth outside the image-power of Daniel. This is always to be held fast — Assyria as the head of the confederate nations in opposition to Israel when owned as the people of God, Babylon and the other imperial powers down to the destruction of the beast while the people are disowned by Him. After the beast and the false prophet are consigned to the lake of fire, the king of the north will come forward for a fresh attack with the highest expectations; but he will be dealt with by the Lord in person, who will then have resumed His relationship with Israel and will act in this case through Israel, though there will be evidently divine intervention in the judgment of the Assyrian on the mountains of Israel. Personally however, as the last leader of the power that began with Babylon will be cast alive into the pit, so also will it be with the Assyrian. Their followers will be dealt with in a less distinctly divine manner, though their destruction will be quite beyond an ordinary overthrow. Whatever the means employed as to the kings and their hosts, the Assyrian army will be beaten down by the medium of Israel. God will employ His people as His instruments, though there will not be wanting the fighting as it were from heaven itself against them. Hailstones and fire are described in Ezekiel — lightning and thunder from God — marking that, although He employs Israel, still the defeat is under the direct guidance of Jehovah.

The attack of the nations called Gog and Magog (Revelation 20) is clearly at the close of the millennium, and therefore quite distinct from what we are now describing. But in Ezekiel 38, 39 we hear of a final effort before the millennium properly so-called begins. I am not prepared to say that this will not be the last effort of the king of the north. It seems certainly the same policy. The king of the north is described in a remarkable manner as being mighty, but not by his own power. That is to say, he will be supported by the resources of another power, which I believe can be no other than Russia; but Russia is in the background as the one that will back up the king of the north, or the Assyrian. The king of Assyria will be then the holder of what is now the Sultan's dominions or the Ottoman Porte. This potentate to the north of the Holy Land will acquire considerable strength, and be found in a state totally different from the excessive decrepitude which we see now. It used to be a common saying with politicians that Turkey was dying for want of Turks; but this will not be the case then. I suspect that Greece and Turkey in Europe, with perhaps Asia Minor, will form a sufficiently strong kingdom where the Byzantine kingdom was once known, the Turks proper being probably driven back into their own deserts.

If this be so, those we now know as Turks will be expelled from Pera, and then the renewed Syro-Greek kingdom will really have its head-quarters in Constantinople, will there play its part once more in the great drama of the future, and be, I have no doubt, as thoroughly unprincipled a kingdom under its final shape as ever it has been under its Mohammedan form. The state of the Greeks we all know to be sorry enough now; but I speak solely from what is revealed in Daniel 8 and elsewhere in scripture. If they are morally among the most degraded people in Europe, and none the less for their sharpness and knavery, their meddling with Jewish affairs will precipitate matters and produce awful results. If they have the pride and vanity of the ancient Greeks, what is it with corrupted Christians without the poor moral elements that heathens could have?

Thus the nations which played their part in Old Testament story will assume their final shape ere long, and then come into the earthly judgment of God in the end of this age when the manifested kingdom of the Lord shall bring the earth and all races of mankind into rest and blessing. The coming of the Son of man is not for the judgment of Christendom only, but for the execution of all the purposes of God whether for heaven or earth. This is no doubt of vast importance, though apt to be overlooked where man thinks that there is nothing before us but the divine decision as regards individuals for eternity. What fertile soil for error is the mind where Christ's glory is forgotten and the word of God has not its just authority! The judgment of Christendom then will precede that of the nations, when Israel must come to the front in the ways of God for the world. I speak of the judgment of the quick, not of the dead. Doubtless Christendom has come in as a specially favoured quarter. It has enjoyed the testimony of the truth of God in remarkable ways, though I quite admit that many parts of the earth once enjoyed that testimony which have long become apostate in Mohammedanism, yet more manifestly than the west which has fallen away into Popery; but all nations as such will be judged of God when the day of Jehovah arrives. Those that are real as belonging to Christ will have been taken up to heaven, and thus will not be in the scene of judgment when it comes.

Among the Jews will be those who are to be conspicuous as witnesses on earth in the latter day after the translation of the risen Old Testament saints and the church to meet the Lord above. For the Spirit will begin to work afresh in that nation, and a remnant will be converted in order to be the earthly people of Jehovah, when with His glorified saints Christ comes to reign. A certain number will have been prepared during the awful horrors of the apostacy and the man of sin, some dying for the truth, and others preserved through those days of Satan's power and rage. For the moment earth is to be blessed as a whole, Israel, now compelled to take the ground of mere mercy, will have every promise fulfilled: they, not we Christians, are the chosen people of God for the earth. Their hopes are bound up with the predicted glory of God on the earth. Our hope is altogether different. We look to be with Christ in the Father's house on high; in fact the church of God begins with Christ the Lord ascending to heaven, and sending the Holy Ghost from heaven to unite us with Christ in heaven. There was no such thing as Christianity, in the proper sense of the word, till Christ took His place in heaven as the glorified man after accomplishing redemption. I am not denying the faith of the Old Testament saints, nor the quickening of their souls, nor their expectation of a portion above; but the Christian who knows not of other privileges now beyond these has much to learn.

Thus Christianity is characteristically heavenly. He who is essentially its life and exemplar is Christ, as we know Him, risen and enthroned at the right hand of God; and the Holy Ghost is come down, since Christ was glorified, to be the power and guide of the Christian and the church here below. It was the business of the Christian individually and corporately to maintain this for their testimony both as truth and in practice. Not only have they not maintained it, but they have allowed themselves to become Judaized. What the apostle Paul fought against so energetically during his ministry has taken place, and there has been a most painful compound of heavenly truth with earthly rule, practice, and hope. The consequence is that conglomerate which we commonly now call "Christendom," consisting of Greek church and Roman, Oriental and Protestant bodies of every description, national or dissenting. Where is the witness to the one body animated by the one Spirit? These various and opposed communities may have different measures of light, but in none exhibit an approach to an adequate testimony, either of the Spirit's presence and power, or of the word of God, in subjection to the Lord Jesus. They really testify to the actual state of ruin which pervades the house of God, though doubtless to His infinite patience and grace.

Every serious believer (no matter who he may be, and I have had real communion with many of the children of God, I am happy to say, spite of much which is opposed to my convictions) must own that not a single fragment answers to the Lord's will, still less does the whole. I know some who feel and would confess it, not merely in low-church ranks but among high-churchmen who truly love the Lord. And here let it be said that, much as I deplore their idolatry of forms (forms utterly erroneous too, and an inroad of Judaism if not Paganism), I cannot but avow my preference of a godly high-churchman who enjoys communion with God to a man of less godliness who boasts of liberal feeling and what is called low-churchism and evangelical doctrine. It is the merest illusion and spirit of party to make notions or names supersede what is evidently of God. It is of the greatest consequence at the present time to the children of God to settle and build themselves up in divine truth. Is there anything else worth living for? Is there anything in the present state of Christendom that has a just claim on the spiritual affections of God's children? I speak not of sentiment or of old attachment, but as bound up with Christ. What we want therefore is that we should hold simply to the Lord, and seek to manifest by His grace that our treasure is not on the earth but in the heavens — that we value nought compared with Christ Himself, and that on the earth which is the nearest and best reflection of Him. The only sure way of accomplishing it is by seeing well to it that the eye is fixed on Christ, and so surrendering ourselves to the word and Spirit of God. Be assured that nothing else is worth caring for. How soon the early saints began to seek their own things, not those of Jesus Christ! By degrees the consequence was that utter declension set in, which, when it ripens into apostacy and the man of sin, the Lord will judge at His appearing.

But in that judgment will be the distinction which we have seen. The west, which will be the main scene of the Christian apostacy, with Jerusalem the connected centre of the Jewish lawless one (as we may observe, both the Christian and the Jewish apostate climax), will then be judged; and in that judgment will be the destruction of the beast, the head of the apostate Gentile power, and the man of sin, the head of apostate religious pretension. When this is done, there will follow the great national confederacy headed by the Assyrian and Gog. The latter seems to be the protecting power which stimulates the king of the north, and uses him as an instrument at first and then at length comes up to fall for ever under the hand of Jehovah.

This I believe to be a true sketch of the predicted future. After the destruction of these enemies will come the peaceful reign of the Lord Jesus. Thus it is plain there will be combined in the future two qualities: the Messiah will answer to David, the victorious king, before He shows Himself the anti-type of Solomon, the peaceful king. He will put down the foes, and then reign in peace when there is no one longer to defile, oppose, or destroy.

It follows of course that the extent of the judgment of Christendom will be a much wider area than the simple overthrow of the congregated nations who oppose the Lord near Jerusalem. For instance, the judgment of Babylon will involve in it the humiliation and punishment of all the different parts of professing Christendom, then of course apostate under the seventh vial just before Christ appears. The downfall of Babylon is just before He comes for the judgment of the world. There will remain the lawless beast and false prophet, with all that follow them to be destroyed when He appears in glory. The last providential judgment will be soon followed by the shining forth of Christ's coming. Thus not merely corrupt Christendom will be smitten in the form of Babylon, with Rome its active centre, as it will continue to be to the end; but the final rebellion that the Lord will judge when He comes will arrange itself under the beast and the false prophet, which is not the state of Babylonish corruption, but a condition of open wilful rejection of God and His Christ. This last will comprise the head of the revived Roman empire of that day, who will sustain the antichrist against the king of the north; and the scene of the destruction will be Jerusalem or its neighbourhood.

Thus the judgment of Christendom will be in a certain sense providential judgments before the brightness or appearing of the Lord's coming, when He destroys them by the breath of His mouth. Who can suppose, for example, that America, or Australia, or India, will be unscathed in the judgments of the latter day? The truth is that no place or nation bearing the name of Christ, or having had the gospel preached there, will escape.

It is true that some of these lands, as America, are not expressly named in prophecy. But this in no way hinders the application of general principles. The judgment of the habitable world will take all in. Nor is God mocked by an ocean. His hand will surely deal with those who despise Him, east or west. It is not always understood that, when Babylon is judged, she sits not only on the seven hills but upon many waters. These waters, I suppose, mean all the streams of professedly Christian doctrine that spring from Babylonish principles. They constitute the main corruption of Christianity. The apostacy follows, but is a much more open avowed hostility than any such corruption of Christianity, though apparently its reactionary result. It would seem to be more centralised than Babylon's influence, and to have a more circumscribed place. Then, after the beast's judgment as well as Babylon's, the confederacy of nations will cover again a larger sphere, because this is not necessarily professing Christendom at all. They may be heathen nations or not. I presume that the nations of central Asia will all succumb to Russia, and will perish most signally on the mountains of Israel. It is well known that, even to the Chinese and others, the eastern races are sinking under the control of Russia, not without resistance and checks, but sure in the end to fall under its steady never-abandoned policy. It is not more certain for the Porte than for Persia, or for central India; not all to be absorbed into the empire, but all to accept its leadership. Astonishing is the blindness of men to what is coming. Such will be the part played by the Assyrian, who appears to be the great north-eastern instrument of Russia's designs; but they will all come under the judgment of God. The fact is that in due time all the nations must be judged as such: only there will be different measures of judgment according to differences of privilege. The greater our favour from God, the more strict the account to be rendered. Every one can feel the righteousness of this, and in judgment it is a question of righteousness. But the portion of the Christian is of grace which reigns through righteousness: and hence therefore his place will be with Christ. They will be all taken away from the earth and its varied circumstances of sorrow here to meet the Lord Jesus and dwell with Him in the Father's house. This is not of course revealed in the Old Testament, but only in the New where the proper revelation of Christianity is given.

In Micah 2 we have the conclusion of the first strain of the prophecy. "Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in the power of their hand. And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage." Surely all this would be strange as addressed to the Christian. We never find such a style of warning in the New Testament. The reason is plain. The law was the rule of the Jew. Now the law claims in natural righteousness, and deals with the want of it. What therefore they failed in was the practical answer to natural righteousness. But the Christian, even supposing he were ever so righteous in natural duties, is far from rising up to the standard which becomes a Christian. We have to walk according to Christ in spiritual things as well as in natural. Consequently we need the light as it shone in Him, and the truth of the New Testament as the rule and guide of our walk, not merely the moral law that deals with man in the flesh.

Manifestly then our position is not in the flesh before God, as we are carefully told in Romans 8, where walking in the Spirit is insisted on. Of course nobody denies that the flesh is in us; but as Christians we are not in it. Such is the doctrine of the apostle Paul; and only unbelief would think of explaining away or even essaying to correct his language. It is not for believers so richly blessed either to dispute his accuracy or to forsake their own mercies. The apostle Paul says positively of all Christians, "Ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that God's Spirit dwell in you." Such then is the distinctive standing of every Christian man. What is the meaning of it? Clearly this, that it belongs to me characteristically as a Christian that I am in Christ; that, instead of being defined as part of the race by fallen Adam, I have in Christ a new life and a new place. In short there is a new standing before God in Christ. This is as true now as it ever can be: the better resurrection will not confer but display its blessedness. When we go to heaven, we shall not be simply in Christ, we shall be with Christ; but we are in Christ while we are on earth.

It is needful to heed the distinctions made and given in scripture. Fear not to believe the word. Cavillers may and do say that these are fine-drawn distinctions. If God has so revealed His truth to us (and scripture alone decides that He has), they may be exquisitely fine, but they are according to Him in whose wisdom and goodness we confide. We are bound to distinguish where and as God does; and if we fail to follow, we shall find out too late our loss. The truth is that there is a great deal of latent unbelief in those who cavil at the distinctions of the word of God. For all progress in real knowledge is tested by, as growth in true wisdom largely consists in, distinguishing things that differ. When a man is learning a new language, the sounds seem much alike to his ear; the characters too wear a sort of sameness of appearance which he fails at first properly to discriminate. Thus he who begins to hear the Hebrew language, or who looks at the written words, is struck with their monotony, and sees a set of strange square letters, many of them so similar as to create for his eyes no small embarrassment.

Such is more or less exactly the case with a person reading the Bible at first, and seeking to grow in the truth. The ignorant are apt to fancy that it is all merely the way to be forgiven of God and our duty. Everything is tortured to this, because it is the thought of their own minds. But when justified by faith, we have peace with God. Then we begin to distinguish the truths of scripture, and we learn that some passages treat chiefly of the divine nature, others of redemption; some of priesthood, others of justification; some of the riches of grace, others of the horrors of antichrist; some of salvation, others of the walk, and others again of the hope. The Jews, the Gentiles, the church, all have their place. Then the distinctions begin to crowd upon us, when wants are met, conscience is exercised but cleansed, and the heart set upon Christ. Yet it is plainly not in the nature of things to be spiritually fit for understanding the scriptures with fulness before we have found rest in Christ; but when this is known by the new man, do not yield to the selfishness which would stop there, but let us use the peace and rest of faith to increase by the knowledge of God — to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Thus we shall soon learn the broad distinction, that to the Jew the evil denounced is of a much more external nature — oppression, covetousness, idolatry. These are the great iniquities with which they were charged. These are not our characteristic perils, though of course we may fall into any of them. But in the New Testament we find another class of evil; namely, bad and false doctrine, which destroys communion and undermines and corrupts the walk. Such uncleanness of spirit does not seem spoken of in the Old Testament. Why? Because we stand in a new and peculiar place. We have doubtless all the benefit of the ancient oracles, but we have the special instruction, help, and joy of the New Testament, which those of old had not; and our calling, being a peculiar thing, requires therefore peculiar scriptures to give us the light that is wanted for the glory of God. I make this remark by the way. Hence the upshot of what I am saying is this, that there are certain moral immutable principles, and that they always abide. Consequently what is true from the first of Genesis remains true to the end of Revelation; but then we have our own peculiar words and exhortations given us. We must distinguish between old things and new. The general truths of God which direct the Jew or the Gentile are surely for the Christian, besides that calling of God in Christ Jesus which we now know in His name and by the Spirit of our God.

As Israel has the prominent place in Amos, so the converse is seen in Micah, who does not omit the kingdom of Samaria, but has Judah and Jerusalem as the prime objects of his expostulation. They pre-eminently are warned of those natural offences against the moral ways of God, which the false prophets bore with and even cherished. But they learn that their prophets shall be taken away from them. The prophets had flattered the people, prophesying smooth things and deceits. Of course they were not really servants of God, but from the mere school of prophets. When prophesying became traditional, it soon became corrupt. Those that God raised up extraordinarily dispensed the true light of God on the earth, and "Therefore thou shalt have none that shall cast a cord by lot in the congregation of Jehovah. Prophesy ye not, say they to them that prophesy: they shall not prophesy to them, that they shall not take shame." What they had misused they should lose.

Then comes a most animated appeal in the latter part of this chapter. "O thou that art named the house of Jacob, is the Spirit of Jehovah straitened? are these his doings? do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?" So we have a solemn call to them. "Arise and depart, for this is not your rest; it is polluted." Here is a grave and precious principle. The people of God are never to rest in that which does not suit Him. Jehovah decides that the only rest which He can sanction for them is the rest that is worthy of Himself. Hence from the beginning we see, graven even on the time which fleets away, that God, when He sanctified the seventh day as the sabbath of rest, gave a sure pledge that remains for His people to the end of the world. The sabbath consequently has a most important place in the order of God for man on the earth, as we learn from His word. But the Jew was always prone to be premature in looking for his rest. The same fault repeats itself in Christendom. But it is not so. Whatever we may have before God in Christ, we are still in scenes of war and labour. Our rest is not here; nor is it now. What do men flatter themselves they are going to bring about by discoveries and inventions? They hope that they may turn the moral wilderness of the world into a paradise, and thus find a present rest here. Is not this what they yearn after? Unconverted men, as the rule, are full of vaunt and vain glory: and I am afraid that too many of the converted yield to these fleshly dreams of the world. All will come to nought. The truth is that God means to effect rest; yet it will not be the fruit of man's work but of His own. It was after the six days in which He made heaven and earth that God sanctified His rest at first, and, as our Lord, "my Father worketh hitherto, and I work," He is still active, carrying forward the work of grace, the new creation; and after this is done the true and final rest of God will come, and the people of God shall share it — the heavenly ones above, the earthly below. It is the earthly people who are addressed by Micah, and warned not to look for a rest before the Lord's time.

So no less but more shall Christians rest by and by. Our business is to work meanwhile. Now is the time for labour; now we must be sedulously beware of making a rest of our own. By and by we shall enjoy to the full the rest of God, when the true Captain of salvation shall lead us in, not anticipatively as now, but in actual and complete possession for the body as well as soul and spirit.

In order to bring in this rest the breaker must come up — He who brings to nought every spurious rest. So in prophetic vision Micah sees. "The breaker has come up before them." "I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel." There will be none of the people left out when it is a question of introducing the rest of God. But the breaker must come before them. "They have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and Jehovah on the head of them." It will be the rest of God when He shall have dispelled all substitutes for it, and evidently set aside every hindrance and repaired all breaches, Himself joining His people and bringing them in, whether to the earthly or to the heavenly rest. For long war against God will have closed, and all the universe of God shall rest above and below. Such is the bright millennial day according to scripture.

In Micah 3 we have a still more solemn appeal directed to the heads and princes of the house of Israel. Now we know of course, that while all the people have their responsibility, the chief weight must necessarily be according to the position of individuals. Wickedness in him who holds an office of trust is worse, and justly dealt with as more serious, than the same evil would be in a subordinate person. Iniquity for instance in a judge has a graver character than dishonesty in an ostler or his master. Corruption or tyranny in a king is deeper guilt than delinquencies here or there in any of his subjects. It is granted that this may not suit the doctrinaires of the present day; but I hold to what God has laid down in scripture. People may give it up; but they will prove ere long that there is nothing like the truth of God. Now the word of God explicitly lays down these principles to which faith will adhere; and, whatever the inventions of man meanwhile, God will surely judge according to His own inflexible revelation, so that men will merely suffer the consequences of their own folly in departing from it. Consonant to this the prophet speaks in the opening of this chapter. "Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel; Is it not for you to know judgment?" The sin of the people had been exposed in the first two chapters; the sin of the heads comes forward here, and among them the wickedness of the prophets. "Thus saith Jehovah concerning the prophets that make my people err." What can be more delusive and fatal? It is bad enough when a man's will makes him err; how much worse when that which ought to be the strongest check on will and the surest guard of holiness impels him head-foremost into everything that is contrary to God.

Hence these false prophets were the mere instruments of the people, and Micah predicts that night shall be unto them instead of their pretended light. "Ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them." Nothing can be more magnificent than his figures; but, what is better, they are true. "Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners confounded: yea, they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer of God." Those who misguided others shall be left to their own delusions. They preferred darkness to light because their deeds were evil; and so Jehovah distinctly lets them know by Micah; for it is the prophet who speaks. "Truly I am full of power by the Spirit of Jehovah, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgressions, and to Israel his sin. Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity. They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest."

Micah 4. And what next? Glorious news! God takes all into His own hand. As is commonly felt and said, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity;" so it will manifestly be in the latter day. How blessed to have believed before that day! The last day to man has always the sound of death and judgment: to him no funeral note so tremendous. At others he may find fuel for pride: this is a death-knell to himself, with an indescribable dread of eternity. The present day is always what man finds his joy and his activity in. The last day presents ideas confused no doubt, and not without popular error, but so far justly it is to man ominous of divine judgment; and this he dreads, not without reason. The last day to the believer is a prospect of perfect unending joy, blessedness, light, and glory. It is the day when righteousness and truth will have the upper hand; the day when man will be most truly elevated, because God is exalted; for how can there be real order and due honour if God have not His supremacy? Is it not the basis of rights that God should have His? This is exactly what will be vindicated in the last day; and therefore when God has His just place on earth as in heaven, man will have his true dignity secured; for assuredly God's delight is in the blessing of the creature. This is what love always devises, and if able effects; it delights in the good of the object it loves; and such is the feeling of God in respect of His creatures. Consequently when He is glorified, man will have the fulness of His blessing.

Hence therefore we do wait in hope for these last days, — not the fond and baseless vision of man's vaulting presumptuous ambition, but the day when God, having put down corruption and lawlessness, shall establish His own way in the peaceful reign of the once despised but now and for ever exalted man, the Lord Jesus, Jehovah, Messiah of Israel, and Son of man.

This is what the prophet brings in: "But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of Jehovah shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it." Instead of merely flowing down, which is the natural course of rivers, the peoples will flow up around the sanctuary of Jehovah, then indeed a house of prayer for all. The change will be supernatural everywhere. Heaven and earth will bear glad witness of the glory and the power of Jehovah, yet withal displayed in the man Christ Jesus, and in those that are His above and below. No room will be left for the idolizing of nature more than any other idol. That day will proclaim the Lord, making a clean sweep of what man prides himself in, and proving that, although man may have done his best, the time is come for God to show His incontestable superiority.

I am persuaded therefore, whatever may be the progress of the age, that not a single shred which gives room to boast of the first man will remain in the day of Jehovah. Take for instance the electric telegraph and the railways. I see no ground to believe that the Lord will condescend to have either used during the millennial reign. Do you suppose that divine power can or will not outdo any invention, let it be ever so prodigious in man's eyes? If they ask how these things can be, a believer need not be concerned to find an answer save that which revelation furnishes as to the fact itself. It is enough for him that he certainly knows God will put down self-exalting man and in that day exalt Himself. Not a single relic shall be left: God will make a *tabula rasa* of all the busy works of man on the earth for the last six thousand years, or at least since the flood; and He will show that, wherein man has most pride, God will do better. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life must pass away. Even the grandeur of nature as it is must fall, still more the imposing structures of man, petty in comparison: for what are their high towers and fenced walls in presence of lofty hills and sublime mountains? Strong and stately ships shall be broken and pleasant pictures fade into nothingness. Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day. Isaiah 2, 3 says much but by no means all of the vast changes "that day" will introduce among things small and great. In fact the Lord will set Himself then to do everything here below in a way and to an extent suitable to His own glory. To my mind, there is no ground apparent for drawing the line of exceptions. Jehovah's exaltation to the exclusion of the first Adam has the widest application — all by which man has sought to set himself up, and gain glory and delight — yes, everything.

There is to be the shaking of the heavens and the earth, with the immense accompaniments and consequences of an act so solemn and unique. The day of Jehovah strikingly combines two things: that God will deal with the immense bounds of creation, the heavens and the earth, at the same time that He will stoop to deal with the pettiest fripperies of men and women. We are apt to connect the judgment of God only with things on a great scale, if indeed men think at all of the judgment of the quick. To counteract an impression so opposed to scripture I draw attention to this. Nothing will escape His eye and hand.

But then there will be moral changes of moment and of the highest interest, as here we read that "Many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares." Such, according to the Bible, is the reign of peace then, and not before. All attempts of peace societies meanwhile are at best an amiable illusion, at worst an infidel confidence in man, always ignorance of God's word. They may possibly influence in isolated cases, though it may be doubted whether when kings or statesmen or countries have made up their minds to a policy which enlists general sympathy within their own spheres and with means adequate at their disposal, any such theories or sentiments will avail to hinder. It is certain that wars have their roots in the passions and lust of man: to escape the bad fruit you must first make the tree good. But the day of Jehovah will deal with man in righteousness and power, and peace will result according to His mind and glory.

Besides there will be outward plenty. A thought full of comfort it is that the day is coming when the earth with every creature of God shall yield its increase, not now the poor and stunted growth of hill and dale, but teeming harvests and rich fruits and flowers of sweetest odour and varied beauty in form or hue, which, if they show the hand of God now, as they surely do, nevertheless confess the blighting fall and curse in decay and death. Disappointment and sorrow meet one everywhere: scripture is plain as to both the cause and the effects. But it is equally plain that a Deliverer is coming for "that day," when "they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of Jehovah of hosts hath spoken it."

What is weightier still morally, there will be a cessation of idolatry, "For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of Jehovah our God for ever and ever. In that day, saith Jehovah, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted." This is the Jewish people. "And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation; and Jehovah shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever." Such shall be the final restoration of Israel by divine grace and power. "And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion." Not merely the first in the sense of being highest on the earth, but first also, it would seem, as renewing what was known in the days of David and Solomon. The first dominion they possessed then, for every Jew looked back wistfully to those bright days. They will return again, and yet more, under a greater than David or Solomon.

Meanwhile they taste sorrow, for Jehovah will surely deal in discipline with His people. He will not take them up and re-establish them without moral exercises and a deep spiritual process in their souls. This is now described. Also many nations shall be gathered. Not only will there be a question of sin raised in the breast of every Israelite then to be saved, but there will be outward distress under the retributive hand of God, when the nations gather with the thought to defile and destroy Zion. But Jehovah says, "They know not the thoughts of Jehovah, neither understand they his counsel; for he shall gather them as sheaves into the floor. Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion: for I will make thine horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass: and thou shalt beat in pieces many people [many nations], and I will consecrate their gain unto Jehovah, and their substance unto Jehovah of the whole earth. Now gather thyself in troops, O daughter of troops: he hath laid siege against us;" that is, against the Jew. It is the Assyrian who will then come up — the last king of the north. "He hath laid siege against us." There is to be a future siege of Jerusalem when the Jews return in unbelief unto their land and God is beginning to work in some of their hearts. "He hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek."

Micah 5. The Jews once despised and insulted, rejected and crucified the Lord of glory, their own Messiah; and this is what brings in the wonderful prophecy that follows: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel." This is the judge of Israel already spoken of. Thus the second verse is unequivocally a parenthetic description of who this judge of Israel is. Though there may seem to be remarkable abruptness in the way it is introduced here, it is scarcely possible to doubt that what has been already explained gives the object and accounts for the manner of the prophet, and is the key to the passage. Why is it that the Lord allows the last siege of Jerusalem? He says it is because of their conduct towards their ruler and judge. Who was the judge? He was born in Bethlehem, but not this only, for "his goings forth have been of old from everlasting." He was a divine person. He in grace became a babe in Bethlehem; but He was Jehovah the true God of Israel. Then follows the conclusion of the sentence begun in the first verse. "Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel."

It is Zion "which travaileth." This is a most important statement to understand. When Christ, the judge of Israel, came the first time, they would not have Him, but contumeliously refused Him. The consequence of His death on the cross was that God raised Him from the dead, and He went up in due season to heaven. Christ ascended to the right hand of God, and there He began a new work, namely, the calling out of a heavenly people to share His portion on high. This is what is going on now. If we have Christ at all, we have Christ for heavenly glory; that is, a Christian has: and this is what we are if we have any living portion in Christ. But then He means to have an earthly people by and by, and consequently in the midst of this final siege of Jerusalem the judge of Israel will re-appear. He has given them up for the time because of their unbelief and rejection of Himself; but He does not give up for ever. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." As sure as He chose that people of old, He will renew His links with them by and by. But they are none the less allowed to suffer the consequences of their own mad and wicked rejection of the Messiah meanwhile; and when He comes back again, it will be in the midst of their bitterest sorrows. Under such circumstances she that travails will bring forth.

The end of her pangs will come through His grace, and the morning without clouds shall succeed the long night. Oh, how deep will be the joy when He whom they had rejected of old is once more restored to them, the Judge of Israel! when, instead of taking Jews out of their Israelitish position to bring them into the church of God begun at Pentecost and going on ever since, the remnant of His brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. They go back to their Jewish hopes. Such is the meaning of the third verse. The remnant of His brethren, instead of being taken out of their old associations and made Christians as now, will resume their place as children of Israel. For the earthly blessing, according to prophecy, there is nothing more important. It is impossible for a man to understand the verse, or expound it properly, who does not see the difference between the heavenly calling now and the earthly calling by and by. This is the reason why the Fathers felt such a difficulty, and went so far astray; for not one of them believed in the restoration of Israel; yet some of them had a measure of light; but they all slipped into the groundless conceit that the Gentile has displaced the Jew permanently, and the church and Israel are to be under the glorious reign of Christ on earth, I may say, jumbled strangely together. That is, it was the most incongruous mixture of heavenly and earthly things that can be imagined.

But the revealed truth is that the heavenly people will be on high, and the earthly people on the earth. All is perfect order in the mind of God as usual; and when the Lord will have finished His heavenly work He will come back as Judge of Israel. He is now Head of the church. On earth He will be the Messiah of the Jews, who will then resume their own earthly standing, instead of being absorbed into the church, as believers from among them are now. Next, we are told that "he shall stand and feed in the strength of Jehovah, in the majesty of the name of Jehovah his God; and they shall abide." Thus the Jews, instead of being swept out of their land, shall be once more settled in it; "for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth." All their strength depends on His greatness. "And this man shall be the peace." He that is our peace in heaven shall be their peace on earth. "This man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land." How plain that the Assyrian is to re-appear for the final dealings of Jehovah at the end of this age, and even at the beginning of the new age! It confirms what we saw in Isaiah. Jehovah will have renewed His connection with Israel when the Assyrian comes up to meet his doom — the head of the combined nations in the great confederacy which is broken just before the millennium.

Then we have this description pursued. "And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from Jehovah, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men." They shall bring fulness of comfort for the earth; but besides that they are to be as a lion. Now the church may and ought to be like dew, but I do not think — nay am sure — they are never called to be like a lion. Assuredly it would be hard for the most sprightly of popular preachers to elicit any tolerable spiritual significance out of the figure so as to suit the church The truth is, if we take the word of God as He has given it, all is plain; Israel are once more in question, for they will be charged with a judicial task on earth. "And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep: who, if he go through, both treadeth down, and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver. Thine hand shall be lifted up upon thine adversaries, and all thine enemies shall be cut off. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith Jehovah, that I will cut off thy horses out of the midst of thee, and I will destroy thy chariots: And I will cut off the cities of thy land, and throw down all thy strong holds." Graven images are to be destroyed, and vengeance taken on the heathen, such as they have not heard.

Then comes the conclusion of the prophecy. The first portion of it (Micah 6) is in part a most solemn pleading of Jehovah. "Hear ye now what Jehovah saith; Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice. Hear ye, O mountains, Jehovah's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for Jehovah hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel. O my people, what have I done unto thee?" Jehovah appeals to their own feelings of what is right. "O my people, what have I done unto thee? Wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me. For I have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam." Had He ever been but the same God?

And then the answer comes. "O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of Jehovah. Wherewith shall I come before Jehovah, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will Jehovah be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Very far from this was Israel's walk.

But nobody does so until he is brought in as a converted soul and receives the grace of God in Christ. It is impossible to act justly and to be really humble before God, until we have turned to Him in faith, though we may not yet have seen our sins covered by His grace, nor by any means clearly know that He will not impute iniquity to us. There is a real repentance wrought in the soul first; and Israel will be brought into this. It is faith which produces real repentance and true humility; where faith was not, we find to the end of the chapter the solemn proof of evil manifested in both people and king. Then the prophet takes the place of intercession. "Woe is me!" says he, "for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape-gleanings of the vintage: there is no cluster to eat: my soul desired the first-ripe fruit. The good man is perished." It is a plaint of the prophet which passes at length into a prayer. Then he describes in the most striking manner the fearful rupture of all bonds and the treachery prevalent among the Jews. "Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide; keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house." It is a solemn thought that these are the words that Jesus applies to the effect of His message of the kingdom. What an awful proof of man's evil that the state of things which will bring God's final judgment of the Jew at the end is that which the Lord prepares the disciples to expect as the effect where this gospel is preached now. Nothing brings out the malice of the heart so much as the pressure of God's grace on men; nor does anything else expose a man to so much contempt or hatred; yet it is returning evil and nothing but evil for the greatest good that God ever gave man on the earth. Thus then the Christian ought to know all through his course on earth, as the godly Jew will know in the last day, what Micah shows us here. We anticipate everything as having Christ. We know the good in God and we know the evil in man even now. The Jew will have to learn it by and by, waiting a special time; the Christian knows it at all times, if faithful to Christ and the truth,

Then the prophet breaks out in noble words, warning the enemy not to rejoice, for Jehovah is going to espouse the cause of His people. Grant that they do not deserve it; but Jehovah is going to do it for His own mercy and word's sake. Accordingly we have "The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf. They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth: they shall be afraid of Jehovah our God, and shall fear because of thee." The prophecy ends with the expression of his soul's delight in the forgiving grace of God to His ancient people. All the good He will do in the latter day is but the accomplishment of what He promised from the first: so blessed are the ways of God from beginning to end. He is the unchanging Jehovah spite of all the changes of His people.

34 Nahum.

Nahum.

Lectures on the Minor Prophets.

W. Kelly.

Singular was the reproach of the Jews in the time of our Lord (Joh 7:52); for there were prophets who had arisen out of Galilee. Jonah and Nahum were both Galileans. There is nothing in which men are apt to be so blind as in reading the Bible; and even the facts of scripture are too commonly passed over with greater carelessness than those of any other book. People readily forget what it does not suit them to remember.

"Segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem,
Quam quae sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus, et quae
Ipse sibi tradit spectator."

Affections too govern the judgment. Hence the tendency to forget the plainest facts, and to find some artificial means of exalting whatever to our minds takes the highest place in religious matters. As once by God's appointment Jerusalem had such a place, the Jews spite of their reversed sentence were striving hard to exaggerate whatever invested it with halo, and to deny what God had wrought elsewhere. But God loves to work in unexpected grace; and hence I do not doubt that there was a fitness in the call of these two prophets both of them having to do with Nineveh. Galilee was a district which both bordered on the Gentiles, and had not a few dwelling in its midst. Hence people there, though prejudiced as everywhere, could not but be open to thoughts and exercises of heart about the Gentiles. Nevertheless, as we have seen in Jonah, there might be a feeling as decidedly Jewish as in any prophet that God ever raised up even in Jerusalem itself.

First of all Nahum brings before us the character of God in remarkably vivid terms, and indeed with a majesty of utterance most suitable to the subject God entrusted to him. "The burden of Nineveh" means the heavy sentence of God against that famous city, a phrase customary in the prophets. In Isaiah we may remember the burden of Babylon, and of one place after another; that is, a strain of judgment which was therefore called a "burden." "The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. A God jealous and avenging is Jehovah; Jehovah revengeth, and is furious; Jehovah will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies. Jehovah is slow to anger." Are we not all of us apt to set these things against one another? But it is not so in truth; for the stronger the feeling of God against that which destroys His own glory, the more worthy is it that He should be slow to act on His indignation, as we should be for quite different reasons. Indeed slowness to anger is ordinarily the proof of moral greatness, though there are extreme cases where waiting would bespeak want of right feeling. Scripture shows us both the rule and the exceptions. Not that it is of God or even of man that there should be slowness to feel; but to act on feeling is another thing. I am persuaded that the more there is the sense of the presence of God, and of what becomes Him, and consequently of what becomes us who are His children — to have the interest of His kingdom at heart, and also the sense of His honour dear to us, yea, dearer to us than any other consideration — so much the more ought we to cultivate in presence of evil a patient spirit.

Yet is it certain that anger in the true and godly sense of abhorrence of evil formed part of the moral nature of our Lord Jesus. There is no greater fallacy of modern times among not a few Christians than the exclusion of holy anger from that which is morally perfect. Our Lord Jesus on one occasion looked round about with anger; on another He used a scourge of small cords with indignation; so also He thundered from time to time at religious hypocrites who stood high in popular estimation. The Christian who does not share such feelings is altogether wanting in what is of God, and also in what becomes a man of God. I grant you that anger is too apt to take a personal shape, and consequently to slide into vindictive as well as wounded feeling. It is not necessary for me to say that there was an entire absence of this in our Lord Jesus. He came to do the will of God; He never did anything but that will — not only what was consistent with it, but only that. But for this very reason He too was slow, not of course to form a judgment, but to execute it on man; indeed, as we know, He refused it absolutely when here below. He could await the due time. God was then displaying His grace, and, as part of His grace, His long-suffering in the midst of evil. And there is nothing finer, nothing more truly of God, than this display of grace in patience.

Here too it seems a remarkable feature that, even when the prophet proclaims the approaching judgment of God, he takes such particular pains to assert, not only the certainty of His avenging Himself on His adversaries, but His slowness to anger. "Jehovah is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit [the wicked]: Jehovah hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet." It is clear that the expression "holding pure he will not hold pure" is not at all inconsistent with His justifying the believer in Jesus up to that time without God and ungodly. It was not yet the fit and destined occasion to reveal the grace of God in justifying; but even so there is no acquitting any one as wicked. And this it is important to hold clearly. His not imputing iniquity is a very different thing from acquitting. He never acquits the wicked as such. There is no stronger condemnation of wickedness than when He does not impute iniquity, because the ground of His not imputing iniquity to the believer is that He has not only imputed it, but dealt with it according to His own horror of evil and just judgment of all in the cross of Christ. More manifestly when it is a question, as here, not of His grace but of His righteous government on earth, it always remains true that God does not treat the wicked as innocent.

Now the believer has to imitate the character of God; for we must remember that it is our point as Christians. Anything else becomes self-righteousness. But there is nothing more important than being true to the character of God, who is our Father, whose nature we have now, who has revealed Himself perfectly in Christ. And we find this most beautifully in His servant Paul, who puts patience above all the other signs of an apostle. It is as eminently Christ-like as any quality manward. There is nothing that more thoroughly shows superiority to all that Satan can do. It had of course also a more trying character in the midst of those who should have known better, as, for instance, among the Corinthians. For they were souls which took the place of serving the Lord and bore His name; but it is exactly to them he says that truly the signs of an apostle were shown by him in all patience. He brings in afterwards in their place miracles and extraordinary revelations; but patience takes precedence, and justly so, because it supposes evil and this in power, and nevertheless proves superior to it. How can you deal with a man whom nothing can overthrow, and who, no matter what you do or he may suffer, cannot be driven from the line of Christ? Now this, I think, is exactly what shone in Paul so very conspicuously. No doubt there were qualities from the Spirit's operation most blessed and refreshing in Peter, John, Barnabas, and in others, whether apostles or not; but I do not think anyone approached Paul in the draught made upon his patience in circumstances calculated to try to the uttermost, and provoke to the quick. Although Paul had like passions with the rest, still there was such a sense of Christ as made him thus practically more than conqueror.

So here, in respect of His government of man on earth, Jehovah is revealed in certain qualities; and this is to be heeded, because Jehovah is that special revelation of God which was meant for His people as one who governed them. Even so He was "slow to anger and great in power, and would not at all hold as guiltless. Jehovah hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and crieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. The mountains quake at him:" of course a figure, the word "mountains" being used to indicate the great seats of power on earth. "The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him."

But this is not all. "Jehovah is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble." Now we come to that which is in relation to the righteous. He is patient even as respects the wicked, whom He will finally judge, but He has given a strong hold. "He knoweth them that trust in him. But with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies." Then comes a challenge "What do ye imagine against Jehovah? he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time." There may be perhaps an allusion here to a blow which had already fallen on the Assyrian. "Affliction shall not rise up the second time; for while they be folden together as thorns, and while they are drunken as drunkards, they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry." But we must bear in mind that the Spirit of prophecy sees and declares things that are not as though they were. I have therefore said "perhaps;" for either way the believer need feel no difficulty. The destruction of Nineveh by Cyaxares and Nabopolassar is generally put B.C. 625; as Nahum is by most considered to have flourished near a century before.

After this comes a direct allusion to the enemy, which draws out this magnificent description. "There is one come out of thee that imagineth evil against Jehovah, a wicked counsellor. Thus saith Jehovah; Though they be complete, and ever so many, yet thus shall they be cut down, when he shall pass away." It is thus plain that there are two elements God has combined in these revelations — the judgment on the one hand of what was wrong in His own people, and on the other of merciless adversaries, who knew not the gracious purpose of God to chasten His people. He would not leave them unpunished; but could He permit a full end? Thus on the one hand the chastening was measured, and its end was according to the goodness of God. On the other hand, God lets the adversary pour out without scruple or bound hatred on His people; but He does not merely use their animosity against them for the good of His own people, and for the punishment of their unfaithfulness, but would surely turn on the malignant foe when His purpose was accomplished. For does God sanction implacable hatred of Israel? utter indifference not to pity only but righteousness, nay, contempt and pride against Himself? turning the fact that God permitted them so to ravage the land and people of Israel into a delusion that there was no God at all, or that they had gained an advantage against the true God? Jehovah accordingly would righteously turn round on the adversaries and destroy them, as surely as He had used them in the first instance to deal with what was faulty in Israel. This we may find everywhere in the prophets, and in none more conspicuously than in the use made of the Assyrian. Nahum also looks like the rest to the end.

Thus the first blow was, I suppose, Sennacherib; the second would be not from the threatening of the Assyrian rebuked but the destruction of Nineveh; and the destruction of Nineveh is the type of the final judgment of the great Assyrian in the last days, the king of the north. Though Jehovah had broken down Israel by the enemy for their good, there would be no such trouble more. The passage looking onward to the end: "Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more. For now will I break his yoke from off thee, and will burst thy bonds in sunder. And Jehovah hath given a commandment concerning thee," — now He turns to the Assyrian, and addresses him, — "Jehovah hath given a command concerning thee, that no more of thy name be sown. Out of the house of thy gods will I cut off the graven image and the molten image: I will make [it] thy grave; for thou art vile." I think that "thee" in verse 12 means Israel, and in verse 13 means the Assyrian. Hence Jehovah is represented as addressing each personally in turn.

Then in the last verse, or, as some prefer, forming the beginning of the second chapter, the chapter is wound up by the beautiful words, "Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!" for the judgment of the Assyrian will be the established peace of Israel, and the proclamation of it everywhere when Jehovah shall have completed His full work in Jerusalem. That is, when the moral work is complete there, He will do His last deed of judgment in principle on the Assyrian, and then will come the reign of peace, of which there is the announcement here.

It would appear that Israelites will go out to the nations with the testimony of the kingdom after the destruction of the Assyrian and their settlement in the land. Thus the word of Jehovah will spread far and wide, backed by the power which has interfered on behalf of His people so conspicuously. For the knowledge of Jehovah and of His glory is to cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea; and Israel will be the messengers of it among the nations. There will be, I think, a Jewish testimony both before and after they are settled in the land. It appears clear that there will be an active preaching during the period between the rapture of the saints and their appearing with Christ from heaven in glory; but there is ground to believe this will not be given up though its form may change, after the Lord will have come.

For be it observed that there are two great transitions in prophecy, which are apt to be confounded in many minds, and yet must be distinguished in order to have anything like a grasp of the subject. There is a transition after Christ takes saints to meet Him above, before He displays Himself and destroys antichrist; that is between the translation of those destined to heavenly glory, and the manifestation of the Lord and His own before the world. During this time when providential judgments fall on guilty Christendom, the Lord is mainly occupied, as far as the earth is concerned, with preparing a remnant of the Jews, some of whom will be put to death, afterwards by grace to be raised up in the first resurrection. Having suffered with Christ, they shall reign together. This is the invariable principle of God. But others who will not suffer thus will be delivered, and have a distinguished place of honour in the kingdom on earth. But when the Lord shall have appeared and destroyed the beast with the false prophet, and their adherents Jewish or Gentile, there will be another transition in which Jehovah will have set the ten tribes in due order, as He had done for the two tribes in the first transition, when in fact He will reunite and re-establish the people as a whole. Thus the two transitions have mainly for their object the setting right, first the Jews as such, and next Ephraim, making finally the two sticks one in His hand (Ezekiel 37), and the destruction of the Assyrian holds a similar relation to the ten tribes that the destruction of antichrist does to the two. The one is before He shall have appeared; the other is the interval that takes place after He has appeared, but before He establishes the millennial reign of peace, properly so called. There will be the public message given and heard. It will be still a time of proclamation before all is fully accomplished.

But further, in the millennium, I think the Jews specially will go out to the nations with the word of Jehovah. (Isaiah 2; Micah 4) No doubt glory will be manifest in the land of Israel, but still there will be a certain testimony, I suppose, for the conversion of the nations. (Isaiah 66) Of this there would seem to be little doubt. There will be, particularly during the period of the second transition, as well as during the first. The first will have "the gospel of the kingdom" going out; but there seems to be a further message. "Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows" — Israel may not be fully gathered; — "for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off." Thus if all be not yet established in peace as far as the whole people are concerned, the fall of the last Assyrian is the sign of stable peace ensuing. (Compare Mic 5:5.)

There is another passage which refers to something like the ministry of the heavenly saints. The nations shall walk in the light. "The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." I have not the slightest doubt that the glorified saints will exercise a beneficent action or ministry of grace over the world in general, although the light of the heavenly state may be more general, perhaps, than this. The leaves of the tree seem to represent special means that the Lord will use for the healthful condition of men on the earth during the millennium; the fruit is, so to speak figuratively, for lips of heavenly taste.

In Nahum 2 and Nahum 3 we have very distinctly and fully the prime object of the prophecy of Nahum, to which the first chapter is a preface, though in the latter part of it quite without reference to the direct subject matter, namely, the Assyrian. But now the great city comes most prominently before us. "He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face: keep the munition, watch the way, make thy loins strong, fortify thy power mightily." The challenge is forthwith given to Nineveh to defend herself as best she may; for there is the utmost danger staring her in the face. "For Jehovah hath turned away the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel: for the emptiers have emptied them out, and marred their vine branches." Thus we see the collateral subject, namely, the judgment of Israel by their enemies; but inasmuch as the Assyrians executed that judgment in such a way as to insult God Himself, and not only to chasten His guilty people, they must be prepared for their own doom. Thus we see the combined truth brought before us — the destruction of Nineveh, but not apart from the discipline of Israel. Jehovah does judge Israel, and if He judges His own people who had at any rate the knowledge and after a larger measure the responsibility of righteousness, how must the ungodly and the sinner appear? Nineveh had been a godless city which had no thought nor care, still less formal profession, of doing the will of God. But the people of Israel had, and they suffered the consequence.

Here follows the most animated description of the preparations of the Ninevites to defend themselves against their enemies. Historically the foes that destroyed Nineveh were, as is known, the Medes; and though there is little information in human history about the circumstances, it appears certain that Babylon helped. Though a city as old if not older than Nineveh, it was not until God had overthrown Assyria and Egypt that Babylon was permitted to leave the background. It was hundreds of years, like an animal in training, kept in the leash till the right moment arrived, when it shot forth beyond all competitors. Other cities or races might show a speedier maturity; but Babylon in due time, after having been thus held in check from remote antiquity, was brought out into the first place of imperial supremacy in this world. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, which was quite a distinct power.

As to all this it will be found, I think, that the heathen authors are a mass of confusion; and there cannot be a greater contrast in early history than the precision of scripture and the blundering of the best lights of Pagan antiquity as to these powers. The ignorance even of the Greeks is something astonishing. The celebrated Xenophon passed within a few miles of the city of Nineveh, but does not seem to have known anything about it. He shows the greatest want of acquaintance with such facts before his day. Possibly he stumbled on some of the outworks of Nineveh without knowing it. He calls it merely a Median city, erected in later times no doubt out of some remains of ancient Nineveh. I merely mention this to show what a wonderful book the Bible is, even as a book, and how deeply we are indebted to God. The man who uses the Bible with simplicity will have the certainty of knowledge not merely of divine things, but even of the nations of the world, with which not all the books that ever were written outside the Bible could supply him. In fact, one of the worst historians in point of trustworthiness was a man who ought to have known best, if knowledge depended on long residence in the east (as physician to Artaxerxes Mnemon); but he is almost a fabulist, and his intermingling of what was intended to hide the dishonour of the Assyrians and to exalt the greatness of his Persian master led him, if not to falsify, certainly to propagate the Persian view of their policy, habits, etc. This naturally misled others, as for instance historians of note who wrote on this subject at a later day adopted some extravagant errors of this man. Ctesias was the name of the physician; and Diodorus Siculus followed suit. He consequently has given us a statement of alleged facts which can be disproved by other writers of antiquity. The consequence is that the Greeks who were the nearest, and the Romans who usually followed the Greeks, are in the greatest confusion on this head; and hence those who are trained in subjection to the classics, and taught to look up to these historians as authorities on the subject, are led astray. Who are more confused in these matters than men of letters? The reason is because they look up to such as were themselves in the dark. Hence all these authors are apt to confound Assyria with Babylon. Never will any distinct light be enjoyed, as far as we may speak of others, in any ancient human historian on this subject; but the divine light, when used firmly, enables us to sift out remarkable confirmations.

Were there an adequate examination of Genesis 10 we might gain not a little historically from its copious early details, and be shown the different lines that penetrated through the earth, tracing them forward to their ultimate developments. It would be of considerable interest, but would require a goodly volume to itself. It is certain that there is unerring light in scripture and nothing else; but it may be doubted much whether a continuous history could be made of a genealogical line. This would be just the difficulty. Completeness men would like, if it could be; but I do not think it is according to what may be called the moral system of the word of God to give that kind of unbroken continuity. Thus, even in the life of our Lord Jesus, it would be an exceedingly precarious task to form out of the four Gospels a continuous history of the ministry of Christ. I have not the slightest doubt that everything stated there is exactly and divinely true; that is, it is not merely true according to man's observation, but according to God's perfect knowledge of all the facts; yet for this very reason it is much above man, as also it is on a different principle from man's; for there is no thought of continuity in the Gospels, but only of facts selected for a moral purpose. I suppose it is the same thing in the glimpses of the Old Testament history: first, the beginning, the sources; next, perhaps after hundreds of years, another glance at their collision with Israel, and then finally the judgment, which concludes all.

I conceive that the great object of scripture is to show us the sources in order to compare them with the final scene and not with the continuous line between, this being the proper work of history. Hence would be just the difficulty of the matter; but it is a difficulty in the main due to the want of historic materials found outside the Bible. Undoubtedly Damascus is mentioned in an early part of Genesis, and is frequently referred to in the time of David, and at various other epochs of scripture. Thus it is one of the oldest cities in the world, and on the other hand it is a city flourishing now in a certain way. Again, several of the primeval cities in Genesis 10 have been identified within the last few years; and of course it would have its interest, more or less, to point this out clearly with the proofs of each. At the same time it would be a task of considerable delicacy, and of enormous labour, even supposing it possible, to do it well.

"The shield of his mighty men is made red, the valiant men are in scarlet: the chariots shall be with flaming torches in the day of his preparation, and the fir trees shall be terribly shaken. The chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall jostle one against another in the broad ways: they shall seem like torches, they shall run like the lightnings. He shall recount his worthies: they shall stumble in their walk; they shall make haste to the wall thereof, and the defence shall be prepared. The gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved." This is certainly a striking picture of the last scenes; for it is not only that we have minutely enough that which recent discoveries have shown as to the abundance of scarlet and of chariots, and all the preparation of war which was characteristic of Nineveh, but the manner in which Nineveh was to fall is most vividly and exactly foreshown; and the more so because of its contrast with, as well as resemblance to, Babylon; for the city in the plain of Shinar was a capital not inferior in extent, and even superior in magnificence, to Nineveh; both being built upon famous rivers — rivers of Paradise. Nevertheless, although both were typical, and the fall of the one like that of the other has in either case a most important character (Babylon even more than Nineveh), and the river in each played a very important element in the capture of the two cities, yet there is a contrast quite as much as a resemblance. For the special means of the destruction of Babylon was by laying the bed of the river dry by turning the river off; whereas the crisis which led directly towards the destruction of Nineveh was the irruption of the river in — not turning it out. This was surely remarkable; at the same time it convicts of singular dulness those who failed to see the differences clearly. The whole is a good lesson for human nature, and no unimportant hint for us to read the word of God a little more closely. He who wrote scripture had no difficulty. It was all as plain as possible to Him. The real obstacle does not arise in general from its language, save in very exceptional cases, but from our own slowness of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

"The gates of the rivers shall be opened" — not merely the gates of the city. A gate of the city was opened in the case of Babylon; and we know the splendid description of it in Isaiah, with its doors of brass and bars of iron, which must yield to righteousness from the east; for God called Cyrus to his foot, and gave kings as the dust of his sword, as driven stubble to his bow. When the moment came, the difficulty vanished, and the Persians entered the imperial city through the dried bed of the Euphrates, which was turned into another channel. Thus the doors were opened for the rest, when the drunken guards were despatched. But in the case of Nineveh it was the waters of the river which dissolved the palatial dwellings and defences. It was not the place taken by an army which stealthily crept up the emptied bed of the river, and then let in the main body through the gates. The converse of this happened to Nineveh. The Euphrates was turned off from Babylon but the Tigris burst its bounds and swamped and otherwise destroyed a vast portion of Nineveh; so that the very foundations, and not the walls only, were swept away. In vain then does the king summon his nobles: they stumble in their march; they hasten to the wall; and the defence is prepared. The flood-gates are opened and the palace is dissolved. "And Huzzab* shall be led away captive, she shall be brought up, and her maids shall lead her as with the voice of doves, tabering upon their breasts. But Nineveh is of old like a pool of water: yet they shall flee away. Stand, stand, shall they cry; but none shall look back. Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold: for there is none end of the store and glory out of all the pleasant furniture. She is empty, and void, and waste: and the heart melteth, and the knees smite together, and much pain is in all loins, and the faces of them all gather blackness." That is, all the vast store of what contributes to the pride of life, all that ministered to selfish enjoyment and vanity, was now shown to be so much laid up for the conquerors — so much gathered together for utter destruction, if not carried away by the captors. Such indeed is the history of man generally.

{*This word has led to great discussion. On the one hand Gesenius takes it as "and made to flow away;" on the other hand Dr. Henderson prefers, "though firmly established;" both construe it with the preceding phrase. Mr. Leeser translates "And the queen." Ewald among recent Hebraists adheres to Huzzab as the name literal or symbolical of the queen.}

Then comes the prophet's exultation over the city that had been the terror of Israel, the old enemy that had triumphed over them so haughtily and persistently; for Assyria was the principal enemy which God had used in the days of the kings to check or crush the pride of His people by their own pride. "Where is the dwelling of the lions, and the feeding-place of the young lions, where the lion, even the old lion, walked, and the lion's whelp, and none made them afraid?" This is a most animated picture of the lordly place among the nations which Assyria had long possessed up to the moment of its ruin. "The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his holes with prey, and his dens with ravin. Behold, I am against thee, saith Jehovah of hosts, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions; and I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard."

At the same time we must carefully remember that, whatever might be the greatness of Nineveh, and what ever the terror the city inspired among the nations, imperial power never had belonged to it. Those who say so mistake the facts, and confound the position of Assyria with Babylon. It will be found on examination of scripture that Assyria was only the greatest among confederate or independent powers. But this is not the true meaning of an empire, which really means a power that is not only greater than any other, but that keeps the kings and nations as vassals, not simply towering above a crowd of compeers, but rather a lord and master of all others. Such was the position to which Babylon subsequently rose by divine appointment, to which Assyria, like Egypt, had long aspired in vain. The desire was in no way new; the accomplishment was. The old taskmistress of Israel, Egypt, would have liked well to have it, and so would the Assyrian, as we find in the prophet Ezekiel. These both strove hard and long for the mastery. They no doubt thought it morally certain that supreme dominion must fall to one or other of the two; and so they fought to the death, Egypt succumbing first, and then Assyria. A power which neither suspected or feared was held in reserve: for it the God of heaven kept the highest place from the beginning. Nebuchadnezzar became the "head of gold." Babel was the cradle of the Babylonish empire.

In Nahum 3 says the prophet, "Woe to the bloody city." Such had Nineveh been to Israel above all. "It is all full of lies and robbery" — rather violence, the usual twofold form of iniquity. "The prey departeth not." The allusion is no doubt to the people carried off and not restored.

Then is given (verses 2, 3) a most animated sketch of the enemies' advance to assail and slay. "The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the prancing horses, and of the jumping chariots. The horsemen lifteth up both the bright sword and the glittering spear: and there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcases; and there is none end of their corpses; they stumble upon their corpses." And this carnage and ruin are attributed to the idolatry of Nineveh, and their efforts, too successful, to entice others. "Because of the multitudes of the whoredoms of the well-favoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts."

Next follows the stern condemnation of Jehovah, who once spared but now would have Nineveh know that it was no mere jealousy of others, but His own resolve to disgrace her who had so enjoyed herself and misled others. "Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts; and I will discover thy skirts upon thy face, and I will show the nations thy nakedness, and the kingdoms thy shame. And I will cast abominable filth upon thee, and will make thee vile, and will set thee as a gazing-stock. And it shall come to pass, that all they that shall look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste: who will bemoan her? whence shall I seek comforters for thee?"

Verses 8-10 set forth as a warning to Nineveh the awful desolation of the famous No-Amon. This was neither Alexandria nor Egypt, but Thebes with its hundred gates; which was the more pointed because the Assyrians themselves ravaged it both before the prophet's days and later, till Cambyses caused it to drink the cup of Persian insolence to the dregs. "Art thou better than populous No, that was situate among the rivers, that had the waters round about it, whose rampart was the sea, and her wall was from the sea? Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength, and it was infinite; Put and Lubim were thy helpers. Yet she was carried away, she went into captivity: her young children also were dashed in pieces at the top of all the streets: and they cast lots for her honourable men, and all her great men were bound in chains."

Then from verse 11 the prophet addresses Nineveh once more, and declares that she must fare no better. "Thou also shalt be drunken: thou shalt be hid, thou shalt seek strength because of the enemy." Indeed Nineveh should fall more easily still as they are told in verses 12, 13. "All thy strongholds shall be like fig trees with the first-ripe figs: if they be shaken, they shall even fall into the mouth of the eater. Behold, thy people in the midst of thee are women: the gates of thy land shall be set wide open unto thine enemies: the fire shall devour thy bars." Prepare as they might (and the crisis called for it), fire and sword should take their course over the devoted city. "Draw the waters for the siege, fortify thy strongholds: go into clay, and tread the mortar, make strong the brick-kiln." Merchants, princes, satraps, viceroys, nobles, people, all should vanish, save those who should remain only to sink irreparably.

Like Babylon afterwards, Nineveh is never to reappear as a capital city; but the kind of power which prevailed in the Assyrian and Babylonish monarchies will each have its representative in the last days. At that time the order will be just the converse, as prophecy shows, of what it was in history. And this is a very important means of demonstrating that they are altogether mistaken who think that we have only to do with Babylon and Nineveh in the past. For the fact historically is that Nineveh fell first. Indeed the overthrow of the Assyrian capital was no unimportant step in God's providence for the remarkable position, unique at that time, into which Babylon was allowed to rise, as Nebuchadnezzar saw in vision and Daniel recalled and expounded according to the sovereign will of the God of heaven. Consequently the order of old was Nineveh towering up into its own place as the chief among a number of distinct powers; then, according to the prophetic warning, it fell utterly as Egypt had done before. Next Babylon was raised by God to be the head of gold, the first great representative of imperial power in the earth. The fall of Babylon, the first which attained such a character, typifies the fall of the last of these imperial powers. The final holder of the system which began with Babylon will be the beast, or Roman empire revived, and in its final apostate state at the end of this age. The beast then answers to the Chaldean monarchy, or Babylon viewed as an imperial power.

I do not mean by it of course Babylon in the Revelation; because this is clearly corrupt ecclesiastical power. But, the last holder of imperial power being typified to a certain extent by the first holder of it, the judgment of the Babylonish empire shadows to no insignificant extent the judgment of the fourth empire in its resuscitated form when it goes to destruction. But it is plain as it is important to observe in the prophetic account of the future, that what answers to Assyria will be after Babylon's destruction, not before it. In history the fall of Assyria was before Babylon. In the future, according to prophecy, the fall of Assyria will be after the power that represents the imperial system of Babylon. Therefore the distinction between the two excludes controversy for such as read prophecy believingly; and those who contend that all is done with Babylon and Assyria are really without excuse.

The same conclusion results from the very plain words of Isaiah. "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against a hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets." That is, the Lord employed him as a means of beating down the pride of Israel. "Howbeit he meaneth not so." He only seeks to gratify his own pride. O that Israel had stood for their true boast, even Jehovah, and humbly looked to Him to plead their cause. But no, they sought what the Gentiles sought; and their God gave them up to the haughty and cruel foe. But assuredly if the Lord chastise the faults of His people, He will not fail to punish the overbearing iniquity of His enemies. "But it is in his heart to cut off and destroy nations not a few. For he saith, Are not my princes altogether kings?" This he valued, and would have liked yet more, but God did not allow the Assyrian to have all he wished. Supreme dominion was his ambition; but Babylon was given it by the sovereign will of God. "Is not Calno as Carchemish? Is not Hamath as Arpad? Is not Samaria as Damascus? As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria: shall I not as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols? Wherefore it shall come to pass that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom."

This is all recalled for the purpose of clearing as much as possible the final character of the judgment to be executed on the Assyrian. It is when the Lord shall have performed His *whole* work. Consequently we gather here an important item of divine truth, namely, that the Assyrian (speaking now in a general manner) is the last. It is the closing operation before the millennium in the full sense of the reign of peace, which accordingly is given just after in Isaiah 11. But in the description there given we have the introduction by the way of the Antichrist. He is destroyed, as it is said, by the breath of Jehovah's lips, but the time is not defined like the Assyrian. When we advance a little after we have more. In Isaiah 14 for instance it is said, "Jehovah will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land." It is now evidently, therefore, a question of settling the people in the land of Palestine, — not merely a part of them, but the whole. Then follow the standing types of the final enemies of the people. "It shall come to pass in the day that Jehovah shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou hast been made to serve, that thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased! Jehovah hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers. He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruleth the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth."

Then we find the earth at rest, and even Hades full of congratulation over the fall of the king of Babylon, — a highly figurative picture, of course, but as exact as sublime. The empire of Babylon or first beast so far shadows the fourth beast, which was, is not, and shall be present. The beast, as we know, has extremely intimate associations with the Antichrist of St. John; so that it is very difficult indeed to distinguish between these two allies in lawlessness at the end. Prophetic students differ immensely as to this; and I do not wonder at it, because the two are so closely combined in their policy. The main features are these: they both claim to be objects of divine worship, and both play a great and combined part in the great apostacy of the future. The beast is of course the empire of the West, but he is also closely connected with Jerusalem, where the man of sin sits in the temple of God. They are seen as the two beasts in Revelation 13. But the false prophet will be in Jerusalem, whereas the beast's central seat of power is Rome. Whether he lives there or not, it is not for any man to say; but it is plain enough, no matter where he resides, that he will possess the old capital of imperial Rome, as Jerusalem will be that of apostate religious power. They are therefore so leagued and similar in policy and objects that one must not be surprised if many confound them, though it is not meant that each has not his own distinctive place and dignity in the future crisis.

But the connection of the beasts is so close that the difficulty of drawing the line is often great. Thus many think that the description of Lucifer in Isaiah 14 points to Antichrist, whereas it appears really to be the king of Babylon as he is energized by Satan. Nevertheless the most subtle power of Satan will be shown in the false prophet, and not in the beast; but inasmuch as they both work into one another's hands, it is sometimes a delicate task to discriminate between them. In point of fact they are both judged at the very same instant, both cast alive into the lake of fire together. Therefore, even if somewhat confounded, such a mistake does not matter as to their doom; it is of more consequence when it is a question of their character, work, and usual sphere. But it would seem that the true distinction between them is that the beast is greater politically, and that the false prophet is higher religiously, and that they divide the spoil between them, in this way accommodating each other in their bad eminence and little dreaming of the common doom that awaits them. The beast exalts the false prophet, and the false prophet exalts the beast; and thus they consequently are as friendly as wicked powers can be to each other, Satan being the head of both and employing them variously and together in his efforts against God and His Christ.

In the end of the same Isaiah 14, when the prophet has done with the subtle king of Babylon as the type of the haughty imperial power, we read what it is well particularly to observe: "Jehovah of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand: that I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders." It is what was promised in Nahum 1 : "This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all nations. For Jehovah of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" I consider therefore that it is plain, both from Isaiah 10 and from Isaiah 14, that the future fall of the Assyrian is distinct from, and subsequent to, that of the king of Babylon. But beyond doubt in history this was not the case. For in the past the destruction of Nineveh took place before Nebuchadnezzar became the head of the golden image. The general impression among chronologists is that the fall of Nineveh took place more than six hundred years before Christ. Indeed, if I mistake not, Sir Henry Rawlinson and others are of opinion that it took place nearly twenty years before the commonly assigned date. Even this, however, suffices; and we shall leave the archaeologists to sift the question more fully among themselves. It is a matter of no great moment to my object now. We know that it took place at any rate before Babylon's supremacy, which was consequently subsequent to either of those dates, and that is the main point, and the only one essential — a point confessed on all sides. If so, it is surely evident that, if there must be the fall of the king of Babylon, and then the destruction of the Assyrian, it is quite impossible to refer to the past as the complete accomplishment of prophecy.

God has taken particular pains to cast us on the future for the exact fulfilment; and nothing can be more admirable than the perfectness of the word of God in this. It was essential that prophecy should have an accomplishment in the days in which it was written. This was needful for the comfort of the people of God. In order to mark that this was not the whole exhaustive scope of the prophecy, the very order is changed, and yet there is no dwelling on the fact nor an explanation. Thus, we see, God has pity upon His people, and would guard us against the miserable principle of regarding prophecy as little better than an old almanac — as that which has been accomplished, and is of no direct use longer. The reverse is true. Prophecy has been accomplished; but the most important bearing of its predictions is yet to be in the future.

There is no need of dwelling particularly on the various forms of Nineveh's wickedness here brought before the mind of the prophetic Spirit. "Thou also shalt be drunken: thou shalt be hid, thou also shalt seek strength because of the enemy. All thy strongholds shall be like fig trees with the first-ripe figs: if they be shaken, they shall even fall into the mouth of the eater. Behold, thy people in the midst of them are women: the gates of thy land shall be set wide open unto thine enemies: the fire shall devour thy bars." So great should be Nineveh's weakness when the hour struck for her doom.

It seems that even the figure of drunkenness is not without a literal import; for although one may conceive that the charge of drunkenness does in a figurative sense take in that false security in which Nineveh lay, like Babylon afterwards in a later day, yet as a fact it is notorious that there was a surprise at Nineveh during a religious festival of their gods, which may remind us of the infamous feast of Belshazzar the very night that Babylon was taken. Thus there was an unholy revelry, not without either impious honour to their false gods on the one hand, or impious dishonour to the true God on the other hand. In short, a feast with the drunkenness that attended them was bound up with the siege of Nineveh, just as with Babylon's. But the way so far differed, as the camp of Nineveh seems to have been surprised before the city was taken. Consequently we hear in Nahum 1 how they were caught as thorns folded in drunkenness. All this is described before the account of taking the bloody city. But if such was the case with Nineveh, not so with Babylon: notoriously the drunken feast of King Belshazzar took place on the night when it was taken. At Nineveh the surprise of the camp was without the city before its fall. Thus each has its own peculiar features; and both show the admirable perfectness of the word of God.

Again the interval between the fall of Babylon and that of Nineveh may be set down at less than ninety years in round numbers. The captivity of Israel measures the supremacy of Babylon. This was seventy years; and we may allow a margin of some few years in consequence of the inability of chronologists to settle the exact time when Nineveh fell. It was certainly taken before Nebuchadnezzar acquired his imperial power, and therefore more than six centuries before Christ.

Do what they might, the prophetic sentence is, "There shall the fire devour thee." Just so it is a matter of common history that, when the king found he could not defend himself, he set fire to the place himself. It was not the enemies that did it, as in the case of the Chaldean capital. In Babylon the enemy secured the victory in this way, but it was otherwise with Nineveh. Again only a partial fire consumed Babylon, which therefore remained an humbled but proud city long after the days of Alexander the Great, who in fact died there. But the Assyrian city perished then. Nineveh fell, not only never to rise again, but not even to survive in any measure. The hand that chiefly effected its conflagration was that of the unhappy prince who saw the hopelessness of escape, and therefore, surrounding himself with his wives and concubines, his jewels, gold and silver, and every other valuable, set fire in desperation to the whole.

Hence we have this described as regards Nineveh in a way not found in the description of Babylon's fall. "Draw the waters for the siege, fortify thy strongholds: go into clay, and tread the mortar, make strong the brick-kiln." Alas! no care should avail. "There shall the fire devour thee; the sword shall cut thee off, it shall eat thee up like the cankerworm: make thyself many as the cankerworm,* make thyself many as the locusts.* Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven: the cankerworm spoileth, and fleeth away. Thy crowned are as the locusts, and thy captains as the great grasshoppers,* which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known where they are. Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria; thy nobles shall lie down." It is a completeness of ruin for its grandeur unexampled in history. "Thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth them. There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is fatal: all that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee: for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?"

{*Some as Dr. Henderson take these as "the licking locust," "the swarming locust," and "the largest locust" [literally "locust of locust"] respectively.}

Nevertheless there is this difference to be seen, that Assyria will certainly have a place in the millennium and a distinguished place — not Nineveh indeed but Assyria. (Isaiah 19) As for Babylon or Chaldea, we never hear of either when the kingdom comes. Jehovah in the midst of His judgment will remember mercy; and Egypt and Assyria are particularly mentioned as having a leading place along with Israel in that day.

35 Habakkuk.

Habakkuk.

Lectures on the Minor Prophets.

W. Kelly.

There is no prophetic delivery among the twelve lesser books more peculiar and characteristic than that of Habakkuk. It has no longer the occupation with the enemy as its main feature, although the enemy is referred to; but for its prominent topic we find the soul of the prophet himself, as representing the faithful among the Jews, brought into deep exercises, and indeed a kind of colloquy between God Himself and the prophet, so as to set out not only that which gave him trouble of heart, but also divine comfort, as well as exulting hope into which he was led by the communications of the Spirit of God. We shall see too that the hope proves its divine quality; for there is all that which is calculated to sustain in patient waiting, though there be nothing shown outwardly, save indeed the extreme of earthly trial. Still the prophet rejoices in Jehovah, and counts on as undisturbed possession of all that is promised above every foe, as gazelles enjoy on the heights where no other foot can tread in safety.

"The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see. O Jehovah, how long shall I cry, and thou dost not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou dost not save! Why dost thou show me iniquity, and beholdest grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth; for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth." Hence there is a goodly measure of spiritual resemblance between the short prophecy of Habakkuk and the longer one of Jeremiah. At the same time Habakkuk is no mere imitator. He alludes to the previous prophets as he does to facts in the early history of Israel: so all the prophets did. There was no avoidance sometimes of direct quotation; nay, we have seen that the Spirit led them to adopt and reiterate that which other prophets had said before them. If the consciousness of originality and affluence of thought sometimes enable men to rise superior to the charge of borrowing from a compeer, much more did divine guidance make prophets less careful and sensitive on this head. Vain souls who yearn after and affect original power are too feeble to act candidly and with freedom, and are apt to show extreme jealousy lest they might be thought to make use of another; if they do not, it is to their own loss and that of their readers; for "non omnia possumus omnes" ["we cannot all do everything" Virgil.].

Hence in scripture we see the contrary of this weak narrowness. Daniel for instance, who is stamped with a characteristic style of his own from beginning to end, was a diligent student of Jeremiah, and, certainly from no lack of power to express himself, prefers to take up the language of Moses where it suited the Spirit's purpose. So we saw Micah and Isaiah furnishing important portions not only in thought analogous, but in many respects identical in expression, yet each having its own proper object. Consequently the use which they serve remains characteristic for each, so that the very points of resemblance only strengthen the real difference in the object before the Spirit of God. In fact this is so true of scripture, that whether it be the same writer or a different one (most probably the same), we find in the book of Psalms that two of these compositions are almost word for word alike; and yet I am persuaded that neither could be spared without positive loss, and that the few words which differ between Psalms 14, 53 are of the greatest moment to take into consideration if we would rightly divide the word of truth and understand their scope. Consequently while there is instruction in the sameness, there is also the most important key to interpretation by the difference. But almost all this is and must be lost save to those who look carefully into their words separately and as compared with each other, but every word is full of instruction when once clearly seen.

In this way then, although there is a certain spirit of complaint observable at first in Habakkuk as well as in Jeremiah, a burdened sorrowful-stricken spirit, nevertheless we may say of him, as Paul said of himself, "Cast down, but not destroyed." He shows us not sin indeed but infirmity, the infirmity of the earthen vessel; but there is a brilliant testimony in both to the treasure that divine grace put in it.

Here then the prophet groans, but he does what the Jews did not in Hosea — he groans to God. "O Jehovah, how long shall I cry, and thou hearest not? even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou savest not?" Jehovah had other purposes; and if He appears not to hear, and if He does not put forth His arm to save — for salvation, we must remember, here means by external power, or deliverances shown on the earth, — if such be not exerted it is always for the accomplishment of better things. We may always count on the perfect goodness of God and the resources of His grace wherever there is faith; for all good for failing man is of faith that it might be by grace; and Habakkuk particularly is the prophet who is charged with the mission of giving its due place to faith. But invariably, wherever there is real faith, it must be tried. We find accordingly the trial even before the faith is distinctly in evidence; yet had there not been real faith underneath, we may be perfectly assured there would have been no such putting to the proof.

Hence the very severity of a trial ought to comfort the believer; for the Lord never puts a heavier burden than He gives grace to bear; and therefore it is always an honour to have a trial as far as it goes. It is no honour to slip aside from what God has given us to do or bear. To be unfaithful as a steward is a disgrace in the eyes both of God and man. But Habakkuk's distress was that there should be such a state of things in the people of God, that He should delay His answer, and that He should not be able morally to put forth salvation in the way of external deliverance I have just now described. "Why dost thou show me iniquity," if it is so exceedingly distressing? — iniquity even in the very place where righteousness might have been looked for. It was among the people of God. This the more harassed him. That the Gentiles should be iniquitous was no wonder; that the Jews should be so was a deep trouble to his soul.

"For spoiling and violence are before me," he says further; "and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked." He is speaking of those who had the law and were formally under it. "And judgment doth never go forth." There was no proper answer to it. "For the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth."

But if man and His people fail, Jehovah answers; He at least heard. Therefore so far there is an immediate appearance of the Lord, though not in the way in which the prophet had looked and yearned for it; but Jehovah must always be above the thoughts of the heart. The foolishness of God, as it is said, is wiser than man, let him put forth his best wisdom.

Jehovah then is here represented as calling on His people to see what He was going to do. Great changes were in progress; greater still in store. The fall of the Assyrian kingdom was a grave and alarming event: so should Egypt and all others who proudly resisted Jehovah's will and word — the more strikingly shown when His own people were going to be put down among the rest. So much the worse for the Jew if he believed not what God made known to him beyond all the world. "Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you." We see that every chapter throughout the prophecy has for its kernel the folly of unbelief and value of faith. This was quoted by the apostle Paul, and that too among the Jews, when they were in danger of letting slip the blessing because of its very magnitude: so perfectly does the Spirit of God always apply the word even in circumstances which might seem to be unlike.

In Act 13:38-39, the apostle applies the passage to the assembled Jews: "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things." This was the great emphatic point; first the Man that has brought in by His work that blessing, the forgiveness of sins, the boon of divine mercy to the needy sinner when awakened. "By him all that believe are justified from all things," — a precise and full expression though in the simplest elements of the gospel. It is not only the forgiveness of sins, but "justified," which, of course, includes it? but goes farther. "By him *all* that believe." Therefore there is the grace that imparts this rich blessing to the feeblest faith, for it is not a question of depth or power but of reality. God is real, and by His grace He gives unlimited blessing to those that are simple and true. This is proved by faith, which honours Him in spite of appearances. It is for "all that believe," says Paul, though all the virtue be "by *him."* The whole value of redemption stands in Christ, and turns on His work — "By *him* all that believe." Yet it is inseparable from the believer. Although faith may have in itself no such quality as could be a meritorious ground for the blessing, nevertheless "without faith it is impossible to please God." Grace and righteousness are not at issue but in harmony through the cross of Christ. How else could man righteously be blessed, being a sinner before God? Faith takes him out of himself, and brings in all the blessing that comes through another, even through Christ our Lord. "By him all that believe are justified from all things." Everything here is, as it should be, in fulness — "justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."

The state of Israel was clearly one of unrighteousness; law could only condemn. Grace could save through the faith of the Messiah, and save in a deeper way than Habakkuk was permitted to see; for the prophet undoubtedly, as is usual in the Old Testament looked on salvation largely, though certainly not exclusively, as a deliverance from outward misery and danger by the gracious intervention of God, and not so much to that still more wondrous deliverance which has come in already to faith in a dead and risen Christ. All things around us remain unchanged; the power of evil still goes on. Fraud and oppression are not judged and gone from the world; but there is One who has broken right through the power of evil, and made a way into heaven itself for those who believe on Him. This is Christianity, and of this the apostle is full, though he does not scruple, as we shall see, to apply the prophecy to it on the principle of faith, and according to the divine depth of the written word. "Beware, therefore," says he, turning to those who refuse the testimony, "lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in nowise believe, though a man declare it unto you." Now it is very evident that this has a reference to Habakkuk, though I should think not to Habakkuk only. We can easily see the exactness of it. "That which is spoken of in the prophets." It would seem that Isaiah is referred to as well as Habakkuk, though one need not dwell upon the reasons for the thought just now.

But there is also wisdom in omission; for the prophecy says, "Behold ye among the heathen." This might have appeared ambiguous, and capable of being turned aside by the Jew, who would say, "This is exactly our conviction: we all know the heathen to be in a dangerous state; but why overlook the favour of the people of God?" Therefore in the application the direct reference to the heathen is dropped, and all is made pointed and personal to the people themselves; for undoubtedly if God resent despite to His truth and righteousness among the heathen, much more will He judge it among His own people. No prescriptive place given to the Jew can justly be pleaded to preserve them from the consequences of slighting and blaspheming God and His grace. On the contrary, nowhere is judgment so insupportably severe as among those who take the place of the people of God and yet set Jesus at nought. If bad in Israel, it is incomparably worse in Christendom: what is it in this land of Bibles and free preaching?

I do not, it will be seen, contend that the death and resurrection of Christ is explicitly named in our prophet; but that a principle is laid down which covers the work of the Saviour. The particular application is left entirely open. We know what the work is which alone could meet the need of guilty man before God. On the surface it is rather the work of judgment which Jehovah had then in hand in raising up the Chaldeans to supreme power, and thereby both destroying Assyria and chastising the Jew sorely. That testimony put the Jew to the test then. Now what is such an object of witness as redemption? Despising it, our Lord teaches (Mat 22:7), would bring a worse judgment from the Romans. But I am inclined to think that the apostle applies the principle to what God was doing then in grace, in view of a judgment which the Lord will execute at His coming. For no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation. We must not limit it to the past. All is part of an organic whole with Christ and His kingdom for its centre. If this be so, it was God who had wrought in Christ, and by the Spirit was still carrying on and out His work, grounded, as we know, on the mighty work of redemption.

As to the latter clause of verse 41, it refers to the opposition of their will. "A work which ye shall in nowise believe." It is no question of a decree on God's part, but of the people's will against Him, of which He gives them ample notice. I should doubt its being the judicial sentence, but a prophecy used for a solemn warning of what unbelief would render imperative. The judicial aspect in the book of Acts is reserved till Acts 28. There and then it is pronounced. That is, we have the full testimony going out persistently and most patiently; and the more patient God may be with His testimony, the more unsparing the judgment when it comes. But He is slow to anger, as we know, and a strange work to Him is judgment; yet, when it comes, it must surely take its course according to His holy nature and majesty. But it seems to me only pronounced judicially in the last chapter of the Acts. Here it was in progress, as the Jews were being put to the final proof. There was a highly significant act done, and recorded there at the end of this very chapter — the shaking off the dust from the disciples' feet; which shows that, although sentence might not formally be pronounced, there was nevertheless a loud testimony to it, and an intimation that they had better beware, for their danger was as extreme as their unbelief.

However, the prophet hears from Jehovah that He was going to raise up the Chaldeans; and this all know was the proximate judgment then impending, though far from being all that awaits the Jew in this way. "For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling places that are not theirs." They were spoilers whom God employed in His providence for the purpose of breaking down the apostacy of Judah, and also for chastising the pride of other nations. "They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; and they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat. They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every strong hold; for they shall heap dust, and take it. Then shall his mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, imputing this his power unto his god." Thus there would be a permitted prevalence of the Chaldean scourge for a certain time; but when they forgot that God was employing them for the purpose of dealing with those who had offended His name and glory, directly they imputed their power not to the sovereign will of God but to the positive influence and agency of their own god, then the true God would take them in hand. Their self-proceeding energy would come to nought just as much as the haughtiness of other nations. This action of the Chaldeans is to be assigned to the moment of their coming up under Nebuchadnezzar down to the overthrow of the Babylonish monarchy. It was then that all should be changed. The culminating point of this outrageous iniquity was the insult that was done to Jehovah by Belshazzar, when they praised their gods in presence of the dishonoured vessels of the temple at Jerusalem, as if Jehovah could not preserve His own people before the superior power of their idols, or of Chaldean hands.

Then comes the answer of the prophet to Jehovah's word. "Art thou not from everlasting, O Jehovah, my God?" This brings out now a measure of rest to the spirit of the prophet. Now, instead of yielding to the plaintive tone in which he began, he is emboldened to speak plainly of the Chaldeans. He bows in a measure to the wisdom and righteousness of the discipline; and if not complete as yet, we shall find it has its perfect work before he closes. It is of deep interest to mark such progress in the soul, and it is always thus where there is reality. Nothing more painful than when believers settle down in a barely dogmatic statement of truth, or in a monotonous experience from day to day, without gathering fresh strength from the Lord, instead of seeking to turn everything, whether of sorrow or of joy, into a means of a better knowledge of Himself. This is all-important. It is one of the grand differences between law and grace. According to law you have demands and directions all definitely out, and it is not in the nature of law to produce increase in acquaintance with the divine mind; whereas as surely as grace takes its way, souls "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," — "increasing," as it is said, "by the knowledge of God."

Just so is it with the prophet here. "Art thou not from everlasting, O Jehovah my God; mine Holy One? we shall not die. O Jehovah, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction," the Chaldeans. There is but little said about their history. They were brought out fully as a scourge, and this is clearly set forth, but it cannot be without God's taking them in hand in the end. All was measured. His mercy always measured the trial where His people must needs come under a chastening. How blessed that even those self-assertive Chaldeans with an unexampled energy of man should nevertheless be but employed of God for the correction of His own grievously failing people! This is what comforted the prophet at length as he weighs it all. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity." He evidently refers to language used elsewhere, as early as Job, but still with an entirely new application. "Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?"

For after all this is what drew out the prophet's heart — that the people of God, let their faults be what they might, contained whatever was righteous at that time on the earth, and that these Chaldeans, raised up to humble the Jews, were as merciless in their dealings with them as they were forgetful and contemptuous toward God Himself. "And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them? They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag: therefore they rejoice and are glad." But as Jehovah told the prophet that they should offend, imputing this very power to their god, so the prophet tells Jehovah, "Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous." We see how skilfully he turns the little word that Jehovah had given him as a groundwork now to plead reasons why He should not spare these ruthless enemies of Himself and His people. Nothing can be more beautiful than the way in which a single eye — an eye that knows the love God has to His own people and above all to Christ Himself — lays hold of the suitable truth and employs it in the interests of the needy who cleave to His name. "Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations." Will Jehovah allow them then to go on in this unsparing way? It cannot be. But the issue must be waited for.

"I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved" This closes the matter. I do not know why this verse should be dislocated from Habakkuk 1, which it naturally closes. It is the conclusion of the question which had so sorely tried his spirit at first; not so much looking to events in providence but to see what Jehovah will say. There does not seem the least real ground for the hypothesis of a late writer who will have it that the prophet wrote Habakkuk 1 under Jehoiakim, Habakkuk 2 under Jehoiachin, and Habakkuk 3 under Zedekiah. Such a scheme breaks up an admirably connected whole.

Jehovah replies to the prophet in the second verse of Habakkuk 2 "And Jehovah answered and said, Write the vision and make it plain upon the tables, that he may run that readeth it." There is but one reason why it seems to me that it may be taken with the first verse; namely, that it is a plain allusion to what the prophet had just before uttered; but still we must always bear in mind that, except in the Psalms and in the Lamentations of Jeremiah, the division of chapters is not divine, but merely according to the judgment of men. The Psalms are by inspired authority written separately one from another; and, again, they appear to be divinely grouped in the order in which we find them. Jeremiah in a somewhat similar way has a peculiar internal construction, which proves that God divided the Lamentations practically as we see in our common English version. But with all the rest of the Bible, Old and New Testament, spiritual judgment alone can discern where the divisions ought to be made; and the manner in which much of it was made might prepare us for not the happiest results. The distribution into verses is said to have been done during a journey on horseback by a printer, of learning, no doubt, but possessed of no such qualities of a higher order as one could consider requisite for anything like a satisfactory execution of so delicate a task. It certainly will not be pretended by competent judges that either the person or the manner was at all favourable to a judicious dealing with the word of God. I think it would have been better done on one's knees in the closet, than *inter equitandum* from Paris to Lyons.* However so it has too often fared with the word of God, though it claims and needs a holy and reverent attitude beyond all other books. Is it too much to say that no book in the world has met with such unworthy usage at the hands of man? On the other hand never has God shown Himself so truly and fully as in the way in which He gave it and watched over it, spite of faithless guardians to whose responsibility it was entrusted.

{*["on horseback"] It is H Stephens, in the Preface to his New Testament of 1576, who tells us the story of this performance of his father R. Stephens at least as far as regards the New Testament, which first appeared in his fourth edition (1551), followed by Beza and since then by almost all."}

"Jehovah" then "answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." It is well known that the apostle Paul applies this to the very centre of the vision, and of all visions, to Jesus Christ the Lord coming back in glory. In Hebrews 10 we are told that He who shall come will come, and will not tarry. Such is the way in which the Spirit displays His admirable use of Old Testament scripture. Already had the Lord Jesus personally come the first time, and been rejected by the Jews to their own ruin. The apostle's use of it gives the words a much more personal force; yet, we can see, not departing from but only adding to the evident issue contemplated in Hebrews 2, 3, which can have no greater fulfilment short of that crowning event.

But then there is another remark to be made here. The prophet lets us know that the vision of God is written so that a man does not require I know not what accessories in order to understand it. It was to be made plain on tablets, distinctly set out in large impressive characters. But it is not said, as the common view assumes, that the runner may read, but rather that the reader may run, and thus, it would seem, spread the joyful intelligence one to another. It has been suggested that we should compare Dan 12:4; but this, I think, carries out the idea of running to and fro, and increasing knowledge thus among such as have an ear to hear. The passage then holds out no premium to the careless reader, but shows how the reader of the vision will be stimulated thereby to earnest spread of the truth he receives.

It is granted, however, that scripture does meet and bless those who take but a scanty draught from the waters of life to which it points in Christ the Lord. At the same time they only enter into its depths who believe in its divine fulness, and have confidence that the Spirit, who made it the word of God in all the emphasis of that expression, delights to lead the believer into the understanding of all the truth.

Thus, while the power of the vision is shown in verse 2, the sureness of it in verse 3, whatever may be the delay meanwhile, from verse 4 we learn another thing, that is, the all-importance of faith to make it good for the soul before it comes. The result is not yet come; but this is no reason we should not gather the profit by that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, It cannot be denied that this is an immensely important principle; and more particularly in prophecy. The common notion is that prophecy never does people good unless it treat directly of the times and circumstances in which they themselves are found. There can be no greater fallacy. Abraham got more good from the prophecy about Sodom and Gomorrah than Lot did; yet it clearly was not because Abraham was there, for he was not in Sodom, while Lot was, who barely escaped and with little honour as we soon sorrowfully learn. But the Spirit teaches us by these two cases in the first book of the Bible His mind as to this question. I grant entirely that when the fulfilment of prophecy in all its details comes, there will be persons to glean the most express directions. But I am persuaded that the deepest value of prophecy is for those who are occupied with Christ, and who will be in heaven along with Christ, just as Abraham was with Jehovah, instead of being like Lot in the midst of the guilty Sodomites. If this be so, the book of Revelation ought to be of far richer blessing to us now who enjoy by grace heavenly associations with Christ, and are members of His body, though we shall be on high when the hour of temptation comes on those that dwell on the earth.

It is freely allowed that the Revelation will be an amazing comfort and help to the saints who may be there. But this is no reason why it should not be a still greater blessing now to those who will be caught up to Christ before that hour. The fact is, that both are true: only it is a higher and more intimate privilege to be with the Lord in the communion of His own love and mind before the things come to pass, though comfort will be given, when they come, to those that are immersed in them. Consequently we see in the Revelation (Revelation 4, 5, 6) already with the Lord the glorified saints of the Old and New Testament who were taken up to meet Him, including those to whom the prophecy was primarily given. Afterwards we see the judgments come in gradual succession; but when they take place, there are saints who evidently witness for God on earth, some suffering unto death, others preserved to be a blessed earthly people. To such undoubtedly the prophetic visions will be of value when the actual events arrive; but the most admirable value always is to faith before the events confirm the truth of the word. This is an invariable principle as to the prophetic word and indeed in divine truth generally.

Here we have faith and its ground thus stated: "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith." I suppose the proud soul particularly refers to the Chaldean. He was absolutely blind; but the principle of it is just as true of the unrighteous Jew or of any man who hardens himself against the divine word. For certainly the wrath of God is against all ungodliness, and indeed, if there be any difference, against those most of all who hold the truth ever so fast in unrighteousness. It does not matter how orthodox they may be; but if men cleave to the truth in unrighteousness, so much the worse the sin. The truth in this case only condemns the more peremptorily. They may tenaciously hold the truth; yet truth was never given to make righteousness a light matter, but urgently due to God in the relations that pertain to us. The object of all truth is to put us in communion with God and in obedience. But the man whose soul is lifted up is not upright, as is plain. The invariable way of God is this, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted;" and faith alone gives humiliation of self. It may be here observed that there are two forms of it: the happiest of all is to be humble; the next best thing is to be humbled. It is better to be humble than to be humbled, but there is no comparison between being humbled and being lifted up. Humility is the effect of grace; humiliation rather of God's righteous government where we are not humble. This is what He did with His saints of old and outwardly with His ancient people. It is what is too often needful for ourselves. The best place of all is to be so realizing what the grace and glory of the Lord are that we are nothing before Him. Humility is the effect not so much of a moral process with ourselves, but of occupation with Him. Humbling is the effect of the Lord dealing with our souls when He sees the need of breaking us down, it may be to use us, certainly for further blessing. We could not so deal with ourselves. Judgment must come instead of humbling, but in every case anything is better than to have our soul lifted up: where is the uprightness there?

"The just," it is said, "shall live by faith." This is used repeatedly in the New Testament. There are three well-known quotations in the Epistles, on which a few words may be desirable before we leave the subject. It is the apostle Paul who uses this text on all these several occasions. In writing to the Roman saints he tells them that in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." Such is the only way and direction of the blessing. The righteousness of God is necessarily outside the reach of any unless it be revealed; but being revealed it is revealed "out of faith," (ἐκ πίστεως,) and in no other way, and consequently "unto faith" wherever faith might be. It could not be in the way of law: not even the Jew could suppose this, for the law claims man's righteousness, and does not say a word about the righteousness of God. The fact is that the law simply convicts man of inability to produce the righteousness which it claims; for though it demand it in God's name, there is only the answer of unrighteousness. According to the law a man ought to be righteous; but he is not. This is what the law proves wherever a man fairly confronts it — that he is not righteous according to the divine requirement.

This state of ruin Christ has met by redemption; and consequently the gospel is entirely a question of God revealing His righteousness, though so many real Christians misunderstand it through their tradition. The meaning of the phrase is that God acts consistently with what is due to Christ, who has in redemption perfectly glorified God. He glorified Him as Father during His life; yet this could not have put away sin. But He glorified Him as God, when it was expressly a question of our sins, by His atoning death on the cross. Thenceforward God reveals His righteousness in view of that all-efficacious sacrifice; not only vindicating His forbearance in past times, but in the present time justifying the believer freely and fully in consequence of that mighty work. The first effect of God's righteousness, though not referred to in the Epistle to the Romans, is that God sets Christ at His own right hand on high. The next result (and this is the one spoken of there) is, that God justifies the believer accordingly. Romans 1 no doubt treats of His righteousness in the most abstract terms. The manner of it is not described till we come to Romans 3, 4, 5. But even in the first statement we have the broad principle that in the gospel there is the revelation of divine righteousness from faith (not from law), and consequently to faith wherever it be found. Such I believe to be the force of the proposition. Probably the chief difficulty to most minds is the expression "from faith." It means on that principle not in the way of obedience to law, which must be the rule of human righteousness. Habits of misinterpretation make the difficulty. [faith alone can be the principle if it be a revelation of divine righteousness; and consequently it is "*to* faith," wherever faith may be.

It is purposely put in abstract style, because the Spirit has not yet begun to set out how it can be and is. It would be anticipating the doctrine that He was afterwards to expound. For manifestly the work of Christ has not yet been brought in; and hence the consequences could not be explained consistently with any true order. It is mere ignorance to assume that scripture is irregular; for in fact there is the deepest order in what man's haughty spirit presumes thus to censure. It is entirely due to the haste which leads men naturally to admire only the order of man. As to the difficulty of the expression "from faith to faith," it is quite admitted that the idea is put in a very pithy and compressed form; so that to men who are apt to be wordy in the usual style, of course such compactness does sound peculiar.

This it is that answers to the expression of the prophet, "The just shall live by his faith." Success had great weight with the Jewish mind. They wondered at the prosperous career of the Gentile. But the prophet is explaining the enigma as Isaiah had done before. He insists that the only righteous man is the believer. It is not the justified but "the just;" and this in order to keep up the link between doctrine and practice, as it seems to me. "The righteous shall live by his faith." It is the combination of the two points, that faith is inseparable from righteousness, and a righteous man from believing. The Chaldean saw not God, and had no thought of His purpose or His way. The Israelite would find his blessing in subjection to His word and confidence in Himself. "Behold the proud! his soul is not right within him; but the just shall live by his faith." The expression then does not say the justified, but it is implied; and there is no real righteousness in practice apart from it. What preachers ordinarily mean is in itself true. We are justified by faith; but we do not require to draw out more than is in the prophecy; nor is justification explicitly developed in Romans 1 but rather in Romans 3, 5. Let every scripture teach its own appropriate lesson.

Again, in Galatians 3 we have a slightly different use of the same scripture. "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God it is evident; for the just shall live by faith." Now here it is sufficiently plain that the apostle is excluding the thought of justification by law, and the way he disproves it is by the cited passage of Habakkuk. Hence the difference between Romans 1 and Galatians 3 is this, that in Romans we have the positive statement and in Galatians the negative. There he positively affirms that God's righteousness is revealed from faith to faith, supported by this text; whereas the point here is to exclude the law distinctly and peremptorily from playing any part in the justification of a soul. Justification is in no way by law; for "the just shall live by faith:" such is the point in Galatians. It is God's righteousness revealed by faith; for "the just shall live by faith:" such is the point in Romans. The difference therefore is plain.

In Hebrews the passage is used again in a way quite as different by the same apostle Paul. "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith." The emphasis here is not on "the just" which is strong in Romans, nor upon "faith" which is strong in Galatians, but on "live" which is as strong here. Thus every word seems to acquire the emphasis according to the object for which it is used in these three places. In the end of Hebrews 10 the apostle is guarding the believer from discouragement and turning aside. He quotes once more "the just shall *live* by faith." Accordingly we are shown in Hebrews 11 the elders or Old Testament saints who obtained testimony in the power of faith. So they all lived in faith, every one whom God counts His worthies. It might be shown by faith in sacrifice, or in a walk of communion with God, or in anticipating judgment coming on the world, and accepting the divine means of escape. It might be in wearing the pilgrim character; or in the exertion of such power as delivered from the foe. But whatever the form, there was living by faith in every case. Hence we have here the most remarkable chapter in the Bible for its comprehensive grasp of the men of old who lived by faith, from the first great witness of its power here below to the blessed One who summed up every quality of faith, which others had manifested now and then: they separately and not without inconsistency, He perfectly and combined in His own person, and ways here below, indeed with much more that is deeper and peculiar to Himself alone.

Thus I do not think that it is necessary to vindicate the wisdom of God at greater length. The passage seems most instructive, if it were only to show the fallacy of supposing that each shred of scripture can only warrant a single just application.* Not so; though clothed in the language of men, scripture affords in this respect an answer to the infinite nature of God Himself, whose Spirit can unfold and apply it in distinct but compatible ways. Even among men there are not wanting wise words which bear more than one application, yet each true and just. If faith distinguished and secured the righteous in presence of the Chaldean invader, its value is even more pronounced now in the gospel, where it is a question of a soul before God, refusing false grounds of confidence, and walking unmoved in the path of trial among men.

{*"Interpret the Scripture like any other book..... First, it may be laid down, that Scripture has one meaning — the meaning which it had to the mind of the Prophet or Evangelist who first uttered or wrote it, to the hearers or readers who first received it."(Essays and Reviews: On the Interpretation of Scripture, 327.) Not the worst answer appears in the next two pages. "There are difficulties of another kind in many parts of Scripture, the depth and inwardness of which require a measure of the same qualities in the interpreter himself. There are lessons in the Prophets which, however simple, mankind have not yet learned even in theory . . . . All that the Prophet meant may not have been consciously present to his mind; there were depths which to himself also were but half revealed."(328, 329) It is no wonder that, when men forget that they are speaking of the word of God, they speak foolishly of Scripture and contradict themselves.}

Certainly the word of God is here proved to be susceptible of different uses, weighty and conclusively authoritative. That it is applied by the same apostle Paul makes the case far more remarkable than if it had been differently employed by various writers. Had it been so, I have no doubt that the rationalists would have set each of the different writers against the truth. But they would do well to weigh the fact that it is the same inspired man* who applies to these different ends the same few words of our prophet. He was right. And yet it is very evident that in its own primary application, in its strict position in the prophecy, God is particularly providing for a state which lay before the Jews in that day; but then the same Spirit who wrote by Habakkuk applies it with divine precision in every one of the three instances in the New Testament. For what is common to all is that the word of God is to be believed, and that he who uses it holily, according to God by faith, lives by it, and is alone just and humble in it, as only this glorifies God withal. But what is true in the case of an Israelite so employing the prophetic word applies at least as fully to all the word of God used by faith, and more particularly to the gospel, because the latter is an incomparably deeper unfolding of God's mind than any word strictly prophetic. Prophecy shows us the character of God more especially in government; but the gospel is the display of God in grace, and this in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ. Is it possible to go beyond or even to reach this in depth? A simple Christian may indeed be led far beyond that which is usually proclaimed by preachers; but it is impossible to exaggerate the infinite character of the gospel as God has revealed it. We also learn from the use in Hebrews, as well as the prophet's context, that the vision looks on to the future coming of the Lord for the deliverance of His people. This indeed belongs to the prophetic word generally, and is no way peculiar to this vision in particular. It is a striking passage — the vision, as setting forth under the Chaldean the downfall of the hostile Gentile, proud as he might be, though Israel might have to wait for the accomplishment. And that the full force is only to be when the Lord is actually come in person, and in relationship with His ancient people renewed by grace, is the gist of the prophets in general.

{*I do not stop here to state the overwhelming evidence that Paul and no other wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews. The peculiarity of the style and method can be simply and satisfactorily accounted for by the consideration of his writing to believers of his own nation outside his Gentile apostleship. The doctrine is pre-eminently his own.}

But it is important of course to bear in mind that, save in special revelations of the Jewish prophets, the vision of coming deliverance vouchsafed did not discriminate the time between the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow. Perhaps we may safely say that none seems to have known beforehand that there would be a long interval between the two advents; yet when the interval came we can bring passages from the prophets to prove it. So perfectly did God write the word by them, and so far beyond the very men who were the inspired witnesses of it; for no prophet knew the full extent or depth of his own inspired communications. This was a far better proof that God wrote by them than if all had been known; because whatever might have been the ignorance of Jeremiah or Isaiah, of Daniel or of Habakkuk the Holy Ghost necessarily knew all from the beginning. Thus what they wrote, going far beyond their own intelligence, rendered His mind who employed them evident. Hence we read in 1 Peter of "The Spirit of Christ which was in them;" and the same scripture which indicates the reality of the inspiring Spirit in the prophets just now quoted shows that they themselves did not enter into all they wrote. They were "searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow." Certainly they did not know, but like others had to learn; and when they searched into it, they were told it was not for themselves, but "unto us they did minister the things that are now reported unto us by them that have preached the gospel unto you by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." It will be observed that the expression, "The Holy Ghost sent down from heaven," as we know Him now, is in full contrast with the prophetic Spirit who wrought in them and is called "the Spirit of Christ." The Lord Jesus was the great object of all the visions; and this it is important to note.

"Spirit of Christ," in Romans 8, I think, goes far beyond this. As employed by the apostle there, it means that the Holy Ghost characterizes the Christian with the full possession of his own proper portion as in Christ and Christ in him. The Holy Ghost is the seal of all, and dwells in the believer on this ground.

Then we find a remarkable series of what may be called strophes or stanzas, from verse 6 to the end of the chapter, — a number of woes in regular succession with a reason annexed to each case. Verse 5 seems to be a general introduction. "Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people." Here we find that what was pronounced on the Chaldean by the Lord, and what was laid hold of by the tried prophet, when pleading for the people in spite of their faults, is now formally brought out. The evil must be judged before the blessing can be introduced in power. Consequently the evil is now fully set out before us. The reason why the Chaldean must be taken in hand by God flows simply and necessarily from the moral nature of God — the impossibility that He should sustain one whom He had employed as His instrument when the instrument dared to exalt itself to the dishonour of God.

Here the derisive ode properly begins, or the first stanza. "Shall not all these (speaking of the nations that he was gathering unto him) take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with many pledges!* Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them? Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and all that dwell therein." Such is the first woe here pronounced on the enemy for his cruel rapacity without.

{*So it would seem most naturally to mean. The reduplication of the word expresses increase either of degree or of number. So Drs. Lee and Henderson understand. The A.V., with Luther, etc., interprets like the Syriac and Vulgate. The Jewish commentators too are divided. It is hard to see any tolerable sense in the version as it stands.}

The second woe pursues the matter more within. "Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!" It may begin with mere self-aggrandisement or coveting another's; but the end of it is his own exaltation against all adversaries. He might not have so used his resources, but have simply lavished them away; but they are as selfishly employed as they were won — to "set his nest on high that he may be delivered from the power of evil." "Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned against thy soul." Violence follows in the wake. Verse 11, as is easily seen, answers to verse 8. "For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it."

Then comes as the third woe (verse 12) another divine denunciation on more daring evil, not private only, but public and on a great scale. "Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity! Behold, is it not of the Jehovah of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity? For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea" (ver. 12-14) What a picture of the futile labours of the peoples, more particularly of the energetic Chaldean — first of the Gentiles to come into the place of supreme power and universal authority! Jehovah reserves it for Himself in the only true sense. The kingdom of Messiah introduced by solemn judgments shall see the peaceful sway of good inseparable from the manifestation of the divine glory. That, and not at all Christianity or the church, is what is referred to here. It is the millennial age which will be the true time for the public establishment of all authority to the glory of Jehovah. The destruction of the Babylonian empire is no doubt of special interest in the mind of God, because the fall of that first world-empire shadows the fall of the last, when the dispersed Jews shall be freed and return from a still longer captivity; and a greater than Cyrus shall rule the world. All will be unrest among the nations till then, however truly grace may give souls far and wide to know a portion in Christ above and apart from the world. But there is no hope for the earth to be filled with the knowledge of Jehovah's glory till that day: on the contrary the apostacy must come before it and be judged by the righteous power of the Lord. What is called "the gospel dispensation" has another object and character, is inconsistent with the special pre-eminence of Israel, and stands aloof from the execution of judgments on the Gentiles.

The next is, "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness! Thou art filled with shame for glory: drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered: the cup of the Lord's right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory. For the violence of Lebanon shall cover thee, and the spoil of beasts, which made them afraid, because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein" (verses 15-17). Here we see the most grievous corruption added to violence. No doubt there was shameless dissolution of manners spread by the Chaldeans; but I agree with those who give the words a larger and deeper bearing than such personal excesses, followed by ignominious exposure when judgment shall come on the nations.

But it is observable that there is a slight divergence from the order in what follows, possibly because it is the last woe here pronounced upon the foe. Consequently there is a purposed difference, and the sin here is brought in before the woe — it was so flagrant. In other cases the woe was pronounced, and then the ground of it was explained. In this case, as being idolatry it was not merely a sin against men; neither covetousness nor violence nor corruption of others for selfish purposes; but the making and worship of graven images, an insult to God Himself who handed over power to the Chaldean. Such a return he must be made to feel. There is no room for other woes after this. "Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it." God might be patient; but to set up a golden image for instance in the plain of Dura, after the God of heaven had formally given him his world-empire, was no small offence in the Chaldean. As usual, the first thorough departure from God is fatal. God may linger ever so many years after before the blow fell on the Chaldean; but when God does judge, this sin comes up before Him. The profane and corrupt Belshazzar was the immediate occasion; but the cause lay deeper — the first open insult to God after power was given of God. The last verse of the woe shows how after this the scene changes. "Jehovah is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him."

Habakkuk, however, breaks forth in prayer. It is now a question of the righteous, and not of the judgment of the Chaldean. The last chapter accordingly is a most beautiful and sublime outpouring of the prophet. "A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet on Shigionoth.* O Jehovah, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid. O Jehovah, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy." And so He does. "God came from Teman and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise." Although it be a prayer, it assumes the form of a psalm. "And his brightness was as the sunlight; he had rays streaming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power. Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. He stood, and made the earth tremble: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting" (Hab 3:1-6).

{*It seems plain that the Hebrew refers here as in the Psalms to music, instruments accompanying the song suitably. In this case it was no doubt of a wild enthusiastic measure, expressive of joy and triumph.}

Nevertheless God occupies Himself with that which men may despise. He takes notice of the little; and this just because He is infinitely great. Those who merely aspire after a greatness which they do not possess are afraid of demeaning themselves by noticing that which is small. Not so where there is real greatness. Israel were His object, not the rivers or the sea. He sought and would save His people. "I saw the tents of Chushan in affliction: and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble. Was Jehovah displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thy horses and thy chariots of salvation? Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers. The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high. The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear. Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the nations in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people." There we see what was near the prophet's heart: was it not also near Jehovah's heart? "Even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah" (verses 7-13).

To a Jew's mind, and very properly, the salvation of Israel is as a rule bound up with the judgment of the Gentiles when the chosen people shall rise to their allotted and good eminence, at length fitted for it after humiliation, and the Gentiles willingly subject (though there may be, especially and growingly at the end but feigned obedience) spite of their long-continued resistance in pride. With the Christian salvation has another sense, and implies our calling out of the world to heaven. The world is left undisturbed: the individual soul is called by faith out of it to the Lord, and so it will be up to His coming for us and our change into conformity with His glory. But when salvation comes to the Jews it will be by the putting down of the enemies that strive round about and against them. That is, it is power that comes down to earth, and deals with the world, leaving the Jews for blessing, by the destruction of their enemies under the hand of God. We, on the contrary, are entitled to enjoy the salvation of God in Christ by His cross whilst the evil of mankind remains unjudged; and we, being thus delivered and knowing it in the power of the Spirit, are therefore called out to be separate to the Lord in grace, yet with full sense of personal victory through His death and resurrection.

The account of the judgment proceeds: "Thou didst strike through with his staves the head of his villages: they came out as a whirlwind to scatter me: their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly. Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters."

The prophet then expresses even his awe at such a solemn interference for Israel: what should those feel who must be objects of divine vengeance? "When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops."

Although however there is such a magnificent description of the sure judgment of the enemy in all its extent (not merely the Chaldeans now, but all their enemies), and although there is the assured salvation of the people of God, even the Jews, the prophet meantime answers to the faith of which he had himself been the preacher by one of the finest expressions of that faith which the Old Testament contains. "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls:" none able to show them any good. "Yet I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will joy in the God of my salvation. Jehovah the Lord is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my* stringed instruments."

{*That there is any ground to infer from the "my" that the prophet was a Levitical chorister is refuted by Isaiah 38:20, as another has remarked. Certainly Hezekiah was no Levite, as he should be if that reason were valid. I am aware that so runs the tradition, as we learn from the Chisian MS. of the Inscription to Bel and the Dragon in the LXX.; but this is all very precarious.}

Thus, with this song which (in strains equally suited and magnificent as a whole) brings out the triumph of glory at the end, and meanwhile the path which faith pursues in the confidence of divine grace spite of all adverse appearances, the prophet closes his remarkable message.

36 Zephaniah.

Zephaniah.

Lectures on the Minor Prophets.

W. Kelly.

Zephaniah like Habakkuk will be found to have some points of resemblance with the prophet Jeremiah; and this not merely in the fact that the Chaldean is the enemy of which both treat, but also in their both setting forth the blessedness reserved for Israel and Jerusalem when the judgments of Jehovah shall have been executed on the nations. Nevertheless there is this wide difference between the two lesser prophets; that Zephaniah in treating of the glory of God is much more external, while Habakkuk dwells far more on the needed exercises of heart with God's answer to the Jew both now and hereafter. Thus the two minor prophets take up each a separate item of the prophet of Anathoth. Jeremiah's prophecy abounds in internal exercises of heart, and here Habakkuk resembled him: we see his grief and hear his complaints and laments to Jehovah when evil was allowed to prevail. On the other hand he shows us the execution of divine judgment which will set aside the proud Gentiles, and reduce the people of God to their true place, in order that, being abased in heart, they may be exalted outwardly. Zephaniah presents rather the latter, as Habakkuk the former. Jerusalem is in the foreground, but in connection with the general judgment of the nations from whose evils the Jews had in no way kept themselves apart. Thus there is no precise mention of the apostate powers of the latter day. As Antichrist therefore is not named or specially described, so neither is the Messiah, save generally as the Jehovah God of Israel.

"The word of Jehovah which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah." Thus we have a full and clear account of Zephaniah, as also of the time in which he wrote. It was of no small importance that there should be prophets raised up during the time of Josiah and subsequently. Jeremiah was rather the latest of the three already named. The importance morally of their prophecies then was, that no one either at the time of Josiah or afterwards should be deceived as to the facts of the partial reformation accomplished during the reign of that pious prince. There is nothing that is more apt to deceive and to disappoint than a wave of blessing which passes over a nation so far gone from righteousness as the Jews of that day. Josiah's eminent piety, his remarkable zeal in dealing sternly with what profaned the name of Jehovah, above all the subjection of heart to the word of God which peculiarly characterized himself, in no way set the nation right. Undoubtedly there must have been then, as always, sanguine hopes indulged by the excellent of the earth. It was of great moment therefore that God's mind about the matter should be made known in order that none, if deceived for the moment, should be too bitterly disappointed at last. We ought to appreciate heartily whatever of blessing God gives, and seek to be kept from a passive or insensible spirit.

On the other hand to look for more than a partial and passing accomplishment of good to individuals through the grace of God is not wise. The blessing that is given, while a matter of immense thankfulness towards souls and of praise to His own mercy, really leaves the moral state of those who reject it worse than before. It does not fail in the end to accelerate the downward course of the mass, and thus brings in a time of deeper ruin. So we see that there was but a short space indeed that separated Josiah's bright burst of pious effort for God's glory from the awful evils which succeeded and brought an insupportable judgment from God on the guilty people. Zephaniah was one of those who spoke in Jehovah's name during these promising times; and thus he begins his message: "I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith Jehovah."

I do not doubt that such times as those of Josiah answer more or less to revivals of religion, or awakenings in our own or other days under the gospel. And assuredly it is solemn to feel that, besides the blessing to souls here and there, the general result is that they only increase much the responsibility of those who do not profit by the testimony God thus renders. We may and ought to be thankful for fruit to His grace, but should not forget that they evidently seem on the background to be a visitation not without grave consequences to the despisers.

At the same time, I think that the resemblance is stronger to such a dealing of God as the Reformation. For a revival is more a work of awakening sinners; whereas this was a recall of the people of God also to their place from idols and profanity. No doubt sinners were awakened, but there was a loud call to the people of God generally to hear the word of God instead of acquiescing in their own declension and dishonour. Now this is not always the case. We hear of some such effects locally; for instance in the revival which God wrought by Jonathan Edwards and others of his day in their districts of America. The Whitfield-Wesleyan movement was widespread in arousing sinners, but extremely partial as to any dealings with the state of Christian people. They were both, however zealous, too ignorant of the word and ways of God to help the church of God to any appreciable extent. I need not speak much of the comparatively recent revival chiefly in the North of Ireland, which spread over various parts of the world about the same time; but it seems plain that whatever may be God's goodness in a revival, it is in general a rebuke to the wickedness of man in its day — a strong reclamation on God's part against the routine in which the mass consent to go on, as well as a display of grace exceptionally. But the effect of slighting such a summons of His, not only in others, but even in those who have shared the revival and thus enjoyed blessing from God, leaves them as the rule in a worse state than before. This seems to have always been the history of such movements.

Some I know believe that there has been a change in a large part of Christendom outwardly since the revival in the North of Ireland and in America, from 1857 to 1860, especially in its operation, so as to call forth a great many preachers of all sorts outside the clergy or the various official guides of the denominations. But I am disposed to attribute the impulse given to lay preaching to a very different testimony, though it is possible that the distress among the souls awakened at that time may have impressed on it a more practical shape. And this continues. The force of free preaching does not appear to be spent as yet, so far as outward appearances go. Whether, and how far this may be an important event towards the close has been a question sometimes. The worst sign is that in a large part even of that evangelizing which continues, it takes the shape of considerable bitterness against such truth as condemns themselves. Those who do so cannot but help on the Laodiceanism of Christendom in these days. Latitudinarianism will be increasingly a snare; and the most systematic and guilty part comes from those who should know better, but are really so much the worse because of the mercy God had shown them and of their deliverance in measure from mere traditionalism. What an ungrateful return from the heart for such goodness of God! — the using grace to slight what is due to Christ and the truth and holiness of God, who calls us to a thorough renunciation of self and of the world for His name. This certainly cannot be said to have been the effect of the movement hitherto; is it so still less as time goes on? If not, a free spread of truth which does not separate to Christ from worldliness, and forms which ignore the Holy Spirit, must in the long run contribute to help on the apostacy more or less decidedly. In fact, as far as we can see, everything moves in that direction.

It would be hard to say what does not in one way or another tend to lessen the authority of divine truth in men's minds. Take, for instance, the Ecumenical Council. The promulgation of absurd decrees about the infallibility of the Pope will no doubt largely increase the superstitious party and their pride of heart and blindness. On the other hand there is the reaction of those that despise and laugh it to scorn, knowing who and what are those who put forth such exorbitant pretensions, that the claim of God's truth is the merest imposture, covering over a group of ambitious priests working out their own glory by the most glaring perversion of the word of God, and this in a way highly calculated to deceive many, because they say a great deal that is unquestionably true and right. They talk about the church just as if there was reality in the Romish system; they also decry the amazing pride and profanity of modern science in setting itself against the word of God; so that in this way there is an immense deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish. Thus on every side is seen that which leads both directly and indirectly to the abandonment of divine revelation and more particularly of Christianity, which is called the apostacy.

The Lord then pronounces through Zephaniah the clean destruction that is coming, not only in a general sentence, but by a minute enumeration of particulars. "I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumbling-blocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith Jehovah." The completeness of the ruin would prove the hand of Jehovah; for why else beast as well as man? why birds of heaven and fishes of the sea? But the root lay in the stumbling-blocks (or idols) of the wicked, who should all perish together. Hence the cutting off man from the face of the land (or earth) closes this emphatic sentence of Jehovah. The judgment should be universal.

But there is more than that: — "I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, the name of the Chemarim [that is, idolatrous priests only named besides in 2Ki 23:5, Hos 10:5, and supposed by Gesenius to be so designated from their black ecclesiastical dress] with the priests." What made this idolatry so offensive was the joining of the idols of the nations with Jehovah. To be what we might call a plain right-down idolater was not nearly so evil as to show that you know the true God and yet put false gods on a level with Him. Such an outrage against God as this is specially described here. "And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear to Jehovah, and that swear by Malcham." And certainly, to apply the principle to the present day, as we have just now been speaking of revivals such as Josiah's and their bearing on the future crisis of Christendom, as then on the crisis of Judah, this confusion is remarkably characteristic of both times. "And them that are turned back from Jehovah; and those that have not sought Jehovah, nor enquired for him." There might be both — two rather different classes — those on the one hand who owned Jehovah in a measure, and then had abandoned Him with slight and insult; and those on the other hand who never had been even outwardly awakened to care for Him or even enquire after Him. Then comes the warning. "Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord Jehovah: for the day of Jehovah is at hand: for Jehovah hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests. And it shall come to pass in the day of Jehovah's sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel." He would begin with those who had the chief responsibility.

"In the same day also will I punish all those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith Jehovah, that there shall be the noise of a cry from the fish gate, and an howling from the second, and a great crashing from the hills." It will be universal consternation and chastening from God. "Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh, for all the merchant people* are cut down; all they that bear silver are cut off. And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles." Not merely those that were openly violent — no one should escape, no class or condition. They "say in their heart, Jehovah will not do good, neither will he do evil." It is Sadduceanism before the Sadducees. "Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation: they shall also build houses, but not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof;" that is, they shall be struck in the very point of their unbelief. "The great day of Jehovah is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of Jehovah." They denied this altogether; they said Jehovah would do neither good nor harm: He was a God that took His ease as they did. "Even the voice of the day of Jehovah: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness."

{* It is literally "all the people of Canaan," which may be as has been thought, a cutting designation of the men of Jerusalem generally, rather than of the trading classes. It appears to me, however, that the clause which follows is favourable to the more common version.}

It is of great importance that we should hold and testify "that day," — not merely the *coming* of the Lord but His *day.* Although it indicates undoubtedly much more for the state that the coming of the Lord is dear to us as our heavenly hope, nevertheless there may be an unwillingness to face the solemn truth of the day of Jehovah. Where there is high truth and low practice, the day of Jehovah can never be honestly testified; it does not then receive that place in our practical service which it has in the word of God. It will not satisfy the heart to substitute for our proper hope that which bears on the world in the judicial excision of evil here below; it will never do to live in or on it, because it is not the suited food for the soul; still it is a solemn and necessary truth to hold up before our own eyes and those of all others. Were there truthfulness with a graciously exercised heart, not only would there be a free and joyful waiting for Christ, but nothing could be allowed knowingly inconsistent with His mind to call forth His judgment. For instance we constantly find this kind of self-deceit where a Christian lives in worldliness, which leads him to say that at all events his heart is not in it.

Now it is quite possible there may be cases where one can quite understand meek trust to be the genuine feeling, as where a wife or a child may be held responsible to obey. Thus suppose such an one in the worldly mansion belonging to a worldly Christian of rank: clearly one under authority is not at liberty to enter on a crusade against splendours of furniture, equipage, or the general style of living that belongs to a great house. Nevertheless the Christian child should undoubtedly seek, while personally a Nazarite, to abstain from offensive demonstrations to its parents. This would not hinder a decided taking part with what was despised and rejected whenever an opportunity was allowed. Faith now as ever shares the afflictions of the people of God, and more particularly identifies itself with what is scorned and hated in separation from the world. But it is most happy where, along with fidelity to the Lord, one sees a meek and lowly mind giving conspicuous honour to father and mother, from which I need not say Christ in no way absolves. At the same time there should be the constant manifestation that the heart is with Him who is the treasure in the heavens. If possession came, such an one would know how to turn all to a testimony, not of sanctified worldliness, as if this could be, but to Him who suffered on the cross, whereby he is crucified to the world and the world to him. Love for Christ's appearing strengthens the pilgrim in his path, though only Christ's love makes one a pilgrim. But it is evil where one perseveres in going on with what grieves the Lord on the plea that He will set all to rights in His day.

Nor is it to be doubted that in the day of the Lord there will be something like a reflection of what the path has been here, loss in case of unfaithfulness and reward for the service of His name. But it would appear from the New Testament, I think, that this to us is rather called the day of Christ, thus distinguishing between it and the day of Jehovah. Assuredly Christ is Jehovah; but still it is a very different thought where He is so styled, as in the Revelation. And it is remarkable that in Zephaniah — so external is its usage comparatively — we never see Him brought in as Christ at all. We find simply Jehovah here. It is therefore more judicial. If "the day of Christ" may be received as judicial too, it has certainly more application, even in that character, to what was based on and flowed from Christ. "The day of Christ" is that aspect of the day of the Lord in which those who have lived and walked and suffered in grace will have their portion assigned to them by the Master. Hence the apostle Paul says a good deal about "the day of Christ" in the Epistle to the Philippians. There we have the results of service and of suffering, of thorough identification with Christ now.

In the common version of the second Epistle to the Thessalonians (2Th 2:2), it is a twofold mistake to present the error then at work among the saints, as "the day of Christ is at hand."* Had the false teachers said this, they had not gone far astray. But they pretended the authority of the apostle and indeed of the Spirit for the assertion that the day of the Lord was actually arrived, or then present — not "at hand;" just as in another epistle we hear of such as affirmed the resurrection to have taken place already. Thus "present" was what they meant. They had, no doubt, some idea of a figurative day of the Lord, pretty much like what obtains at the present time in Christendom generally. For, strange to say, not a few theologians hold that the baptized are in the first resurrection, and that we are all throughout the Christian period reigning with Christ! The thousand years are thus of course taken as an indefinite period in a similarly vague sense. The chief difference is that the saints at Thessalonica had better knowledge than those who indulge in such thoughts now. They saw that the day of the Lord was a day of darkness and trouble; and in danger of feeling overmuch the troubles then come on themselves (*cf.* 1Th 3:3-5), they too readily believed them to be at any rate the beginning of that day. Encountering persecution, they thought that the day of the Lord had come at last. But the very error shows they were so full of the coming of the Lord as to be open through lack of intelligence to a delusion on that side. Only observe it was not through excited hope but terror; because, when their troubles came, they thought that the day of the Lord was actually on them. They needed to be recalled to their hope and the gathering of the saints to the Lord so as to come with Him in that day. Such is the apostolic correction; not putting off the hope (as most do now), but distinguishing it from the day of the Lord which few seem to see; for that day cannot be till the evil is ripe which is to be then only put down.

{* The true reading is the day of the Lord, not "Christ," and the proper rendering would be is present, not "at hand."}

Thus "that day," "the day of Christ," is to have an aspect toward those who are now Christians, who will be with Him in the glory in the heavens. But it is "the day of Christ" more particularly which affects a Christian. "The day of Jehovah" in scripture is invariably that which deals with the world, with living men and their works on the earth, and finally with the frame and elements of the universe itself, but this rather at the close of His day than at its beginning, as we gather from the comparison of several scriptures. "The great day of Jehovah is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of Jehovah: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against Jehovah: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of Jehovah's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land." Nothing can be plainer. It is distinctly judicial, and this as regards the habitable world. "The day of Christ" has also a discriminative bearing, and this with a view to rewarding the saints who shall have laboured for the Lord or suffered meanwhile. All will be made up to them then. It is possible that this has been overlooked: what has not been? Excellent men, in their desire to give grace its scope in redemption and our justification by faith, have failed now and then to leave room for another principle equally plain. The apostle Paul, if weighed, would keep us by the Spirit both large in heart, and free from the confusion of things that differ. It is he who insists that we "are saved by grace," and that "every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour." Not only will God be justified by our account of all as it is to Christ, but the ways and work and suffering with Christ of those who are His will have their due place and display in the glory of the kingdom by and by.

The apostle had this certainty before him as a measure and test of the present. See it in 1 Corinthians 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 15, to take but one epistle; and this not the most abundant in such interweaving of the future with all the present life. "That day" becomes even more before his spirit as he approaches the end of his own labours, though we know that from the first he had not failed to preach the kingdom. I admire the exceeding breadth of Paul, as indeed well one may in every one who, steering clear of laxity, its counterfeit, proves spiritual capacity for it. It becomes not the Christian to be narrow. Nevertheless who can avoid seeing the tendency to be so on this or that? Be assured that it is not only weakness but a danger wherever it may be. I grant, however, that even narrowness in and for God's truth is far better than that lax uncertainty and spurious liberalism in divine things which is growingly a snare in this evil day.

Take the contrary of this in the apostle and his preaching. The very man to whom all are most indebted for the gospel of the grace of God, set forth as none else did that particular phase of it which is called the gospel of the glory of Christ. At the same time he preached the kingdom of God as decidedly as possible. He never was afraid of the ignorant outcry that this is low ground. The fact is that hasty and little minds say so, unable to take in more than one idea, and apt to be intoxicated with that one; but the apostle exhibits that excellent largeness and elasticity which gives its place to every message which God has revealed, which pretends not to choose in scripture, but thankfully takes and uses the testimony of God as it is given. It seems to me that we really lower the revival of truth grace has wrought by allowing the idea that this truth or that is the only truth for the day. The speciality of our blessing is that we have got into a large place, contemptible as it looks to unbelief — that no truth comes amiss, and that all truth is for this day. I hold this to be an important point for us, avoiding the pettiness of fancying or seeking a factitious value for whatever happens to be dawning with especial force on our own minds.

It is a snare the more to be dreaded because it has ever led to the making of sects through an active mind laying hold of (or rather taken captive by) some favourite notion or even truth. I consider it then an essentially sectarian bias; and that the true and distinctive blessing of what God has given us now in these days is not so much laying hold of this or that truth higher than others accept, though this be true, but the heart open to the truth in all its extent, and this bound up with Christ personally, as the only possible means of deliverance, if by grace we walk there in the power of the Spirit, from every kind of pettiness. It will be found too, that it is immensely important practically for holiness, because we are so weak that we are likely to take just what we like and what at the time suits our own character, habits, position, circumstances, and capacity; whereas what we want is to detect, judge, and thus be saved from self; not that which ever spares flesh, but what gives us to mortify our members on the earth, as well as what in divine love suits the varying wants of souls around us, and above all His glory, who has given us not only a particular part of His mind, but the whole of it. Thus, as it has been well said, the peculiarity really of the right position is its universality. That is, it is not merely a special portion or phase of truth, no matter how blessed, but the truth in all its fulness as the divinely given safeguard from particular views, and the communication of the exceeding largeness of God's grace and truth and ways for us in the world. "All things are yours." Anything that tends by distinctive marks to make a party by bringing forward one's self or one's own views as practically a centre is self-condemned.

For this reason it is, I think, that, while holding fast, for instance, the precious hope of Christ's heavenly glory, and that which is so connected with its revelation, namely, the church in its heavenly relationship and privileges, to see every other aspect is in its own place of great importance. Again, the individual is important just as much as the body, and in a certain sense more so. Above all to hold up Christ is to my mind of incomparably greater moment than either the Christian or the body. Indeed the way most of all to profit both the body and the individual saint is by the constant maintenance of Christ's glory, and this too not more as the exalted man in heaven than as a divine person in the fulness of His grace on earth, yet withal the dependent and obedient man, who never sought His own will or aught save the glory of His Father who sent Him.

And as we touch on the subject, let me just make the passing remark, which may be helpful to those who desire an entrance into God's revealed mind, that a phrase too often misunderstood spite of its plain force in 1Jn 1:1 — "That which was from the beginning" — does not refer to Christ in eternity or in heaven, but to Him on earth: so utterly mistaken is the principle of merely directing attention to that which seems the nearest object or the highest point of view. The truth is, that the snare lies in this, because the mighty work of redemption, and the position which Christ has taken, may be too much regarded in its resulting consequences for us. What brings ourselves into such special blessedness is thus in danger of being made more important than what has even glorified God the Father morally. For this last we must look not to our heavenly place and privileges but to Christ's person and work in all its extent. Here the manifestation of Christ on earth is of capital moment. It is the beginning of His presence and path here. In the beginning (John 1) He was before all things were created. The only begotten Son in the bosom of the Father declared Him. The work lays the ground for an association with Him; but His manifestation here is the beginning from which God revealed Himself in grace. In due time redemption and union with Him in heavenly places and all else follow. We must thus leave room for all the truth; if one is merely occupied with a particular point of truth, very great harm may result to one's own soul and to others.

A few words on a subject often referred to, the difference between the gospel of grace and the gospel of glory, may be seasonable here. The gospel of the grace of God is the larger expression; the gospel of the glory of Christ is a part of it. It is therefore an error to set the two in contrast, though we may distinguish and use in due season, as we find each used in the word of God. But that the one is an advance on the other is a blunder. The gospel of the grace of God includes the gospel of the glory of Christ, while it embraces a great deal more. It takes in the unfolding of redemption such as we have it for instance in Romans, — "propitiation through his blood;" it takes in His death and resurrection with its immense consequences. On the other hand, in looking only at the gospel of the glory, all this may be left out; souls carried away by what is new to them are even in danger of slighting what is deepest without intending it. Let us then beware of making a system, instead of being subject to the truth. Of course it would be done unconsciously by every godly person; but in itself it is always a serious feature.

If the first chapter set forth the coming ruin of Judea because of the corruption of people and princes, and the horrors of the day of Jehovah falling on their selfish security and vainly trusted appliances, we have a call to repentance in the second. "Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of Jehovah come upon you, before the day of Jehovah's anger come upon you." It is an appeal to humble themselves before the Lord. "Seek ye Jehovah, all ye meek of the earth." We see there are these two calls. To the nation there is a suited warning; but an earnest appeal is made to the remnant of righteous Jews. These were "the meek of the earth." "Seek ye Jehovah, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of Jehovah's anger."

Throughout scripture we see this to be the portion of the godly Jew. They do not look to be caught up to heaven as we do, but they hope to be hidden on earth. They are not removed from the scene and then the wicked judged, neither are they displayed with the Lord returning from heaven for that day; but they are hidden in the day of His anger. It is the precise opposite of the Christian's portion, though both are to be blessed. When the day comes, we shall come along with Him who brings it. In that day of judgment on the world they will be hidden in His mercy and faithfulness. Instead of their going to the Father's house, they will have their chambers to hide them on the earth. This is what Isaiah (Isaiah 26) shows clearly in his ample account of that day. "Come, my people, enter thou" — not into My mansions, but — "into thy chambers." Before the dawning of that day we enter into the heavenly chambers, or the Father's house. We are taken and seen there before the judgments begin. Compare Revelation 4, 5. When the day comes, instead of being hidden, we are displayed, whereas the Jews (the godly alone, of course) will not be seen, or at least they will enter into their chambers till the indignation is overpast. That hiding place is prepared for them by the pity of God. We see something analogous in Revelation 12 where the woman had a place prepared of God for her in the wilderness. It is the same substantial truth whether before the day comes, or when it does come. "Hide thyself as it were for a little moment until the indignation be overpast." By the "indignation" is meant God's wrath, which will be poured out on the nations, and more particularly on the apostate Jews. The indignation of God takes in both; but it is very evident that the Christian has nothing to do with either. He is called out from the earth and man's portion here, and is entitled to wait for heavenly hopes with Christ.

Not so even the faithful Jews at the end of this age. Their hope can only be enjoyed when their enemies are destroyed by divine judgments, during which they are preserved of God. For "behold Jehovah cometh out of his place to punish." But our hope is to be taken into the Lord's place before He comes out of it in vengeance. Thus in every respect the position and hopes of the Christian are contrasted even with those of the righteous remnant who follow us on earth.

We go out in spirit to meet the Bridegroom, and will have our hope at His coming for us in peace. It is no question of a special tribulation, or of being hidden, as far as the heavenly saints are concerned. To the godly remnant of Jews it will be so when the Lord deals retributively with their guilty brethren after the flesh and the nations. With the remnant common views hastily confound the hopes of the Christian; whereas a closer knowledge of the scriptures proves them to be distinct.

The essential difference arises from this, that all through a Christian is one not of the world, even as Christ is not, and hence is looking to be taken out of the earth. Accordingly it is not only true morally from the time when he is brought to God, but it runs through his calling up to the end: I do not say from conversion simply as such. For important as this may be, the work of conversion is more what takes place always in every renewed soul, Jew or not. But certainly in the believer's separation to Christ by the power of the Holy Ghost he is called out of everything here to God as manifesting Himself in Christ; and the issue will be that he, as thus called out, will be taken up to be with the Lord without disturbing things or people outside. The world goes on. The Christian hears what the world does not hear; the Christian sees a glory that is invisible to man as such. Truly if the rulers of this world had seen it, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." We *do* see it. Accordingly our portion is to be thus called out from first to last; and so it will be when Christ comes for us. Then we shall be taken, as we have remarked, into His chambers — not merely enter chambers of our own on the earth, as the Jew at a later day, and be hidden there till the indignation is passed away. We are called out for heaven in the day of grace: they will be hidden in their chambers in the time of Jehovah's indignation. At that time will they be severed to Jehovah; and then will He come out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth; whereas during the whole dealing with the church of God the earth and its inhabitants are left to pursue their own way. The only testimony which goes on is one of grace towards them, if peradventure they might hear and believe.

Then we have the warning of what will take place in the day of Jehovah's anger, which no doubt has been partially accomplished, and will be yet more. "For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation: they shall drive out Ashdod at the noon day, and Ekron shall be rooted up." These were cities of Philistine power. "Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea coast, the nation of the Cherethites! the word of Jehovah is against you; O Canaan, the land of the Philistines, I will even destroy thee, that there shall be no inhabitant. And the sea coast shall be dwellings and cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks. And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon;" which has clearly not been accomplished yet to the full. "In the houses of Ashkelon they shall lie down in the evening: for Jehovah their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity." In fact the Jews have been carried off into a longer dispersion since then. The captivity in the days of Nebuchadnezzar was nothing at all so extreme as their scattering to the ends of the earth, consequent on the Roman destruction of Jerusalem.

"I have heard the reproach of Moab." It is not merely the Philistines on the west, but Moab, etc., on the east who must come into judgment for their proud enmity. "I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the revilings of the children of Ammon, whereby they have reproached my people, and magnified themselves against their border. Therefore as I live, saith Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation: the residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them. This shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of Jehovah of hosts. Jehovah will be terrible unto them: for he will famish all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen."

It is not here the rejected Son of God turning away from the jealous religionists of tradition, and opening out the grace of the Father and the power of the Spirit, which characterize the hour that now is, during which neither Jerusalem nor Samaria is more than Japan or Sierra Leone for sanctity, but Christ received by faith displaces the old man, and flesh and forms vanish before the gift of the Holy Ghost consequent on redemption. In the period which Zephaniah contemplates there is no such absolute blotting out of special place and outward show as according to Joh 4:21-24 we now know or ought to know in Christianity. Hence we see no sentence of death as it were on the ancient city of solemnities, but only, as in Mal 1:11, the opening for worship elsewhere "each from his place," even all the isles of the nations.

That the great change for the earth — the full putting down of idolatry — awaits the execution of divine judgment is plain everywhere. We can clearly see that idolatry goes on, with the worst forms in Christendom itself; for there is nothing so bad as idolatry where Christ is named, and there is nothing that more characterizes Christendom than the prevalence of Romanism which is essentially idolatrous, besides the monstrous assumption of the Papacy more than ever towering up in its vanity against God. For what is idolatry, if not the worship of images, in whatever measure they may mete it, the worship too of saints, angels, and the Virgin Mary? Whatever may be judged of the Greek and Oriental bodies, I should say that idolatry is not characteristic of Protestantism at all, but rather headiness, and, among the worst, high-minded self-will, which sets up to judge the word of God. This is much more the public vice of corrupt Protestantism, which therefore tends to rationalism. But the ritualistic system is another root of evil, which does not tend to idolatry only, but is in fact idolatrous. (Gal 4:9-10) I should not however call it Protestant. We all know that a certain portion among the Reformed in these and other lands is falling into Ritualism and ripe for Rome whenever it suits both.

Having seen the divine dealing with their neighbours, we find a judgment that takes place on some of those who, though farther off, came into contact with the chosen people — the Ethiopians on the extreme south, and again, on the north-east, Assyria: "Ye Ethiopians also shall be slain by my sword. And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness."

It is evident, save to those who regard the prophets as impostors, that this utterance of Zephaniah must have preceded the destruction of Nineveh. He lived, there can be little doubt, in Josiah's reign. "And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations. Both the cormorant and the bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it; their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation shall be in the thresholds: for he shall uncover the cedar work. This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand." Thus we find it is a judgment which selects two classes, nations near and others afar off, to show the character of an universal judgment upon the world. It is the day of Jehovah on the earth.

But there follows a closer threat for the Jew. "Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city!" This is not Nineveh, but Jerusalem. The most solemn word of God is always reserved for His own people, city, and sanctuary. Judgment must begin at His house: the denunciation may end with it, but judgment begins there. Hence, therefore, we find this woe to complete all. "She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in Jehovah; she drew not near to her God. Her princes within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; they gnaw not the bones till the morrow." We find here therefore failure first towards Jehovah, then towards every one else — oppressive cruelty, and this persisted in too. Shamelessness in evil, once it is yielded to, always characterizes the fall of those that enjoyed better light but gave it up. There is nothing more blessed than light from God: where the heart basks in it, the conscience is quickened by it; but there is nothing so tremendous as where it is despised and becomes a name, a profane and common thing. "Her prophets are light and treacherous persons." They ought to have had most of all the mind of God. "Her priests have polluted the sanctuary." This would have been bad enough in the dwellings of Israel; what was it for the priests in the temple of Jehovah? "They have done violence to the law. The just Jehovah is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame." He abides faithful; so much the worse that "the unjust" should be not a heathen but an Israelite.

Consequently we have what Jehovah must do not merely to the heathen but to Jerusalem. "I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant. I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction; so their dwelling should not be cut off, howsoever I punished them: but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings." As Jehovah rose early to send them messages and warnings, they rose early to indulge in their wickedness. Hence comes the sentence, "Therefore wait ye upon me, saith Jehovah, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy."

But the day of judgment on the quick ushers in the predicted era of earth's blessedness: as it is said by an earlier prophet, "the acceptable year of Jehovah and the day of vengeance of our God." How strange that good men should overlook what God's word makes so plain, if one knew not the blinding power of tradition! "For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of Jehovah, to serve him with one consent." This does not mean the people of Israel, but the peoples in relationship with Jehovah among the nations. But it does not hence follow that the spread of Christianity and any check thereby given to idolatry throughout the world are here specifically predicted. When it is fulfilled, it will be no dislodgment of idolatry here or there in parts of the globe, still less will it admit of the rising up of the pollutions of anti-christian systems, while vast regions still remain the theatre of varied and most degrading idolatry. Scripture reveals an age to come, distinct from the present and before the judgment of the great white throne (Revelation 20), during which divine mercy will bless the nations far and wide. This, and not Christianity properly so called, is here set forth.

Then again we read, "From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed shall bring mine offering." These suppliant worshippers are the Jews who return from beyond the rivers of Cush (the Nile and the Euphrates) which ordinarily girded them round.* In that day shame for the past will be taken from the Jews: not of course that they shall not deeply mourn and truly repent, but the reproach shall be removed from them. Their vain self-exaltation shall disappear, and they shall be the meek of the earth. The reference is not to gospel but to Messianic times, after the execution of the judgments just spoken of. It is impossible therefore justly to bring in here the spread of Christianity, which has not overthrown idolatry, but after subverting it within the Roman Empire has apostatized to it largely far and wide. Hence even the advocates of such a loose interpretation are obliged to own that it has hitherto been only partially fulfilled. There is anything but the "one shoulder" in Christendom for the service of the Lord. Do they not understand that it is only when divine judgment has been poured out on all the assembled nations that *then* Jehovah will work this mighty and beneficent change to His own glory? It is the blessedness of the earthly kingdom of our Lord.

{*The meaning is not, as Dr. Henderson seems to incline to, a people in the west of Abyssinia, called Falashas. Isaiah (Isa. 18:1) tells as that a nation beyond the rivers of Cush (for there was an Asiatic as well as African Cush) should interfere for Israel; but this would come to nothing. Here Jehovah promises that the Jews shall bring His offering from beyond the seats of their old enemies of chief power.}

For along with God's judgment of the nations will be a new heart to Israel, and upon Jerusalem shall be the glory for a defence. There shall be then the returning tide of divine mercy, when the promises shall be fulfilled to the full and established for ever. "In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain." It is the fruit of grace undoubtedly; but it is want of intelligence to see in this the picture of the gospel state. We must leave room for the varied dealings of God according to His word. It is the new age, not the present evil age. "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people." There must be moral integrity as well as true lowliness before they can be entrusted with the throne. They are destined to have the first dominion: ere that they will know a humiliation not by circumstances only but by grace in spirit which will fit them for their future greatness.

And the afflicted and poor people "shall trust in the name of Jehovah. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies" — the very faults they have been so notorious for during their sorrowful and often persecuted sojourn among the Gentiles. Deceit has peculiarly marked the Jew in his exiled state: it is apt to be the character of a down-trodden people. Those who have things their own way can afford to have a kind of honesty after the flesh; but in the case of people for ages hunted and destroyed, and the object of unprecedented rapine and cruelty as the poor Jews were, it was not to be wondered at. Where grace is not known in Christ, persecution generates this kind of deceit in language as well as iniquity in many an other way. But the change is at hand and here announced: "The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid." There will be the removal of all the old occasion for fear externally; and even before this a moral change will have been produced by the grace of God within them. It is not in outward things really to form the heart in any case. But where mind and conscience are depraved, circumstances furnish incentives to the inroad and practice of evil, and thus aggravate, no doubt. On the other hand Jehovah in His mercy will work His own mighty work within, as He also will mow down their adversaries. Thus circumstances will be turned in their favour at the very time when Jehovah has wrought His great work. It will be what the Lord Jesus calls "the regeneration" (Matthew 19), when the twelve tribes of Israel shall judge and be blessed in more than royal glory under the Son of man. For we must remember that "regeneration" does not mean as is commonly supposed a subjective change or a new nature given as in the new birth, but a blessed position into which we are brought now by divine power in Christ, or by and by established publicly when He comes in glory. It is now known to faith of course, yet is not so much the inward work of the Spirit, but rather the new place that we enter by resurrection in virtue of His death.

Hence we read of being saved by the washing of regeneration. (Titus 3; compare 1 Peter 3) It is not merely that we are born again, but we have left the old behind and are now a new creation. Of course it supposes the new birth, or it is only a hollow form. The two things are identified in ecclesiastical writings, and frequently too in baptismal services we see the same mistake perpetrated which the Fathers first introduced. They always confound new birth and regeneration. Few Protestants have emancipated themselves from the error. But post-apostolic ecclesiastics were those that brought in the error. Regeneration goes beyond new birth, and supposes a passage into the new order of Christ, of which baptism therefore is the sign. Accordingly I should say that all saints were born again from the beginning, but that none (in this the only true sense of the word) were regenerate till after Christ's death and resurrection, when Christian baptism was instituted to set forth this truth. It is thus in my judgment not less but more full and significant. And though many may be baptized who are not born again, every one regenerate (save only in form) must *à fortiori* be born again. The theologians, like the Fathers, hold that every baptized person is born again, using the phrases as interchangeable. If baptized, a man was regenerate or born again according to their system. It appears to be true, however, that the washing of regeneration in Titus 3 refers to baptism; but then, as it seems to me, the language of the passage proves that the introduction into the quite new order of things in Christ is accompanied by a new nature or life; that in short the new creation supposes new life and much more, all being bound up together. "But after that the kindness and love of God appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us." It is not man merely dead in sins or owning it, but "he saved us by the washing of regeneration." We must not neutralise nor attenuate salvation. It would be dangerous to take "he saved us" as here spoken of the Christian in any sense barely external.

Indeed I think a great vice at the present moment is making "salvation" too cheap and too common a word. You will find many evangelicals constantly saying when a man is converted that he is saved; whereas it is probably quite premature to say so. If truly converted he will be saved; but it is unwarrantable to say that every converted person is saved, because he may still be under doubts and fears — that is, under law more or less in conscience. "Saved" brings one out from all sense of condemnation — brings one to God consciously free in Christ, not merely before God with earnestness of desire after godliness. A soul is not converted unless brought to God in conscience; but then one might be the more miserable and all but despairing in this state. Does scripture allow us to call such an one "saved"? Certainly not. He who is saved as here in Titus is one who being justified by faith has peace with God. It seems therefore that the distinction between what some call being *safe* and being *saved* is quite true and even helpful. Not that those safe could be lost, but that they are not yet brought out of all difficulties into rest of soul by faith. Then they are not safe only but saved. But it clearly is not possible that a converted person can be lost, for the life is eternal. One might be enlightened, and even be a partaker of the Holy Ghost, and yet be lost. Such a statement may surprise some; but such is the unequivocal intimation of Hebrews 6; and no believer need be in the least afraid of standing to the word of God. To state it so is but repeating what scripture says: it is another matter whether we can help people to understand it. Let the truth be ever so clear and sure, with some you may not always succeed. It is easy enough to give scripture for it, which ought to be sufficient.

Hence it is a mistake to regard as saved any person who is not brought into happy relationship with God through our Lord Jesus. Thus, to take a scripture example, Cornelius was obviously converted, and not a mere self-righteous man, before Peter went to him; but he certainly was not saved until Peter preached the word which he and his house received as the glad tidings of God. Thereon they were not born again, but they received the Holy Ghost; and who could forbid water? They were *saved.* Such is the whole matter to my mind. It is not the difference between quickening and conversion, which is only one of different aspects of the same substantial truth. Quickening regards man, and conversion is a turning to God; but the quickened soul is converted, and the converted soul is quickened. Such distinctions may be true enough, but require more delicate handling than they too often receive; for those who could treat them properly would hardly think it worth their while. As they have no practical value for the soul or the Lord, and no particular bearing on the word of God, they should be avoided. It seems to me trifling with souls to dwell on them. One ought almost to apologize for saying so much about the matter, which I do chiefly to warn all, and especially those who are young in the enjoyment of truth, from occupying their minds with shades of distinction which have no solidity whatever in them. Wherever the word is received, there is conversion, or turning to God, and there must be life in order that this should be real, not the mere effort of nature. If there be life, assuredly they must turn to God. It must be that the life is in a feeble state if the turning to God is not manifest. We cannot affirm that there is life unless there be a manifest turning to God. We may hope that life and conversion are there; but it must be felt to be serious when anything is equivocal about the soul in such a question. It is dangerous to be over-sanguine or to foster ungrounded hopes, though nothing excuses our encouraging souls to doubt. Uncertainty here is a wretched condition; but the feeblest desire Godward is not a thing to be crushed. It is right to foster the soul spite of that state, to entreat and warn, if they may thus get through their obstacles.

The only remark I would further make about "conversion" is, that scripture uses it not merely for the first turning to God, but for a turning again to Him if one has slipped away. This is really the main distinction between conversion and quickening. For quickening can be only once, but "conversion" may be repeated. Though this is not at all its usage in our tongue, it is the fact that scripture uses the word for both turning to God, and turning back if He have been departed from. That is, it includes what we call restoration of soul; as Peter after his first conversion was "converted" (Luke 22). Here restoring may be a fair paraphrase; but the literal meaning of the word is "converted." Conversion, however, in modern phraseology is restricted, especially by Calvinists, to the first effectual work. This, however, is not well. Those who identify quickening with salvation naturally slip into a disuse of scriptural language if not really bad doctrine. Such is the effect always of an error — it puts you in collision with scripture. Do not think it so slight a matter after all. Although we should never force the thought on any one, at the same time there need not be the slightest doubt of the distinctness of quickening from salvation, and of its importance. Identify quickening with salvation, and you are driven to think that Cornelius was a mere formalist at the time that he is said to be such a pious and prayerful man, abounding in almsgiving, which was not forgotten by God. Undoubtedly he was no common Gentile: there was, I doubt not, a wise choice of him to whom the gospel was sent first. To me there is not the slightest difficulty, because the same principle applies to every Old Testament saint. The peculiarity here is, that he, a pious Gentile, was brought into the proper New Testament or Christian state, (and this is what is called "salvation,") not when quickened or converted, which he may long have been, but only on hearing the gospel.

The two things then coalesced. This is sometimes important to remember; for supposing a soul heard the truth preached, and received it, there might be not conversion and quickening only, but also "salvation," practically all at once, though not, I think, ever at the same instant in any case. I doubt that it ever has been since the world began that a soul has known precisely together both conversion and salvation. So far from this, I admire God's wisdom that it is not so; if it were, it would be no small injury to a soul, because this supposes it passing in a moment out of its sense of guilt, and consequently of sin and sins of every sort, into perfect peace with God, without time left for the most needed moral exercise. To my mind such an instantaneous transition would be a real loss, not gain. That life is imparted by receiving the Lord Jesus at once is most true; as forgiveness is when the soul bows to the gospel. But we must leave room for all, without hurrying ourselves into a system which agrees neither with scripture nor experience.

In most of the epistles salvation is spoken of as a future thing. But I have spoken here of salvation as an accomplished fact, as in the Epistle to the Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles. But the twelve men who formed the first nucleus of the church at Ephesus were clearly converted, and in a transition state before they received the gift of the Holy Ghost in the name of the Lord Jesus. They were meeting as disciples, not knowing anything beyond the testimony and baptism of John. Were not they converted? They were as truly converted as the Baptist was, and this was a very real thing no doubt: nevertheless they had not yet received the Holy Ghost in the way that they afterwards experienced. In this we have the case clearly; and it was many years after Pentecost.

There is another sense of the word "save," etc. in Timothy, where it has a providential bearing. "The Saviour of all men, specially of them that believe." To Timothy and Titus it is the truth of salvation already effected, and the subject is looked at from the same point of view. Put the way people reason on the point is quite a mistake. They assume, because it is said, "He hath saved us," that we were brought into the whole blessing from the first moment of our faith. I am not aware that this is ever said in scripture. If it be without scripture, they have no right to lay down so absolutely, "He hath saved us;" for this is said, not when we were first attracted and broken down in soul and truly converted, but when we have submitted to the righteousness of God and received the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation.

"The Lord added to the church [or together] daily such as should be saved." This is doubtless a peculiar expression, meaning those destined to salvation out of the Jews, who as a people were on the way to judgment, and to the prison in which they still lie. Such as should be saved are the righteous remnant, really who are now added to the church instead of being left in their old place as Jews. We must remember there were a great many brethren — not only the hundred and twenty, but other names in Jerusalem. We hear of six hundred who saw the Lord at one time, and must have come to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. There may have been more. No doubt all these composed the assembly on whom the Holy Ghost first came. Then there were three thousand souls converted, who were added to those before, and all formed the assembly on the day of Pentecost. But the point here is that salvation precedes and is by the washing of regeneration. "He hath saved us by the washing of regeneration." This is not an expression of man, but of God; and of this change of place or standing baptism is the sign.

36 Zephaniah.contd

But besides "the washing of regeneration" there is "the renewing of the Holy Ghost," the washing of regeneration being, as I suppose, our introduction into the new place given us in Christ risen, as the renewing of the Holy Ghost is His mighty action internally, but operating in us conformably to it. That accompanies union; but I do not see that such is the point here. Regeneration is thus the new order of things seen in Christ risen, who makes all things new. As Christians we have this new place in Christ. So it is said in Rom 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." That is the position, but of course there is also an internal reality which those have who are there. Its being a position, and so objective, does not set aside a real subjective change: still it is a position. The Christian is no longer in Adam: he is (not merely going to be) in Christ Jesus. Along with that there is a real life given. Of this verse 2 treats, which may perhaps answer to the renewing of the Holy Ghost here. "For the law of the spiritual life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."

It is thus the work of the Spirit, and not merely so because the work of the Spirit is true in a new nature, but the new internal work of the Spirit is suitable to our new place. Of the renewing of the Holy Ghost it is therefore said, "which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour." It is the full place and life of the Christian by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Thus there are three things in this text. First, there is salvation distinctly stated, secondly, there is position by the washing of regeneration; and thirdly there is full nature and power of the Christian by the Holy Ghost. The salvation is made ours by the grace of God; then follows what puts us into our new place and attests it outwardly; and lastly the new power of the Spirit in the new nature which accompanies the Christian position. There is the general result, and then the means by which that result is attained, as I think. The great fact is that He saved us, and this is the way in which it is effectuated and enjoyed; and this abundantly. In John 10 it is rather "life more abundantly," life in resurrection power and fulness. Here it is said that the Holy Ghost is shed abundantly. Life in Christ is the main doctrine of John. Here the fulness of the Spirit's power is brought before us in connection with the work of regeneration. I think that there is an allusion to baptism in "the washing" of regeneration (and I agree with the Auth. Version that the sense is "washing," not laver as some critics have hastily assumed), because I believe that this is what baptism does show. Baptism sets forth not merely Christ's death, and that I am dead with Him, but, as we find here, it goes onward to the new position. It is not only death but more; and not at all death in sins, but death to sin with Christ. To suppose that it is but death is another instance of merely taking a particular part and making it the whole.

What might confirm this to some is Peter's way of looking at the matter. He says, "the like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us." Here again it is not merely what Christianity assumes of all mankind, but the sign of Christ's work in grace that is complete as far as the soul is concerned — salvation of soul. We have not yet salvation of body, but we have what is more important after all than the body could be if the soul were not saved. Hence it is not the mere outward act of washing away the filth of the flesh. As we are told, it is the request of a good conscience by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The expression used, complicated by our habit of reading it as given in the Authorized Version, may make this a little difficult; but as we are on the point, it had better be said that it is the thing requested rather than the answer. It is what a good conscience wants. When the conscience is dealt with savingly by God, a man will not be satisfied with anything less than acceptance in Christ. This is really "the request of a good conscience toward God." He wants to be as Christ is; to be free from self, free from sin as well as from condemnation. This is the true meaning: "the request of a good conscience by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." I take the resurrection as connected both with saving and with this request. Here we must close the long discussion into which the notice of "the regeneration" has led us. We know it in Christ; Israel will enjoy it manifestly when the prophets are fulfilled.

The close of the prophecy is a call to rejoice and exult. The daughter of Zion is summoned to shout for joy. "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem." This confirms what has been said already, that it is the general place of future blessing, and not a special one. When we hear of the peculiar position of Judah, as brought back from captivity and subjected to a fresh test to which Israel was not, then the rejected Messiah is brought in. Such is not the case with Zephaniah. We should not know from Zephaniah but that Messiah would come and bring in His glory as Jehovah all at once. In fact we do not hear Him called Messiah as such, but rather the king Jehovah. Verses 15-17 explain why they should thus rejoice. "Jehovah hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even Jehovah, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. Jehovah thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." What indeed is lacking? There is no finer description in the Bible of His complacent satisfaction when mercy has done all for the people that He loved. But the dark and cold night of oppression is supposed in verse 18. God does not disguise that up to the time of deliverance their position will be desolate, as in other respects, so especially in relation to the solemn assemblies. "I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden." Now He appears for their exaltation from the dust as well as putting down their oppressors. "At that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out: and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith Jehovah." Most gracious promise! Jehovah will remember all the sorrows and bring the Jews in for a name and a praise among all lands and tongues of the earth, when He reverses their captivity in their own sight as also before the eyes of all men.

37 Haggai

Haggai.

Lectures on the Minor Prophets.

W. Kelly.

The prophet Haggai is the first of those who followed the captivity. There is great simplicity in his testimony. Nevertheless we shall find the Spirit of Christ working as decidedly in him as in any other with peculiar distinctness. He bears witness of the future glory of the Lord Jesus; at the same time none more emphatically deals with the actual state of the remnant which had returned from Babylon. "In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, came the word of Jehovah by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying, Thus speaketh Jehovah, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that Jehovah's house should be built." This is no uncommon excuse — a want of care for the glory of the Lord, under the pretext that His time is not come. We find exactly the same pretence now, the same misuse of the coming of the Lord Jesus — the excuse that because the time is not come for glory to set things right by divine power, therefore we may yield lightly to the moral confusion and irregularities and departure from the will of God found at the present moment.

Again it is an inevitable alternative that we must be occupied, either with the Lord's things, or with our own. The apostle judged it needful to specify this root of evil in writing to an assembly of more than usual vigour and subjection to the word, the church at Philippi. There were those who made manifest — what alas! is everywhere a too common symptom among Christians — their want of heart for the things of others, for the things of Jesus Christ. It was so whence he wrote: all were seeking their own things. With this before him, the apostle shows that the day of Christ, rightly understood and applied, has a powerfully counteracting effect in unsparingly dealing with the selfishness of our hearts, the light of that day being thrown directly on what occupies the present day.

Haggai does just the same. There is no one that brings out more emphatically the duty of the Israelite for the present, but no one that puts before us more steadily the light of the coming kingdom of Jehovah. They are not to be set one against another; but, contrariwise, the more we believe that He is coming, the more ought we to be in earnest that there should be nothing now inconsistent with His coming. So when they said, "The time is not come, the time that Jehovah's house should be built," the word of Jehovah comes by the prophet, saying, "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?" Certainly there was in this a grievous forgetfulness of the glory of Jehovah; and it was the more painful because they had begun better. It had not been always so with the remnant.

Ezra is strongly connected with our prophet; for his book is a history which has the temple for its centre, as Haggai has evidently the very same centre — Jehovah's house. Nehemiah, as was natural, occupied himself most with the city and general state of the people. We are told in the book of Ezra that, when the remnant returned, the first thing they did was to set the altar upon its bases. In Ezra 3 we read: "And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries." This is exceedingly beautiful. The effect of fear upon a godly spirit was not that they attempted to protect themselves by human means, but that their heart turned to Jehovah and the altar of acceptance they enjoyed by His means. Their first thought was Jehovah; they brought Him in between them and their difficulties from the foe. "And they offered burnt offerings thereon unto Jehovah, even burnt offerings morning and evening. They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required; and afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of Jehovah that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto Jehovah. From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto Jehovah." It was the more remarkable because "the foundation of the temple of Jehovah was not yet laid." There was a fair pretext therefore for delay, if their heart had not been toward Him. Oh, if they had but gone on so! But it is no uncommon thing to begin in the Spirit and end in the flesh; and this was precisely what befell the remnant of Israel. Still there was the beginning in the Spirit. Haggai reproaches them with going on at any rate in the flesh. They did not walk according to their bright beginning, Having offered to Jehovah on the altar, they left off their care for the temple of Jehovah — they occupied themselves with their own things. Accordingly the prophet now points out to them what the result had been. Where was blessing or honour in their affairs? Was it that discouragements came in on account of the difficulties of the way?

Not merely so. This was true; but they were also occupied with settling themselves in the world. These two things constantly go together. As long as they looked to Jehovah, they found blessing and security; but directly Jehovah ceased to fill their eyes, then not merely the adversaries were seen, but plausible reasons for settling themselves down began to be felt. The altar was an admirable testimony to their faith. Before the temple was built, and while it was building, the altar was set on its base as the first thought: it was a beautiful feature among the returned Jews; but spiritual power failed to go on accordingly.

They allowed it to be a substitute, as it were, for the temple. Supposing persons showed a readiness and zeal, for instance, in emerging from mere forms of men to meet together in the name of the Lord, if this were made the whole matter, and there they stopped short without a thought of going on to learn the positive teaching of the Spirit and will of the Lord, or allowing room for God to act according to His own word, it would just answer to this very thing, that is satisfaction with the bare fact that they could meet as disciples together. There has been a constant tendency in many people to settle down into this as a finality, not to the name of the Lord, which would keep the door open for all that is of God, but to their meeting together as Christians, which in itself leaves things loose enough. For it does not raise questions as to condition or as to glorifying the Lord. What does not exercise souls as to Christ is a sorry comfort. Meeting simply as disciples may be a relief as a means of separating from what is positively bad and utterly condemned by God's word; but anything negative, or short of the glory of God, ought never to satisfy the soul that is renewed by grace. Hence, although the altar was in its place and time excellent, still as being specially connected with an Israelite it was liable to be rested in, and so become a hindrance. It was no doubt the altar of Jehovah, but it was such in relation to themselves, as it met them only in their first wants. It is not denied that this is all quite right; and a happy thing to see souls in earnest, and beginning with their real need. There is nothing more dangerous than straining after something grand when we ought to be feeling the depth of our necessities. At the same time the very same faith which bows to the sense of our true wants as seen of God will never rest there, but will go on attracted and encouraged by the grace of God to think of what is due to His glory. This is what the remnant ought to have done. The fact that God was graciously pleased to allow them the altar, which was the first want of an Israelite, whereon he should offer his burnt offerings, and be accepted of Jehovah, ought to have cheered them on to leave nothing undone, but to labour diligently in the face of all difficulties till the temple of Jehovah was finished. They did not; and the consequence of this lethargy, this contentedness with what just met their earliest wants and no more, and then turning round to provide for themselves and their own houses, was met by the Lord's permitting the courage of the adversaries to rise, who espied with jealous eyes, interfered with them, and sought to stir their Persian masters effectually against them.

Thus unbelief constantly brings on us the very thing that we dread. It was not unnatural that the Jews should be afraid of their watchful enemies; but they should have looked to Jehovah. Where there is simplicity of confidence in the Lord it is astonishing how the tables are turned, and the adversaries stand in dread of the feeblest folk who have faith in the living God. We see it in the Israelites when they were near the land. Rahab told the truth about the fear of all in Jericho, at any rate, if not about the spies. She confessed that, spite of their high walls, the Canaanites were quaking because of the despised Israelites. So we see here, among the foreigners planted in Samaria and their governors, there was an effort to keep the sharpest watch after a little remnant. This alarmed them; but they need not have been alarmed if they had held Jehovah before their eyes. There was departure in heart; and this both relaxes all zeal for the Lord, and leads us to prefer to take care of ourselves rather than that He should care for us.

Hence to carry forward the house of God could be easily deferred to a more convenient season, though urgent call was for their own wants as men — their ceiled houses. "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith Jehovah of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little." There was diligence for themselves; but there was the result, and what? "Ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm." Thus bitter disappointment, as always, must be in the people of God who live for themselves instead of confiding in Him who specially looks after the faithful. Our business is to care for His things; His gracious work is to care for us in our and indeed in all things. "And he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes." In every way there was vexation for the selfish heart. In grace there is another call to consider their ways. The first was to reprove them; the second is to encourage and exhort them. "Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith Jehovah. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? said Jehovah of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house."

I do not know anything of its kind more touching than Jehovah's sense of neglect on the part of His unworthy people. It certainly was not the grandeur of stones, which suited the present condition of the remnant; nor was it of the inferiority of the house compared with Solomon's of which Jehovah complained; but He did feel their indifference. We assuredly know, or ought to know, that it was not that He needs anything of man's hand for His own glory, but He is very sensible of the lack of heart for Himself. The truth is that the glory of the Lord is bound up with the best blessing of His people. You cannot serve a soul better than by filling his heart with the Lord. Other means are at best negative, however valuable.

Undoubtedly the moral application of Haggai to the present day is very striking in many points of view. Their call to care and concern for Jehovah's name and His house and His glory, not only the whole bearing but the detailed instruction, have a wonderful application to the present hour; but in all there is none more important than the value the Lord attaches to devotedness to Himself and His worship on the part of the saints.

It is then pointed out that the failure was deeper than in mere circumstances. And what made it the more remarkable is that God was no longer maintaining His throne in Israel! but He did not for all that relax His moral government. This is to be weighed. A royal throne in His name as a witness to the nations was no longer the question. It was thrown down. The throne of Jehovah was not in Zion, nor anywhere else on earth for the time, though of course the purpose is not given up; but still He governed morally; and this is the thing that is now made plain. "Therefore" (so He begins with them) "the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands." It was Jehovah who blighted their selfish efforts. He was dealing with the unbelief and consequent neglect of the returned remnant. It was not because He loved them not, but because He did. "Whom he loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." When the Lord allows persons to go away without rebuke, it is the evident and sure sign that all practical bond is broken, — if any bond ever did exist, — that He now disowns them, at any rate for the time. Hence these very chastenings which fell on the Jews were the proof, though of a sorrowful kind, that His eye was over them, and that He felt their negligence of Him and resented — in divine faithfulness of course, but still in government — the failure of His people in care for His glory.

Nevertheless Jehovah blessed the testimony of His prophet Haggai at this time. "Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of Jehovah their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as Jehovah their God had sent him, and the people did fear before Jehovah. Then spake Haggai Jehovah's messenger in Jehovah's message to the people." It is exceedingly gracious, I think, to see how God provides with special care for a day of weakness. I am not aware that any of the prophets was called "Jehovah's messenger" before. Haggai is the least of the post-captivity prophets in extent, and the earliest of them in point of time; but he is the one called to have this peculiar name of honour. Men would never have selected him for it. Mere critics when giving their thoughts of Haggai would speak of him as the tamest in point of style, the most prosaic of all the prophets; but he was Jehovah's messenger for all that. The wisdom of men is foolishness. "The foolishness of God," as men think it, "is wiser than man." The very prophet who is most simply dealing with the commonest things, — talking about their ceiled houses, and their sowing much, and their bags with holes, nothing but the most trite and ordinary appeals, as it might seem, — was Jehovah's messenger.

I am persuaded that it is precisely the same principle now. One sees it in our Lord's provision, already referred to, in Matthew 18, where He warns the disciples of stumbling-blocks. And we know well how truly it has been so — that what was once fair and vigorous and free in its progress over the waste of waters has been wrecked and broken in pieces. We know well how the united testimony of Christendom has been long gone, and become as a whole the seat of Satan's power; that now the testimony of truth is most partial; that even what is sound and good is dislocated to serve man's pride, not the glory of the Lord in separation from the world; that consequently the circumstances are such that it is impossible to defend the present state of the house of God, so as to carry conviction to an unbeliever, who contrariwise gathers his strongest weapons from the gross contrariety of Christendom to the New Testament. No doubt a spiritual mind can see through the confusion, and see in it a confirmation of the divine warnings; but this does not hinder that which has the greatest show and the highest claims under the cloak of Christ's name, from being the farthest removed from the truth of God. Consequently there are a great many moral perplexities for simple souls which should lead us, I think, to have great tenderness and concern for them at the present time; but above all there is this comfort, that God gives those who love Christ and the church — His peculiar forethought in providing for a day of difficulty and weakness when people might be more than ever deceived. Thus it is an example of this very care, when there might be literally but two or three gathered to the name of the Lord in some places, that He expressly says beforehand, "there am I in the midst of them." What can be lacking where He is? Or is it that the mixed multitude lead those who should know and feel better to loathe that light bread? Is the manna distasteful, and does the old habit of Egypt induce any to pine after its flesh-pots and garlic? I know not where we find His presence more expressly and emphatically pledged than when His assembly might consist of only "two or three gathered unto his name."

We see also a similar principle in the Epistle of Jude. The downfall of the Christian testimony is set forth there in a more stringent and awful manner than in any other part of the New Testament. "Woe unto them," he says, "for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core." Yet in this very epistle it is said, "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith." Here only in the New Testament is our faith called "most holy;" and I think that the reason why the Spirit was pleased to use such a term in this connection alone was to guard against the tendency to lower the faith in consequence of the difficulties of the state of things and times. People feel vaguely that Christendom is in confusion. Hence the temptation in such perplexities is always to give up unswerving fidelity to the will of the Lord where it is hard to follow and costs much every way. In a day of laxity we need most of all to hold the truth of God inflexibly. The only thing for which we ought to be uncompromising is the name of Christ. We are not called to fight for our own name, or honour, or any earthly object or connection: still less should we oppose others unless to fight for His name which is theirs as well as ours; but we are called to be unhesitating and unbending where the faith is in question. Therefore, building up themselves in their most holy faith, they are told to "keep themselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Both the gravity and the comfort of such a word as this, for such a day as ours, seem to me beyond exaggerating. No, we are not to become Laodicean; we are not to say, because the faith has been encroached on in all sorts of ways, that therefore truth, holiness, and love are hopeless. It is not so. "Building up yourselves on your most holy faith, keep yourselves in the love of God," etc. We are not to sink down with the declension of Christendom; we are rather the more strenuously by the grace of God to rise up, and, if we have nothing else to boast of, at any rate, to cleave to the faith of God's elect which works by love. We owe it to Christ and the church so much the more because of the danger and the difficulty; not merely for our own souls, but for His sake who died for us and is coming back to receive us to Himself, when we shall taste the sweetness of His approval for whatever of obloquy we may have known for His name. Doubtless all is worthless which is not founded on the person of the Son of God, who is the object of faith; and the only test of maintaining it intact.

Admirable is the manner in which the New Testament provides for a dark day, so that without pretension there should always be a real provision for the church. Let me illustrate my meaning. God took care in apostolic days that the holy apostles should acknowledge that which some men call disorderly, but what is really of the Spirit; and certainly they should beware of going too far when He is concerned. So in writing to the Thessalonians, the apostle called on the saints to know those that were over them in the Lord. Probably they themselves were surprised that the Lord should make so much of them. So here, though of course on higher grounds, Haggai is called Jehovah's messenger. Isaiah and Ezekiel did not require it so much; Haggai did. The sublimity of Isaiah, the extended scope and deep nature of his prophecies of Ezekiel spoke for themselves. But it was not so with Haggai as is too plain from the depreciatory estimate of our critics. There is a quiet homeliness in Haggai's communications for the most part, which has exposed him to be thought by some merely a good man doing his best under the circumstances. Yet up to this time he and he alone is called Jehovah's messenger. No one had ever been so carefully supported, and covered over, so to speak, with the shield of the Lord in the midst of adversaries. He was sent forth with a veritable coat of mail round about him. If more exposed, he was more protected. After some such style was the Lord providing, not merely for those early days when He drew attention to the fact that these labourers apt to be despised were over them in the Lord.

But there is more instruction and value still. For assuredly in these days we want no new directory; and if such was the true principle then, it abides no less true now. The Thessalonian saints had no title from the Lord to give their brethren authority, which was the case where the apostle chose elders for the brethren. A truly admirable method it was to call the saints to recognise what was of God where apostolic choice could not be had. But the apostle makes it a clear duty to own spiritual power in the way of rule without anything more. As we have seen, the inspired word carefully draws attention to their place, and maintains it jealously. Hence when as now we cannot have the regular appointment of elders by apostolic authority, we can thankfully fall back on that which was true before and independently of it. So wisely and graciously does the Lord think of us in this day of weakness and wants and deceits.

What then answers to a messenger of Jehovah now? The man who uses the testimony of God for His glory, — who unflinchingly holds to it, yet perseveringly seeks the good of God's people, and who bears all odium and scorn and rejection, yet cheers others as well as his own soul with the bright anticipations of glory and triumph with Christ at His coming. But he who is helping on the delusive hopes of the world, and the vain dream of Christendom's improvement, is, I think, a very different messenger. Of one thing be assured, no truth avails unless you are prepared to carry it out in every day's practice. The world will let you hold and even say anything, provided they see that you have no serious thought of being faithful, and so calling them to be the same. He then has not the smallest resemblance to Jehovah's messenger, who says one thing and does another, who denounces the world yet seeks it for his family, judges rightly, yet never thinks of acting out his convictions. Is this living so as to give effect to a divine testimony? He who is the living spring of the truth is also the Holy Spirit. What can be more calculated to destroy the truth than practical inconsistency with it?

In the New Testament "the man of God" supposes one faithful in the service of souls; but the term is by no means confined to Christianity, being rather in itself a familiar Old Testament expression. By it we may understand a believer who has the moral courage and the spiritual power to identify himself with the Lord's interests, and to maintain the good fight of faith in the midst of perils and obstacles of every sort. Such a testimony is incompatible with yielding to human principles and the spirit of the age.

We must not suppose however that fidelity in such a day as ours wears an imposing garb. An appearance of strength is not of course when declension has come in and judgment is approaching. God will have a state of ruin felt, and His testimony must be in keeping. When He calls to sackcloth and ashes, He does not give such a character of power as has price in the world's eyes. Thus one of the truest signs of practical communion with the Lord is that at such a moment one is heartily content to be little. This is reality, but it is only a little strength. It is according to the mind of God. But that which attracts the world must please and pander to the self-importance of man. The world itself is a vain show, and likes its own. Consequently there is nothing which so carries the mass of men along with it as that which flatters the vanity of the human mind. It may assume the lowliest air, but sinful man seeks his own honour and present exaltation. But when a servant of God is thus drawn into the spirit of men, he naturally shrinks back from fairly facing the solemn call of God addressed to His own, loses his bright confidence, and gets either hardened or stands in dread of the judgments of God. When Christians lose the power and reproach of the cross, philanthropy has been taken up, which gives influence among men, and general activity in what men call doing good replaces the life of faith with the vain hope of staving off the evil day in their time at any rate. One need not deny zeal and earnest pursuit of what is good morally; self-denial too one sees in spending for purposes religious or benevolent; but the man of God, now that ruin has entered the field of Christ's confession, is more urgently than ever called to be true to a crucified Christ. And as surely as He is soon coming to take us on high, He will in due time appear for the judgment of every high thought and the fairest looking enterprises of men which will all be swallowed up in the yawning gulf of the apostacy.

"Then spake Haggai Jehovah's messenger in Jehovah's message unto the people, saying, I am with you." What a remarkable analogy there is in that which has been occupying us! "I am with you" is the saving principle for faith in the weakest possible day: and, let me repeat it, what had they better in the brightest day? Nay, what else so good as having the Lord with them? To have the most blessed servants would have been small if they had not the Master Himself. This was the great safeguard and unfailing source of supply and counsel when Israel came out of Egypt. How gracious to have His presence reassured after Babylon, when all was apparently gone and broken! "I am with you, saith Jehovah." The words were few, but they implied every succour and blessing; and they sunk deep in pious hearts. "And Jehovah stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, the governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of Jehovah of hosts, their God, in the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king."

The remarkable fact here is, that they built without waiting to hear that the king sanctioned it. They did the work, because it was Jehovah's message, not because it had the king's sign-manual. His sanction was given subsequently, but they had ventured to go on confidently in faith, simply acting on the word of Jehovah, without waiting for anything else. Nor did the Lord fail to work for them. Israel were now Lo-ammi. They had forfeited for the time their public place in the world; but Jehovah did not fail to try, to guide and to bless the faithful. His righteous government goes on none the less because it is the times of the Gentiles. There is even more scope for faith; and we may always be confident that, if we are within with the Lord, He will work outwardly, whatever hinders. If there is opposition, the Lord knows how to turn the many adversaries so as to further the work; if, on the other hand, His providence controls the outward powers and they cherish a friendly spirit, the Lord will use this for good. *All* things work together for good to them that love Him. It is impossible for faith to be overcome, however sorely it be tried. It brings in God who cannot fail, and who loves to strengthen the believer when all else fades. He is the God who quickens the dead. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Christ is the true power of this; and the joy of the Lord is His people's strength. May our only confidence be in Him!

It appears, however, that the Jews, like ourselves, were apt to get discouraged; consequently every now and then the prophet comes in a way somewhat similar, but with increasing force. As unbelief increases, the testimony of God becomes more energetic as long as He continues to send His words to the people. "In the seventh month, on the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of Jehovah by the prophet Haggai, saying, Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying, Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" There is no allowance of self-complacent thoughts. God would make us real in our souls and ways. It is a good thing not to have too high imaginations, but the truth, a just weight and measure. At the same time let us leave room for the grace and power of God. Take, for instance, the present moment, as we are looking at this in a practical way. There is no greater danger than forgetting the spirit that becomes those to whom God has shown His mercy in giving true understanding of what suits Him in the actual and broken state of Christendom. Is it not one of the things we need most to look to that the tone in which we use the truth should be becoming? The more we learn of God, the more we should cultivate lowliness of mind. This does not imply that you should have indecision in your convictions, but that along with this you have a just sense of your own weakness, and that you are broken in spirit, remembering how the glory of the Lord has suffered by the failure of His people. It was quite right, therefore, that they should feel the feeble condition of all that bore the name of Jehovah in their midst. "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory?" We feel how far the church has fallen and whence also, but we ought not to be discouraged. There is no element of Christ in despair or distrust. The Holy Ghost never produces doubt. As there is sometimes a difficulty in minds about what is called the ruin of the church, a few words may be well on the present broken state of things among those who call on the Lord's name.

We must bear in mind the church in two points of view — the church or assembly as built by Christ and as built by man, that is, by His servants. The assembly as built by Christ never fails. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." But that which has been built by the servants of the Lord is always liable to be injured by elements more or less worthless if not worse. It may suffer through worldliness, haste, carelessness, fleshly feeling, a thousand things according to nature allowed to act without being judged, and so leave results to shame and the Lord's dishonour. Hence we find among the Corinthians there were materials of which the apostle speaks in tones of grave admonition. They have let in what was not unprofitable only but even corrupting: "wood, hay, and stubble." Yea also there might be a power of defilement with the hand of destruction there. He who built what was worthless might be saved while his work perished, but the man who defiled, or destroyed, the house of God would himself be destroyed by the judgment of God. All this is where men are the builders. Thus we see the two aspects justified. There is that in the assembly of God here below which is built of Christ, and so never fails, the stones of which are living, and in no case dead ones. On the other hand there is the bad workmanship, more or less careless service, as the case may be — either bad men doing what is according to themselves, or good men who are not in everything guided of God; and consequently there is an accretion of inferior material having no value for God which sullies His temple, and so far incurs the charge of confusion, disorder, and weakness. It is in the last point of view that we see the springs of the ruin which soon overspread the church. These perishable things, "wood, hay, and stubble," mean, I think, ill-put or light doctrine generating persons akin. It might thus easily mean both; it is in the first instance doctrines palatable to the flesh, and therefore attractive to persons in a fleshly state, perhaps unconverted or natural men.

Some no doubt think it a hard saying to speak of the church in ruins; but why so? There is no impeachment of God but only of man. God called Israel out of Egypt; yet Israel became a ruin. Why then should we wonder that the Gentile has not continued in His goodness? Compare Romans 11, where we may see how little the apostle could be surprised at such an issue. The principle runs through every dealing of God with man. The creature always fails, but all turns to God's glory. No doubt the church, like Israel, exists, but in a ruined state. Does not the Protestant own it when he thinks of Popery? the Romanist when he looks on Protestantism? Upright and spiritual men own it without reserve.

All these are but cases of a still more general truth. The first man fell and is fallen universally. But there is another great fact — the Second man is risen from the dead, and has begun a new creation which will never perish or even fail. Thus the same principle applies far and wide; as always; as far as we touch on the responsibility of man, we behold ruin and confusion. Everybody feels it; every godly intelligent person owns it, even though he might not be used to the expression, and so feel difficulty, fearing it might compromise the grace and faithfulness of God. Impossible to love Christ and the church without groaning. Doubtless I could easily name a well-known high church leader who as a pious man mourns over the present state of the church. I take him as occupying a zone ecclesiastically far removed from that of most of us here present. Yet as we cannot doubt of real godliness there, so also a heart that loves Christ and those that are Christ's. Now it is impossible to have these divine affections of the new nature without feeling that the present state of things is contrary to Christ's glory. I confess that I have incomparably more sympathy with the groaning of such a man than with others who trumpet the onward progress of Christianity in the nineteenth century, and look for the triumphs of the millennium as the fruit of the church's labours. How can one sympathize with such insensibility to the actual dishonour done to the Lord? It is really, though unconsciously, playing into the hands of Satan.

As to the comforting assurance through the prophet of the Holy Spirit being with the Jews as in the day when they were brought out of Egypt, we must remember that the power of Jehovah is in everything good wrought by the Spirit. He it is who always gave energy in man, whether in Israel or in the church, in man, creation, or anything else. The energy is always of the Spirit, and therefore he says, "Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith Jehovah; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith Jehovah, and work: for I am with you, saith Jehovah of hosts: according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you." It is not the Spirit given in the special power, still less the personal presence, vouchsafed when Christ went up to heaven and the church was being formed on earth; but according to the way in which He had wrought at first in Israel, so would He in grace even after the captivity in Babylon.

This was not merely by Haggai speaking to them, but His gracious operation also in strengthening the remnant who needed the word of Jehovah. He was ready to bless them afresh; but of course only in such a sort as suited the then dealings of God, that is, after a Jewish pattern and measure. The additional thing is not as some suppose the distinction in John 14, where the Lord speaks of the Spirit not only dwelling *with* them, but being "in them." He was to *dwell* with them, instead of going away like Jesus; and He was to be not merely *with* but *in* them, after being given in the new way the Christian knows Him. So intimately does the Spirit of God identify Himself with all our matters according to Christ. Whatever privileges and powers were known of old, His personal presence was not and could not be, as the Lord lets us know, till He returned to heaven after His death and resurrection. Thenceforward it becomes to us a new power of fellowship with the Father and with His Son. There is also more of a heavenly character.

But the Spirit of God was with the Jews suitably to the earthly dispensation they had under the law, and in accordance with their being a nation in the flesh. With us He is and acts suitably to the glory of God in exalting Christ in heaven; and He is in us according to the efficacy of redemption. He could not be in us until all that was of us had been completely annulled before God. There is therefore that which is absolutely new, while a higher character attaches to what abides kindred to what they possessed of old. But as in John 14 there are two main elements of comfort — the presence of the Spirit and the coming of the Lord Jesus; so here we have the permanence of the action of the Spirit in the feeblest remnant of Israel, and then further the day of Jehovah, when their Saviour God reveals Himself to His waiting people. "For thus saith Jehovah of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land." The analogy is great throughout this prophecy from first to last with what we have now in Christ for heaven. "And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come.'

After mature consideration and research I cannot doubt that this phrase, "the desire of all nations," points to the Messiah. There are difficulties about it, so much so that a learned person in Convocation the other day denied its reference to anything of the sort. This seems to me more rash than wise. How often we betray the state of our own minds and hearts by our judgments of scripture! When in a low condition spiritually, without having God's object before us, we are apt to prefer a more human and consequently more incorrect interpretation of God's word; we shall be satisfied with its lowest application, and use this to deny what is incomparably more important and full.

The truth is that the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, is the constant object of the Holy Ghost where He speaks of any object or office supremely excellent, no matter what its shape or nature. If it be a great priest, prophet, or king; if it be a Saviour, conqueror, or judge) always the One whom the Holy Ghost contemplates from beginning to end is Christ; and it will be the same with our interpretation, where the Holy Ghost identifies our spiritual affections with Christ, and forms our minds according to God's purposes and ways. Thus in fact the Spirit of Christ is characteristic of the Christian. Surely he of all men ought to be the first to see this running through the written word. So among the apostles we find constantly in Paul — but indeed it belongs to the New Testament generally — this quickness of scent in the fear of the Lord, which sees Christ everywhere.

I do not then stand on the ground that "the desire of all nations" is generally accepted as the Messiah. Such has been the ancient and prevalent interpretation, though some, especially in modern times, have laboured to throw doubt on it. English followers have caught up the cavils of German critics and repeated them, little knowing that most of these doubts have been expressed by Deists of a former day. Most of the sceptical theories of the land of Luther in the present day are the reproduction of what England cast out as a filthy rag in the seventeenth century. The English would not have it then; it got into Germany; and now it has come back again decorated with a goodly show of erudition after a new pattern, but only the old material after all.

It is a fair enquiry in what sense the Messiah could be the desire of *all* the nations or Gentiles. Not it seems that He must needs be said to be subjectively their desire; but objectively He is, and will be one day owned as, the precious treasure of all nations; for indeed in the past or present which of them have prized Him as they ought? He is not only the hope of Israel, but will be the means of true riches and blessing to all other nations. There never can be the full happiness of the world till He comes. In itself I see no more difficulty in such a phrase than in the kindred expression said of the Jews in Mal 3:1 : "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in." They have both been far from feeling as became them the worth of Jesus. But the day hastens for both, however tremendous the dark hour which comes before it.

As to the grammar, it is a peculiar phrase in the Hebrew, where the subject* is a noun feminine singular, the predicate is a plural masculine. Some suppose what is called a *zeugma* with *ha'goim*. But explain as we may the want of concord, neither the older nor the later Jews were deterred by the construction from supposing the Messiah intended. So Et. Ahika (in Sanh. cap.). Parkhurst and Lee take it similarly, as did Jerome of old in the Vulgate. If one puts it thus: "And the desire of all nations, they shall come," the English reader may understand better the harshness involved. The Septuagint gives "the choice things of all the nations shall come," which may remind us of its strange rendering of Gen 49:10 : ἕως ἔαν ἔλθῃ τὰ ἀποκείμενα αὐτῇ καὶ αὐτὸς προσδοκία ἐθνῶν ,† "till there come the things stored up for him, and he [is the] expectation of nations." It is nearly answered by Hengstenberg's "the beauty of all the heathen," if not by Ewald's "loveliest of all people." Some have taken it as "all the Gentiles shall come *with* their delightful things," others as "come *to,*" etc., that is, Jerusalem; but I think we may well dismiss these as possessing little claim on general attention and as proving scarcely more than the difficulty of the construction. And as for the version "costly or precious things," whether we take it, as would be most natural, for the Jewish temple from the heathen, or as others do as contributions to the church, I am surprised that any Christian should hesitate in judging that such a meaning cannot be the true one. Dr. Davidson is right enough in rejecting Stonard's "they shall come *to* the desire of all nations," and D. Kimchi's *"with* the desire of all nations," or even Henderson's "the things desired by all the nations shall come," that is, the blessings of the gospel.

*In Dan 11:37, "desire of women" clearly means the Messiah. Gesenius admits some deity, "flagitante contextu intelligendum idolum à mulieribus Syris studiose cultum." Rationalism ever curtails and degrades.

† Augustine wrote better (De Civ. Dei, 18:35), though we see in him the usual slipping away from the truth. He applies the prophecy partly to the past, but, strange to say, applies "*veniet Desideratus cunctis gentibus*" to His second advent only. Still more explicitly he reasons later (48), "Nam prius ejus adventus nondum erat desideratus omnibus gentibus. Non enim quem deberent desiderare, sciebant, in quem non crediderant." Jerome is equally decided, though noticing the Septuagint, that the Hebrew points to the Messiah, though he sees in the words only His first advent.

But Dr. D.'s own rendering, as often happens with critics, is not better founded than those he rejects, and results in a sense altogether beneath the requirements of the verse. "The right translation is (says he, iii. 316) *the choice of all nations,* that is, the noblest or best of them will come. All nations are represented as fearing God; but only the best of them as coming to do Him homage. Perhaps the LXX. too meant this." Now it is true that the substantive is used frequently in a wholly different construction as a qualifying noun, and so as a virtual adjective for the sense. Hence it is often rendered in such instances "pleasant," "goodly," etc. But in a construction analogous to the one before us such a meaning as the choice, that is, noblest or best, is to set at nought Hebrew usage, and would give elsewhere, as I am bold to say here also, a sense foreign to and irreconcilable with the context. Thus 1Sa 9:20 means "all the desire of Israel." "The choice" of Israel, that is, the noblest or best, is not at all the thought. This was far from being the fact as to Saul and all his father's house. Again, Dan 11:37, though of course Dr. D. adopts the notion of its being Astarte, still even so his version of the same construction in Haggai seems to me refuted by his view of Daniel. Surely all this violence done to language is not without instruction, and shows that it is easier to find fault with the current version of a clause, no doubt peculiar, than to suggest a better.

The truth is, as it may be well to add, that the Jews used a totally different word when they meant to say the choicest of any objects; and this Dr. D. knew; for immediately after he says, "We have a synonym to the noun desire in *mibchar* (Isa 22:7; Exo 15:4.) In this case also the construct state ceases to be an adjective-description of the latter substantive, and requires another to make sense." Now it is not correct to call this a synonym; for the true notion is *choice,* as in the former word it is *desire;* and these are in no way interchangeable, even where both might apply to the same, which is not always possible. Thus in Gen 23:6, "in the *desire* of our sepulchres" would be nonsense or at least not the sense intended, but the choice or best; and so with every other occurrence in the Bible. Dr. D. is therefore as mistaken as he can be in such a case. If the reader compare Isa 22:7 with Zec 7:14, he will see that the idiomatic use of the one is the inverse of the other, one being literally "the choice of thy valleys," the other "the land of desire;" the construct state being thus reversed in the two phrases. Dr. D. therefore is premature in expecting that "books and sermons" will cease to identify the Messiah with the desire of all nations in this passage: certainly those who make them may be excused till weightier grounds take the place of bad Hebrew and as bad exegesis. On the whole, though the phrase is peculiar and may be vague, it appears to converge on the Messiah.

A partial illustration might be found in Isaiah 11, where we have the Messiah described: "In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek." Thus the Gentiles will be then brought to the feet of Jesus. They will be, so to speak, clothed and sitting at the feet of the true King. The difficulty is freely granted. There appears to be a purposed want of precise terms; and we may gather from it that it is not necessarily subjective. Personal faith gives definitiveness to the object of trust. Christ is the one who really is so before God, and the one that will be made so before them by and by; for He is in sober truth, so to speak, the concentration of all that is good and precious. Thus there is no difficulty to a spiritual mind about it. The difficulty is to scholars who want everything formally regular; and where this is not so, they seem not sorry to profit by the occasion to leave Christ out. Certainly this is not the way of faith, which delights to trace Him even if for wise reasons veiled for a season.

Further, even when one departs from Christ to any of the alternatives, there is much violence done. Prepositions are either unwarrantably interpolated by the mind, or a very unworthy sense is extracted. Even so the difficulty remains pretty much in the phrase itself, no matter how it may be rendered, the subject being singular and feminine, and the predicate plural and masculine. Difficulty of explanation does not destroy the version, "the desire of all nations shall come." Even though the construction look irregular, we may be sure that all is designed. All languages, including those of the classics, admit of anacolutha — none so much as the Greek of the Apocalypse; but we can often see the reason, and should learn to conclude that there is always a holy motive for them. I am persuaded that nothing else would give the force so well; but still that is the very circumstance which furnishes occasion for disputation. Where persons do not rest on Christ by faith, they will find abundance to perplex their minds: if they do not take advantage of it, they seem themselves carried away captive by a mere notion. That there is here a certain indeterminateness in the object of desire they have laid hold of in order to eliminate Christ from the passage. And this they think a feat of criticism and a consequence of superior discernment; whereas it only proves that they are out of the current of the Spirit's testimony, and have not an ear to hear.

The truth is that there is no security even in the most accurate and comprehensive scholarship without the teaching of the Spirit, if the subject-matter be the scriptures. Christian translators may often fail through ignorance of idiom; but a worldly scholar never can be trusted at all, spite of consummate linguistic skill, because of his necessary lack of still deeper qualifications. He knows not God and His Son, and has not therefore the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the intelligence of the truth. He who singled out Hag 2:7 is probably the most learned on the bench of English prelates. I do not doubt his abilities learning, or honesty. Nevertheless the prize at stake and imperilled for many by the temerity of such statements is too great to close one's eyes and lips, when those who by their public position ought to be zealously defending the faith are really carrying on the tactics of unbelief with so much the more opportunity for mischief. Nor is it that he made any serious attempt to set the truth clear. The doubt, familiar enough in sceptical writings, was thrown out in a speech about the revision of the English Bible. Dr. T. was of course one of those who supported the motion for the revision of the Authorised Version, and this was a particular instance from the Old Testament adduced as an example of the necessity for an amended translation.

It is well known that there are passages printed as scripture which have no real title to be in the Bible, as the three heavenly witnesses, for instance, in 1 John 5. This also, I think, was then referred to; where every serious and unbiassed student would agree with him, because it is only ignorant prejudice that accepts these verses. Men versed in the diplomatic evidence of the New Testament know that the same grounds which demand our reception of the apostolic prophetic writings in general compel us to reject those clauses as an interpolation. Besides, I am assured that internally they weaken the truth, and do not help but hinder the effect of the full light on the capital truth of the Trinity. Testimony in heaven (to whom, and for what end?) is a strange doctrine. Again, the phraseology is unexampled in scripture; there is never such a correlation in it as "The Father and the Word." When the "Father" is spoken of, we hear of "The Son," if named in the same context; never of "The Father and the Word." For this answers not to "Father" but to "God." Wherever scripture treats of these terms, the true correlates are "God and the Word," or "The Father and the Son;" never, as in the spurious insertion, "The Father and the Word." I am not reasoning now on mere *à priori* grounds; for if a passage comes with sufficient outward authority, whether understood or not, I hold myself bound to receive it. Where there is evidence that it was originally given and received as an inspired document on God's authority, I receive it without dispute, question, or reasoning whatever. But in this case the fact is that the only Greek manuscripts known to support this particular portion are proved to be either forgeries or valueless from their want of antiquity. There is not one ancient Greek copy that contains the passage. Hence it was very properly left out in Luther's translation of the Bible into German, as also in the first Greek Testaments edited by Erasmus. That it was subsequently brought in was mainly due to the clamour of Roman Catholics, who were naturally anxious to have it accredited in Greek, because the Latin Vulgate, with some Latin ecclesiastical witnesses, vouches for it; and especially since the Council of Trent pronounced the Latin version to be authentic scripture. Consequently, if we are compelled by truth to give it up, their authentic scripture is seriously wrong. Thus Romanists have a palpable interest ecclesiastically in supporting it, whereas nobody else ought to have. But this a wholly different case and question from the one before us.

As to the seventh verse then of Haggai 2,* it is admitted that there is an idiomatic difficulty *for every rendering* of the clause translated in our Bible — "the desire of all nations shall come." The modern Jewish version, which is generally that of German rationalists, is no more literal than the usual Christian one. As I have already explained, there is a peculiarity independent of every version and inherent in all; but I believe that "the desire, or object of desire, of all the Gentiles," is as literal and, what is of more moment, more true, as far better suiting the grandeur of the verse than that which some would force on us, "the precious things," meaning the gold and silver, etc., which are distinctly named afterwards. It must be borne in mind that the most literal version is not necessarily the most faithful or best, especially in such a case as this, where an irregularity occurs in the concord, no doubt for special emphasis. The Chaldee paraphrase, or Targum of Jonathan, takes the sense apparently just as our English Bible.† The Syriac is decidedly loose; the Arabic seems to give the sense much as the Septuagint.

*One might have hoped that the famous Grotius was sufficiently free for the freest handlers of scripture. But they use him when he suits, and discard his judgment when his conscience was too strong for the aberrations they desire. This is his comment on the passage: "*Ubi venerit desiderium omnium gentium,* id est, quem desiderare omnes gentes debent. Respicit ad verba Jacobi de *Siloh,* quae in ore erant Judaeis et vicinis gentibus, ut diximus ad Matth. ii. LXX. hic pluraliter legere twDmj cum Holem, eximia, τὰ ἐκλεκτά, minus recte." (*Crit. Sacr.* Amst. tom. iv. 671.)

† Let me here transcribe a long critical note of Dathe, who was certainly a more careful Hebraist than most, and far too disposed to lower the full sense of scripture. But here his judgment was sound and decidedly against those who oppose the Messianic application. I purposely give the opening words, which are worthy of a rationalist. "Commotionem caeli et terrae, de qua in hac pericopa a versu 6-9. sermo est, ego quidem cum Illustri *Michaëlis* explicandam putem de bellis Alexandri M. cum Persis. Etenim haec sententia cum aliis argumentis, tum inprimis ex versibus 22, 23, 24. plane probatur, ubi propheta idem vaticinium tertio die post primam ejus promulgationem repetit. Cf. Viri Illustris Paraphrasis Epistolae ad Hebraeos, pag. 379 seqq. ubi ex instituto de hoc vaticinio disserit. Sed de verbis versus 7. td'm]j, Wab;W µyI/Nh'AlK; aliter sentio. Explicat ea Vir Celeberrimus de donariis gentilium templo Hierosolymitano illatis, quod etiam ab aliis factum est, cum Judaeis, tum Christianis. At enim vero tantum abest ut per rationes grammaticas probari non posse putem vulgariorem illam de Messia in hoc templo quando apparituro sententiam, ut potius ita statuam de ea quam Vir Celeberriemus defendit. Etenim quam movet difficultatem contra numerum pluralem verbi Wab; cui non conveniat nomen singularis numeri td'm]j, haec quidem facile removetur, si in memoriam revocemus Grammaticorum observationem, quod in regimine duorum substantivorum verbum in numero nonnunquam posteriori respondeat, non priori, v. c. 2Sa 10:9, Job 15:20. Sed haud scio, an Vir Celeberrimus aeque facile probare possit, verbum Wab< *venient* idem esse quod *afferentur.* Verbum Wab< in Kal nunquam habet hanc significationem. Semper Conjugatione Hiphil utuntur Hebraei ad notionem afferendi vel adducendi indicandam. Qui verbi usus, cum tot ejus extent exempla, non potest in dubium vocari. Analogia praeterea linguarum Chaldaicae et Syriacae eum confirmat. Hinc etiam interpretes Chaldaeus et Syrus Conjugatione Aphel usi sunt ad eum sensum exprimendum. Vocatur vero Messias des*iderium gentium,* h. e. ex Hebraismo gent*ibus desiderabilis et expectandus,* eodem sensu, quo a Jacobo Genes. 49:10. *obedientia gentium* dicitur. Atque miror, Virum Celeberrimum hoc non vidisse (pag. 387) cum *gentium commotionem* paullo ante (pag. 385) explicasset de conversione gentilium ad religionem Judaicam, quae cum notitia Messiae Judaeis expectandi non poterat non esse conjuncta. Equidem fateor, versum octavam favere explicationi de donarius templo inferendis, attamen eam non necessariam facit. Possunt enim illa verba sic quoque accipi, ut Deus neget, sibi in aede sua ornamentis ex auro vel argento opus esse, (quemadmodum de sacrificiis simile quid dixit Psa 50:10,) atque tamen vel illis ornamentis deficientibus majorem futurum esse posterioris templi splendorem, quam prioris. Non contemnendum argumentum pro hac explicatione in esse putem ultimis ejusdem versus verbis .µ/lç; ˆTea, hw,h' µ/qMib'W Constat enim ex historia, quantopere Judaei in istis bellis et regnorum eversionibus afflicti fuerint; ex quo satis probabiliter concluditur, prophetam intelligere pacem, non tam corporalem quam potius spiritualem, a Messia omnis pacis et salutis auctore afferendam." *(Proph. Min. ex rec., etc.* a J. A. Dathio, Halae, 1773) It is plain that had Prof. D. seen the future coming and kingdom of Christ to be its only complete meaning (as determined by Hebrews 12) verse 8, far from presenting a difficulty, only falls in with the character of that age to come (compare Isa 59:20-21; Isa 60:1-7) as contrasted with the present call of Christians while the hour is come when it is a question neither of the mountain nor yet of Jerusalem, but of the true worshippers worshipping the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father seeks such to worship Him. Dr. Davidson (O. T. Introd iii 316) tells us that "Dathe thinks Michaëlis has proved Wab; may be rightly translated *afferentur,* and in a note refers to his note, p. 230, third edition." Not having that edition I cannot verify what is possible: if so, it would only be a proof how easy it is for some men to change their minds on serious points. In his first edition, as my reader sees, he gives not bad reasons to prove Michaëlis wrong.

This is ever the case where there is an object before us different from the divine one: the true force of scripture is lost. The only way of receiving scripture is to receive simply as a child what God says, and seek to understand it by faith; whereas if we are possessed by a theory, it warps the mind before we begin and we are sure to miss if not to pervert the word of God. "I will shake all nations." It is not here, be it observed, the preaching of the gospel to all the nations, nor anything of a church character of any kind. Hence the Lord's first coming is not in question, but rather the prominent topic of prophecy, namely, the coming of Jehovah Messiah in His kingdom. Then He shakes all the nations, and not these only, but the earth and even the heavens. Nothing can be plainer than the sense and scope. He shakes the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. Now this is the very scripture that is referred to by Paul as unfulfilled in Hebrews 12 — "Whose voice then shook the earth: but now He hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." Thus all can understand that Jehovah will fill the house with glory. Herod's great porticoes in the outer court, and any offerings of gold and silver in his days, utterly fail to reach up to this promise, even if such accessories were not mentioned expressly and apart. That the temple before Christ ever approached that of Solomon in internal splendour, or anything but size, there is no reason to believe. Zerubbabel's exceeded Solomon's, and Herod's was much greater than that of Zerubbabel.

37 Haggai contd

Even the Jews however felt that, not to speak of its sumptuousness, "the former glory of this house" consisted in its possession of the Urim and Thummim, the ark, the tables written by God's finger, and the visible glory. To say the Spirit is an oversight corrected by the express declaration of the prophet in the immediate context. Further, Aaron's rod and the pot of manna disappeared from the ark. When Solomon's temple was reared, they were not found; they characterize the wilderness state, not the reign of glory. But the law still abode in the ark, the rule of the kingdom as well before as when it came. What then *could* more than compensate for their actual deficiency in all these respects? All but one sense is excluded. The promise which enfolds all promises of blessing must be intended, whatever be the precise service preferred, or the solution of the original phrase.

Nothing then can be plainer than the necessary inferences. The Lord is coming, and will then shake the universe, not merely the earthly part of it but the whole of it, including the heavens. This was not the case even in the chaos before Adam was created. (Gen 1:2) But, besides, He will shake all nations. It is not, therefore, what is called "the end of the world," by which is meant the dissolution of all before the judgment of the great white throne. For there are nations recognized as living still on earth, however shaken. "And the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith Jehovah of hosts." Clearly therefore it is not the destruction of the universe. It is the dawn of the blessed time for which all creation groans but waits, and all nations then shall have the promised object of desire in whom they were to be blessed and are yet to trust. (Genesis 12, Isaiah 11) Then they will understand His preciousness. They as well as the Jews have despised Him, but He will then come, the concentration, yea, at once the giver and the attracter, of all that is desirable. "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith Jehovah of hosts." He draws out to God's glory what people most of all value; but what of all that which is Jehovah's and will then be felt to be so in comparison with the glory?

Verse 9 seems however to be faultily given in many versions old as well as modern, and by our own among the rest. For the unity of Jehovah's house* is forgotten and destroyed, and of course the true point of comparison lost — another state of the same house at a later day when Jehovah should give peace in this place. The Greek version, as it is the oldest, so in this it seems to me the most correct; and the Arabic, as far as I can judge, supports it: so do some of the German critics as De Wette, Hitzig, Maurer, and Ewald. Ezr 3:12 determines nothing as to Hag 2:9; though it be of great moral importance, there is no connection between the two scriptures. No one doubts the fact of two if not three houses; but the Spirit carefully identifies the house all through, as is plain in Hag 2:3. Now here would have been no bad instance for those disposed to call for emendation. It is melancholy to think how often the same features reappear in criticism just as in morals: men doing what they ought not, and omitting to do what they ought. In both respects they have erred as much as was possible. They have in fact robbed the passage of its brightest light and true power by denying Christ to verse 7; and they have failed to remove a blemish which obscures the beauty and connection of the argument in verse 9. Let them weigh Ezr 5:11-13, where, as Secker long ago observed, the house that was built, destroyed, and rebuilt, is treated as the same house. Compare 2Th 2:4 : it is "the temple of God" right through.

*I will here show how embarrassed a late pious and learned man was through not observing (or rather the common misunderstanding produced by) the misrendering of verse 9. About forty years ago Mr. T. P. Platt, the eminent Ethiopic scholar, published "Thoughts on certain Old Testament Prophecies interpreted in the New Testament, and on some General Errors of the Interpreters of Scripture." In opposition to the mystical school, which reduces minds to the same uncertainty as the rationalistic school, Mr. Platt shows that the Spirit supplies in the New Testament the interpretation of many prophecies contained in the Old, and thus seeks to point out a sure help to the godly enquirer. In examining four passages (Isa 25:6-9 compared with l Cor. 15:54; Isa 59:20 compared with Rom 11:25, Jer 31:34-40 compared with Heb 8:7-12, and Hag 2:6-9 compared with Heb 12:18 to the end), he mentions among other perplexities this, "the mention made of 'THIS house,' 'THIS latter house,' the house standing in the days of Haggai, into which it certainly does not appear that the riches of all nations [for such he was disposed to think might be the meaning of the contested phrase in verse 7] were ever brought. This difficulty, I confess, I cannot get rid of."

But it is evident from the explanation given above, and indeed without this to any one who reads with care the prophecy itself, once it is pointed out there, that the Spirit views the house as one from beginning to end. He may also elsewhere draw attention to the earliest form under Solomon, to the post-captivity stage, to that of Herod, and finally to that of the latter day, not to speak of our having to distinguish even then between that phase of it when the Antichrist or man of sin shall sit there, and when, after his (and probably its) destruction, there will be a concluding and very different state, inasmuch as the ideal as men say of Ezekiel 40-42 shall be then first realised. But All are here spoken of as "*this* house."

Hence one may learn how precarious are many of the stock arguments addressed to Jews, built on the assumption that verse 9 teaches the coming of the Messiah before the destruction of the second temple. Daniel 9 goes far more precisely to a similar conclusion; but emphatically as *this* house is expressed, it is a mistake to lay stress on a *second* house, where we have seen the object is to carry on the idea of the house till it is filled with the glory of Jehovah after the second appearing of the Lord. Nor is there any force in straining "yet a little while" to this end: for as is well-known, in the Old Testament as in the New, prophecy shows no real rest short of that day. Two thousand years seem long; but it will not be so when looked back on from the glory of God. And how can any sober-minded man* really think that the shaking of the universe, or of all nations, agrees only with the first advent, even if we had not the application of Hebrews 12 to fix it to the second? No doubt the Jews themselves are as blameable as any for speaking so much of the second house and missing the point of the divine message; and their way of accounting for its superiority over the first (as *e.g.* its lasting a few years more; or owing to the visit of Alexander the Great, or because of Gentile gifts during the Asmonean times, or through Herod's re-edifying) are truly pitiable. So too Abarbanel's effort to escape by making out, by dint of changed punctuation and assuring emphasis, a third house for the Messiah to fill with a glory which shall exceed not only Zerubbabel's but Solomon's. It is evident that this is but a specious ingenuity, exaggerating into a third house the ordinary deduction of a second from verse 9, and wresting† it thus exaggerated against the use to which Christians generally turn it.

* I cannot so characterise a comment like that of C. a Lapide on the place, who first enumerates eleven instances of commotion in heaven, then eight on the earth, then four on the sea, with three causes for all, and lastly a general statement of movement among the nations. Jerome, it is true *(Comm. in loc.),* had written similarly of old; but not so Theodoret, who takes it as a prediction of Gog and Magog, about to perish by mutual slaughter, and to leave their treasures to the builders of the temple. No wonder those who follow guides so crude and conflicting fall into error or scepticism.

† It is curious that C. a Lapide, though as loose first and last as most others in discussing verse 9, makes some good remarks which correct himself as to this without intending it. "τὸ *hariscon* propriè non referre *habbait*, id est, domum, sed *kebod*, id est, gloriam. Unde Septuag. disertè vertunt, διότι μεγάλη ἔσται ἡ δόξα τοῦ οἴκου ἡ ἐσχάτη ὑπὲρ τὴν πρώτην , id est, *magna erit gloria domus istius novissima quam prima*. Loquitur enim de templo Salomonis et Zorobabelis quasi de una et eadem Dei domo: quia una alteri successit, eidemque loco inaedificata est; ac ei dicit, quod gloria posterior, putà domus Zorobabelis, sit futura major gloria priori, puta domus Salomonis. Et hoc ad punctum respondet querulis Judaeorum verbis Hebraicis vers 4. *Quis est qui vidit,* etc., *domum istam in gioria sua prima?* quasi dicat. Quis vidit gloriam priorem prioris templi Salomonici? nonne dolet et gemit, quod haec posterior gloria domus posterioris longe illi sit impar? At sumat animos: ego enim promitto me facturum, ut gloria posterior priorem superet. Itaque articulus *he* hic iteratur, quia propriè non respicit *bait*, id est, domum, sed *kebod*, id est gloriam, quae major futura erat posterior quam prior," etc.

The plain meaning then of verse 9 is that "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, saith Jehovah of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith Jehovah of hosts." The house of God has a unity in the mind of the Spirit, and this would be a signal comfort to every thoughtful Jew who might otherwise be dejected. It might be afterwards pulled down and rebuilt, and after that burnt down, or turned to a wholly different use in the hands of the enemy; it will surely revert to the Jews once more, and once more be defiled as ill or worse than ever. But "*this* house" it abides in His mind, and He will own it as His house for ever when He dwells in the midst of His people, redeemed and settled there, never more to depart from Him nor to be dispersed more.

To me I confess, the thought of the house viewed as one and the same is not only different, but, as truth always is, a far nobler conception. Besides, it maintains much more the sense of moral responsibility, as well as the stability, among the Jews' changes, of God's purpose. "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, saith Jehovah of hosts." The ordinary rendering is not only feebler, but confusing; for it gives the notion that we now hear of one house, now of two; the true version makes verse 9 to harmonize completely with verse 3. The expression, *"this* house," keeps up its oneness; and once we have taken in the connection we feel how incongruous, to say the least, it is to read, "The glory of this latter house." The balance is forthwith restored when we hear the prophet say, "The latter glory of *this house* shall be greater than the former . . . and in *this place will* I give peace." It is the same house in God's mind, as it is the same place. Let it be defiled, or even razed to its foundations and built again and again, still it preserves the character of unity the inspiring Spirit stamps on it. "And in this place will I give peace." It will be so in that day. The nations will learn war no more. Every one then left of all the nations will come up to pay Him homage in that house of prayer for all nations, after He shall have shaken not the earth only but also the heavens. He made peace at His first coming, He will *give* peace at His second. For indeed we know Him meanwhile in heaven, and know that He is our peace. Moreover, as Zechariah says, "He shall speak peace to the heathen and his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth."

There is scarce a more frequent or more delightful aspect of the kingdom than this universal peace which He the King, reigning in righteousness, will establish throughout the world till the end, when He shall deliver up the kingdom to God even the Father. There is an evident connection with Micah 5 which we have already discussed. "This man shall be the peace when the Assyrian shall come," where also we may see how Jehovah Messiah magnifies Himself in Jacob, and makes His people to be both as a lion to put down revolt without hope of escape, and as a dew of blessing and refreshing showers in the midst of many peoples. Truly He will be the desire of all the nations in that day.

Then comes another message (verses 10-19), but here a moral instruction; and we are best able to judge of what is moral when we have the Lord Himself before us. This has been done as I believe in the preceding verses; another but wholesome admonition follows: "On the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of Jehovah by Haggai the prophet, saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying, If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy?" Of course the priests answered truly when they said "No." He that is holy imparts no holiness to aught else. "Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean?" The answer was no less precise in the affirmative. He that is defiled communicates defilement. "And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith Jehovah; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer thereon is unclean." As with the unclean condition of a man, so the nation of Israel defiled whatever they took up. All works and offerings are unclean. There must be personal cleanness before one can act or offer aright.

Who can fail to see that this is most applicable to the present day'? The common notion is that you can cleanse the world by going into it and by associating with it; instead of which you cannot fail to be defiled yourself. The direction to the Christian now is to purge himself from every vessel of dishonour, and to follow after righteousness and peace with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. There is no more salutary word for the Christian in the present confusion of Christendom. There we have every sort of snare and trial — both the negative and the positive. Negatively we are bound to separate from what is dishonouring to the Lord. Positively we are bound to follow after what is good, according to His will, with those who have His glory and will at heart. Isolation is wrong; but to separate from what is evil in the Lord's sight is an imperative duty for the Christian — to separate in order to unite according to God's word with those that call on Him with a pure heart. The notion of this day that you can benefit or set to rights what is evil by association with it is not only a fallacy which must end in disappointment if not in dragging you where you think not; but in itself the principle really is nothing less than a giving up of God. It is a practical abandonment of His holiness, and of our obligation to walk as Christ walked, under the plea of doing good. What more ruinous?

Along with this the prophet calls on them again to look at the ways of God. "And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of Jehovah: since those days were, when one came to an heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the press-fat for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty. I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands; yet ye turned not to me, saith Jehovah. Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of Jehovah's temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you."

Now the Lord challenges them to see how faithful He will be to His own word. And did not the disciples find it thus of old? There cannot be a more marked fact than this — the blessing that God has given so far surpassing what their largest thoughts looked for. Some of us may have proved as much in God's dealing with us spiritually. Enough, if we may refer to our own experience in a matter which after all is important both for ourselves and for others. The love of Christ alone gives whatever there may be of holy obedience, as indeed it alone is its spring and only full standard and rule in waiting for His return. To many it was simply a practical question of doing the will of God, and therefore a fixed duty of keeping clear of what dishonours the Lord; but who ever expected, as He has given since, the opening out of His word, the recovery of forgotten truth, and the enjoyment of His presence, and the extended, if indirect, blessing of others far and wide through it? Can we not say that the Lord has surpassed all the expectations that we ever had, not only in His grace, but in rejection and reproach among men? Therefore let us speak well of His name for both. The blessing has and will come beyond all our thoughts if by grace we but cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart; just as to the returned Jews of old, the Lord here vouchsafes the promise, "From this day will I bless you."

The last message comprises and amplifies the change of the heavens in its effect on the earth. It is not the church, but the kingdom when no longer in patience but in power and glory. "And again the word of Jehovah came unto Haggai on the four and twentieth day of the month, saying, Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I will shake the heavens and the earth; and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen; and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother. In that day, saith Jehovah of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith Jehovah, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith Jehovah of hosts." The throne of David should be established by the gracious power of Jehovah on the judgment of the Gentile kingdoms. The figure of His special intimacy and choice looks onward to "that day." Zerubbabel, though but governor, is clearly the type of Christ as King: as being David's son and heir in his own day, it was the more natural that he should be. Messiah alone will fully set up and for ever maintain, while earth endures, the kingdom of Jehovah here below; and this in the midst of the chosen people gathered back from captivity and dispersion. As heathen expected from the world that which was to be manifested in the church, so now Christendom expects from the church that which God reserves for Christ, and for Christ in relationship with Israel on earth as well as the church glorified on high. The revealed truth of the age to come embraces both the restoration of the kingdom to Israel on earth and the reigning of the saints above, changed indeed into the glorious likeness of the Lord, but none the less reigning with Him over the earth.

Zechariah.

Lectures on the Minor Prophets.

W. Kelly.

Zechariah was plainly a contemporary of Haggai. Like him he dates his prophecies from the second imperial power of the Gentiles; but he goes a great deal farther than Haggai in giving God's testimony about these powers. In the former prophet there was no doubt a divine intention in the allusion to the era measured by Darius's reign: not only is this kept up in Zechariah, but we have the general relation of the powers in a measure analogous to Daniel, but having its own special character and design as with all scripture. Hence it is not merely the sign of subjection in the government of God; but further we have the due relationship for the present, what was to be expected in the future, and then the final overthrow of all those powers which had come in intermediately, not only on Judah's judgment, but still more widely during the time of Israel's unfaithfulness. Malachi differs from them in being exclusively occupied with the moral condition of the Jews; hence he takes no notice whatever of the Gentile powers. Thus the prophets of the restoration, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi have each sufficiently distinctive traits.

Zechariah then brings first before us Jehovah's sore displeasure with the fathers of the Jews. They had slighted the former testimony. When it had been commanded them in the name of Jehovah of hosts to turn unto Him who would turn unto them, they had not done so; and now the children are exhorted not to be as their fathers to whom the former prophets had cried in vain. "They did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith Jehovah. Your fathers, where are they?" The present desolation therefore, and the weakness of the things because of which the children were groaning, ought to be a serious and standing lesson to their souls. "Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned and said, Like as Jehovah of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us." The word of Jehovah therefore had received its full sanction, and, instead of being disheartened by the circumstances which proved its truth, their place was to profit by the further communications which applied to their state. Every accomplishment of His chastening on Israel ought to be a call to their souls to heed the word of Jehovah now. This however was but prefatory, though of moral importance The call to them to think of their fathers and their own sins and danger is the clearing of the ground for what should follow. Prophecy supposes sin and the necessary judgment of God; but then, thanks be to God, it also holds out before us a great deal more. It shows how impossible it is that God should be overcome of evil, and that the abuse of a good thing when judged He replaces by a better in His mercy. Certainly if He has called us as Christians to overcome evil with good, He acts upon it Himself: whether in government or in grace, God is supremely above evil; and this is the one resource and unfailing comfort of faith.

The vision first introduced to us the prophet has by night: indeed the same thing applies to the first six chapters where we have a series of visions which the prophet beheld in a single night, and which traverse in that kind of outline the course of God's ways from their setting aside for the time as His people till their restoration to the land with their city and temple under Messiah. "I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him were there red horses, speckled, and white. Then said I, O my lord, what are these? And the angel that talked with me said unto me, I will show thee what these be."

Again we find a considerable resemblance to the manner in which some of the visions of the Apocalypse were given. There is the presence of an angelic communicator and interpreter. One sees therefore how the links of divine truth are found throughout scripture and always, it may be added, with due account taken of the subject, so as to preserve moral suitability. The position of Zechariah in relation to the Jew had many points in common with that of St. John towards the failing Christian body, which was already morally judged and was about to be spued out, as he said of Laodicea to them all in the Lord's name. We can understand therefore that the introduction of an angel who speaks, instead of Jehovah in more direct style of address, was by no means without its significance. There was reserve and distance implied, and this it was right to notice, for God meant it to be felt. This does not in the least degree hinder communications rich in compassion and divine goodness, not without present blessing, and pregnant in the glorious prospect for the future. In fact, though we may notice profitably this retreating of God and the intervention of angels, there is no prophet of the Old Testament who opens out a finer vista of blessedness on earth than Zechariah.

So we know that the Apocalypse of John is the main prophetic unfolding in the New Testament. Indeed its method is deeper and more complete, while at the same time it is more precise and orderly than any other in the whole Bible. Is it not then a matter of real thankfulness to God that we are not thrown on a mere inferential course of application in having to do with the ruin of Christendom just as Zechariah had with the ruin of the Jews? For a generous mind and a humble one would surely shrink from pronouncing on others unless divine authority interposed and made it simply a duty. The more one desired the glory of the Lord and loved the church, the slower one would be to form a strong judgment on the state of that which bears the name of the Lord. Now God has met this unwillingness which one might otherwise have excused as having really good and becoming elements in it. But there are other considerations of more importance than the feeling of Christians about their brethren in Christendom: we must not overlook but first of all weigh all in the light of the glory of God, and of what is due to Christ. Hence therefore God, who always cares for the name of His Son, and hence watches with tender interest those who have been given Him, — God has met this reluctance by pronouncing on it with clearness and solemnity, and distinct evidence that what gave Him ground for so strong and decided a judgment was then before His eyes, though of course about to be still more developed. Evil certainly does not grow less but more in course of time, with the continual influences which go to augment its volume and to darken its character. So we know in Christendom the declension then before the eye of the Spirit of God has gone on always increasing; but the apostles were not taken away before God pronounced on its existence, its extent, and its irreparableness, only to be set aside by divine vengeance at the end of this age.

I make these remarks of a general kind to show the value of these later prophets as furnishing the final sentence of God on the state of Israel, even of those comparatively true-hearted Jews who had come back instead of going on content to be with their Gentile captors. There was no excuse therefore for their being deceived; there is less now for us, as, God has shown His mind with all fulness about the present state of Christendom and the consequent duty of saints, not a little manifest before the apostle John became the medium for the Lord Jesus to address the Asiatic churches in Revelation 2, 3. Amply sufficient is the record to give us clear grounds for a moral judgment. No man can slight this without positive loss. We are called to take heed. Let him that has an ear hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Just as the Apocalyptic epistles differ manifestly from the general testimony of apostolic letters, so does Zechariah even from preceding prophets, save in a measure Ezekiel and Daniel, still more from the rest of the Old Testament. The occasion was peculiar. The Persian empire considerably favoured the Jews. Consequently there were two things necessary to communicate: one was the Lord owning what was of Himself providentially for the help of His people, and at the same time bringing in the whole course of these powers. These two things are done separately in this chapter.

First of all we are told of the man riding upon a red horse who stood among the myrtle trees; and then further of red horses, speckled, and white, which are explained afterwards. "These are they whom Jehovah hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth. And they answered the angel of Jehovah that stood among the myrtle trees, and said, We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest." I think that "red" is used symbolically as a sign of devotedness to God, whether in judgment, or in grace as in the rams' skins dyed red of the tabernacle, but even these founded on judgment. He who was on the red horse had been on the Lord's behalf the executor of His judgment, and was now using Persia as His instrument for so dealing and thus favouring the Jews. This was the second of the world powers, and two more were to follow as we see here. It would seem that the symbols here are rather of the angels whom Jehovah employs to overrule than of the kingdoms themselves which follow separately; and it is clear moreover that we have the connection of these powers with the history of the ancient people, but that people now in a strikingly abnormal state. We must remember that all through the last three prophets they are never owned as the people of God. This is of much importance. They are destined to be blessed and exalted more than ever as the people of God, but meanwhile they are seen out of national relationship with God. "They *shall be* my people," but they are not. Such was and is then their state. Not that God ceased to care for them: the raising up of these post-captivity prophets, and above all the mission of the Messiah, prove the contrary.

But remember that vague ideas prevail as to what is meant by "the people of God." The proper force of that expression in the Old Testament is seen in the public relationships God had with them when He identified His name with them as His nation chosen out from all others. This tie was broken at the time of the Babylonish captivity. The Jews then ceased to be openly and formally the people of God. This in no way whatever interferes with His having persons in the midst who had living faith There were such who by grace looked for the woman's Seed before the call of the people of God or their first father Abraham. In fact we have all been deeply injured by the current phrases of modern religious language, and indeed of ancient theology. Thus when people speak of the people of God, they almost always understand the line of believers. Now this is not the meaning of the people of God in the Bible, manifestly not in the Old Testament. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the saints before them, as Noah, Enoch, Abel, are never called the people of God. It was a new fact that began with the call of Israel, who were put in a national relationship with God, with the law subsequently to regulate their walk, and a sanctuary, ritual, and priesthood. Then a king was demanded on their part, and given in God's anger (for it was to reject Him); and when they began to fail under the new regime, and when prophets were raised up more and more on the total ruin of the house of David, and the final acceptance of idolatry by that house and the most faithful part of the people that had been raised up as a witness against it, then they lost their title. They were thenceforward to be Lo-ammi (Not-my-people). But this does not at all imply that no more believers were among them. As believers had been before "the people of God," so there were afterwards. In short to have believers in the midst is a wholly different thing from being the people of God: else all nations would be so. Whereas at most it can only apply to Christians now while Israel is disowned; and strictly speaking seems only applied in scripture to that portion of the Jews who believe while the rest refuse the Messiah. Compare Romans 9 and 1 Peter 2; though of course the principle applies to all baptized in His name.

In these three prophets then we find contemplated this state of things most serious for a Jew when they were no longer the people of God, and there might have risen for those who misunderstood it the danger of fearing that God no longer cared for them, because He took away their honourable title and no longer dwelt in their midst as He had once done. This would have been a fatal error. Hence therefore we find, particularly in Zechariah, the two facts clearly shown — how far God used or recognised the external powers of the world, and what was the relationship of His people during a time that He could not publicly own them as His. The prophet shows us that everything is caused to work for the good of those that love Him — a principle just as true in the Old Testament as in the New, but one which requires much delicacy in order to apply it aright, particularly in examining the ancient oracles of God, seeing that there is in this case a relationship different from our own.

But on the face of it we have One who proves Himself especially interested in the returned remnant. It is evident that the light of His word was afresh vouchsafed in the new circumstances when this might have been judged impossible. We hear it from Haggai; we have fresh proofs in the visions of Zechariah. God would regulate everything with a view to this very people after they had been utterly faithless. And these different spirits go forth and do the bidding of God, not in public but in a providential way, which He makes known to the Jew as a sign of His real care for them. He would have them confide in Him. They could no longer be called His people in the formal sense now, but those who had lost the title of it were nevertheless maintained in His gracious consciousness of care, as they will surely have that title given again in a better way by and by. Such is the posture of things in Zechariah, as it was the object of his prophecy to make it known. Thus the preliminary vision was of very great importance, just as much as the moral preface that we have seen.

"We have walked to and fro (said they) through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest." This rest of their foes boded no good to the Jew. "Then the angel of Jehovah answered and said, O Jehovah of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah" — He does not say "on the people of Jehovah" — "against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? And Jehovah answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words. So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. And I am very sore displeased with the heathen." Clearly this is the point that now comes forward. He first declares that He was sore displeased with their fathers, and that He had dealt accordingly, sending them into captivity and taking away their great distinctive title for the time with all the singular signs and effects of His presence with them nationally. Then it is shown that, though He had sanctioned Gentile powers in their place of earthly supremacy, He was none the less aggrieved by their pride and cruelty toward the Jews. "I am very sore displeased with the nations that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction. Therefore thus saith Jehovah; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith Jehovah of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem." This was having then a partial accomplishment on the fall of Babylon, but the fulfilment in the strict sense of the word awaits another day; and we may enquire why, before we close with Zechariah.

For this reason, I suppose, it is that in the opening vision the horse of the man seen to stand among the myrtle trees in the shade (verse 8), and the first of the horses behind him were of the same colour — red. For a similar reason also there is an absence of a fourth colour here; as in fact the Babylonian empire had been already put down by Cyrus the Persian, who in a dim way prefigured Christ as the deliverer of the Jews from their oppressive captivity, vindicating the true God and His word against idols, restoring them to their land and encouraging them to build the temple of Jehovah. The vision however seems purposely general. There is more precision in the corresponding one of chapter 6, where also the purpose in hand brought the first empire into view, as we shall see. But it is not here as in Daniel a symbolical sketch of the world-powers, outwardly or inwardly, but rather of the spiritual powers behind the scenes. "Then said I, O my lord, what are these? And the angel that talked with me said unto me, I will show thee what these be. And the man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, These are they whom Jehovah hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth."

It seems plain that the man who stood among the myrtle trees is no other than the angel of Jehovah, familiar to us elsewhere "And they answered the angel of Jehovah that stood among the myrtle trees, and said, We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest. Then the angel of Jehovah answered and said, O Jehovah of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? And Jehovah answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words." The same who revealed Himself of old to the fathers, to Moses, Joshua, and others; so did He now according to the circumstance and need of the remnant. We must distinguish Him from the angel that talked with the prophet ordinarily.

Again it must not be forgotten that the proper national history of Israel closed with the captivity, and that after their return it was only a provisional state in the mercy of God here and elsewhere guaranteed, while waiting for the Messiah. His rejection brought wrath on them to the uttermost; but in it the hidden purposes of God were accomplished where all seemed most to fail — in the cross of the Lord Jesus, by virtue of which God not only gathers out the church now, but will return in sovereign mercy to the Jew ere long, after working graciously in their hearts and producing both repentance and a looking out in faith to Him whom they once crucified and slew by the hand of lawless men.

"Therefore thus saith Jehovah; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith Jehovah of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem. Cry yet, saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and Jehovah shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem." Now what gives this its force is that these words were uttered after the return from captivity. Consequently this return could not furnish the complete fulfilment of the divine assurance, though it was no doubt a pledge of it. Therefore the object of these words was not to make them contented with the measure of mercy already shown them, but to use the present as a ground to look for greater blessing which grace has in store: "Jehovah shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem." As far as the return from Babylon is concerned, it was already accomplished; and there never has been a return since but another and worse scattering. It is plain and certain therefore that God intimates a fresh return. He shall yet comfort Zion and shall yet choose Jerusalem.

But a fresh sight presents itself. "Then lifted I up mine eyes, and saw, and behold four horns." Here we have the full course of the Gentile powers: clear if an allusion to Daniel 2 and Daniel 7, but hardly intelligible otherwise. "And I said unto the angel that talked with me, What be these? And he answered me. These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem." It is not the providential agencies which God employed to act within and by the empire: these were represented by the horses. But here we are in presence of the kingly powers which successively ravaged Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem (verse 19). Hence horns are the symbols employed, of which the prophet saw four, as we might expect, answering to the four powers from first to last that were successively to reign. It is a general picture grouped prophetically and bringing into one glance both past and future, Babylon and Rome, Israel and Judah.

But vengeance belongs to God, and instruments of it are next seen. "And Jehovah showed me four carpenters. Then said I, What come these to do? And he spake, saying, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head: but these are come to fray them." They are the instrumentality God will use to overthrow the powers that He was pleased to raise up in His sovereignty for the chastening of Israel. But God will know how to deal with them, especially in the end of the age. He will then "cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it."

Now it is clear that all this has a general character. The opening vision gives no more than a broad panoramic picture or the outline from first to last — what was even then true but at the same time what would go down to the close when the judgment of these horns should have been finally executed.

The second chapter lets us know that, whatever God may tell us about others, His heart is always occupied with Jerusalem. "I lifted up mine eyes again, and looked, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said onto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof. And, behold, the angel that talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him, and said unto him Run, speak to this young man." It is the prophet Zechariah, of whom we learn this personal circumstance by the way; though some take it as merely a servant apart from age, which seems to me rather unnatural.

The measuring line is the symbol of taking possession, either in title or in fact, when renewed dealings or restorations would follow. Here it is rather the former, because the proper possession would await the overthrow of the Gentile powers; but the act of measuring was meant to show even then God's intention to bless after this sort.

"Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: for I, saith Jehovah, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her." It is very evident that nothing that has yet been at all meets the terms of the prophecy. We look onward to the day when the multitude of her inhabitants will break all bounds; and, instead of vassalage under Persian or Greek or Roman masters, they will have Jehovah Himself their fortress and wall of defence.

In the next place comes the call to all that remain: the restoration of the Jews will be then complete. "Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith Jehovah: for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, saith Jehovah." This refers to the previous dispersions of Israel. "Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon. For thus saith Jehovah of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you." Nothing can be more distinct. How any with the smallest attention to scripture, not to say spiritual judgment, can mistake the scope or nature of this prophecy, or think that this has been fulfilled, it is difficult to understand. Observe the words "after the glory:" consequently no blessing before Christ came could possibly accomplish Zechariah's words. More than this; when Christ presented Himself, so far from then accomplishing these words, there was a further sin and a fresh dispersion. Thus the dealings of God after the first advent and the crucifixion put the accomplishment of this prophecy farther off than ever and brought in fresh grounds for a new punishment of Israel, not as yet the fulfilment of the prophecy. This will be "after the glory." Christ must first appear in glory. "For thus saith Jehovah of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you; for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye. For, behold, I will shake mine hand upon them, and they shall be a spoil to their servants: and ye shall know that Jehovah of hosts hath sent me." Consequently there is a song of joy even now raised in anticipation of the fulfilment of glory for the people of Israel. "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee." What Jehovah did when He brought them out of Egypt will be accomplished and much more. "I will dwell in the midst of thee."

The statement of His dwelling among His people regularly follows that of their redemption; as we see in Exodus 15, 29 and many other passages. When the redemption was figurative, He dwelt after a visible sort in their midst. When true and eternal redemption shall have been by faith applied to Israel, then will be His true and everlasting dwelling in the midst of His people; but this is "after the glory." "And many nations shall be joined to Jehovah in that day." There we find clearly the circumstances of the millennial glory. We see how repeated is the testimony to this inestimable privilege of Zion, as indeed it goes out to all mankind. It seems astonishing how any student of scripture could point to the sojourn of the Son of God before redemption in the land of Judea. The similarity of the language to Zec 9:9 compels to no such conclusion, because this prophecy was fulfilled in the presentation of the King, not at all in His action or the consequences of His advent described immediately afterwards. The rejection of the King postponed the complete fulfilment. His coming will take up the broken thread and perfect the web of divine purposes. The comparison therefore with the latter chapter really compels to the inference that both await the public reign of Christ over the land. "And I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that Jehovah of hosts hath sent me unto thee. And Jehovah shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again. Be silent, O all flesh, before Jehovah: for he is raised up out of his habitation." The age to come will be characterised not by some believing and others not (Mar 16:16, Act 28:24), but by universal homage under the kingdom of Jehovah and the Christ, when judgments on the nations after the manifestation of the divine glory have broken the pride of man.

All this part is sufficiently clear. The first chapter in a general way brings in the Gentile powers and their destroyers; the second chapter shows us proof of Jehovah's peculiar care for this purpose for the earth, of which Jerusalem is the centre, the witness of which goes out to all nations when Jehovah shall have made the daughter of Zion His holy habitation. It is to me beyond question that the moment is fixed by the expression "after the glory." That great event will be when the Lord appears in glory. "That day" fairly and fully interpreted cannot be short of His manifested kingdom over the earth, when Israel is restored to the land, and the nations, having undergone in one form, and in another continuing to undergo, the solemn judgment of the quick, learn righteousness under His reign, and bow to the holy pleasure which Jehovah takes once more and for ever in His chosen city. The fact that the remnant had already returned from the Babylonish captivity makes it so much the more evident that God here reveals His purpose of effecting a still more complete restoration of the Jews to the land. But all His purposes centre in Christ, and will only be displayed when He comes in the clouds of heaven with power and glory, not to destroy but to reign. The judgment of the dead will follow in its season.

But then supposing Jerusalem could be thus blessed according to the sovereign choice of God, who never revokes His gifts or His calling — supposing all nations could be thus joined not merely to them but to Him with Jerusalem as their centre — would that satisfy God without putting their hearts and consciences in communion with Him? Impossible. Hence another scene follows to this end in Zechariah 3. "He showed me Joshua the high priest." This, as is evident, touches relationship with God, and brings in not merely the city but the sanctuary. "He showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of Jehovah, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And Jehovah said unto Satan, Jehovah rebuke thee, O Satan; even Jehovah that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel." The high priest bears a representative character, not here entering within the veil, but much more like the same personage when he confessed the sins of Israel on the head of the people's lot, the live goat sent into the land of forgetfulness. We must remember that the high priest had not only an intercessory function but a representative character, the latter outside, the former within the veil when the blood was put before and upon the mercy seat.

Here the scene has clearly a representative design. Hence Joshua is seen not clothed in garments of glory and beauty, nor even in the linen garments of daily service. He is on his trial, so to speak, like one suspected of crime. Notoriously the Easterns are as to this rapid in their thoughts and prompt in action. When a man was suspected of crime, it was the common habit to take for granted that he was guilty till he had cleared himself. They do not resemble the Westerns, who take for granted that a man is innocent till he is proved guilty. Here however all stand on solemn ground. It was not a question of Oriental any more than of Western thoughts, but of God and the adversary, who both knew the guilt of Jerusalem. Properly therefore do we see the strange sight of the high priest clad in filthy garments. It was only to be expected that Satan should be there taking advantage of the guilt and the confessed condition of the representative high priest as a reason why God should cast Jerusalem back into fiery trouble again. Why should He pluck such a brand as that out of the fire? Was it better than other brands? Such was Satan's reason; but Jehovah had seen all according to His grace, and in sovereign mercy says, "Take away the filthy garments from him." It was a sentence which had its spring in His own affection. Nevertheless it has a firm ground of righteousness, as we know well, though this be not here brought forward, yet never absent from the eye of God. "And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with costly [not merely change of] raiment." Such is His good pleasure, which is not more gracious toward the Jew than glorifying to Himself. "He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy," and He has mercy on Joshua as standing for the people. But this is not all. "And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head ;" for he is not content with acquittal merely, but lavishes signs of honour and full favour. "So they set a fair mitre on his head, and clothed him with the garments. And the angel of Jehovah stood up. And the angel of Jehovah protested unto Joshua, saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways." This solemn declaration was a charge conditional on obedience and even then valid and applicable. Although God put before the people His purpose of grace He did not for the present take them out of government proceeding on the ground of their own responsibility. It was not the new covenant — the Messiah. There was but a sign of the good things coming, but not yet come. The very image could not be beforehand; nor should it be looked for in the past.

The angel of Jehovah means, I think, Jehovah acting by one who represented Him. The angel stood in a relation with respect to Jehovah similar to that which the high priest held towards Israel — at least to a certain point. The same principle in the Revelation is true of the angel of Jesus, and the angels of the churches, which last of course were men in their midst.

This then was the ground on which the Jews stood for the present. There was as yet no taking them out from their place of responsibility under law. This could not be till the Messiah came and was received by Israel. But there is more added. "Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy companions that sit before thee: for they are men of a sign or portent [that is, representative men]: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH." The effort of Grotius to lower this to Zerubbabel is mischievous; and a grievous thing that Dr. Blayney should acquiesce in an unbelief too strong not only for many a learned Rabbi, but even for such rationalists as Gesenius and Hitzig, who deny not the Messianic reference. From Isaiah the application is unquestionable; and in Luke 1 we see the Septuagintal alternative, ἀνατολή, as is commonly known. "For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon the one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I *will* engrave the graving thereof, saith Jehovah of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity [or punishment] of that land in one day."

Why should one think that the stone then in vision before Joshua sets aside the future reference of verse 9, typified by the foundation stone of the temple then laid? The context is decidedly Messianic. As yet it was the blessed sign only; the shadow and not the substance for the Jews till Jesus come and reign. "In that day, saith Jehovah of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree." What "one day" but the day of Messiah's glory can remove the punishment of Judea with its cause? Meanwhile we come into the blessing for heaven — we who believe on Him, our life hid in God. Surely it is not the day when they were still exposed to the evil eye and malicious report of their Samaritan and other envious neighbours; but a day of mercy and power flowing from God's grace towards the Jews. It is not indeed the deeper calling we know now by the Spirit according to the once hidden counsels of God, who unites us to Christ in heaven and for heaven. This will be a day for the earth. Consequently we hear of each inviting his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree. We follow Christ unseen through shame and suffering till we go to meet Him on high. Here it is not those whom the Lord is not ashamed to call His brethren, while the world disowns them, whose joy it is to know "His Father and our Father, his God and our God." The prophet never intimates such language for the earth any more than the New Testament puts such figures as theirs in our mouth. Although we are on the earth, we stand in a heavenly relationship already, and shall be changed accordingly when Jesus comes. (1 Corinthians 15) They at His coming shall enjoy all that God promised Israel of old and down through the line of prophets.

But there is more still. "And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, and said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold." It is not only the future justification of Israel: it is not only that there is a foundation stone of the perfect government of God exhibited; but further we find now the manner in which Jehovah will give a suitable display of the Spirit's power in the day that is coming. This is so represented by "a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof," with evident allusion to Joshua and Zerubbabel, though looking on to a far greater One of manifold office and deeper glory than any type could express. Joshua represented the high priestly function, Zerubbabel in a measure bore witness to the kingly one. As we know, this will centre in Christ, and then will perfection be seen, and not before. He only will supply, dispense, and keep up, as the true Priest and King, the light of the Spirit in Israel to the glory of Jehovah. Before this shall be established in the kingdom, we see a pledge of it in the two witnesses of Revelation 11, after the translation of the saints to heaven, when God begins to work anew in the Jewish remnant. But here it is the full divine order of Messiah. It is a state of things obviously distinct from the church. Both the high priest and the governor might be feeble shadows indeed; still they brought before the mind of God, and drew out for the remnant the sure sign of what should be when the Messiah fulfils both. So we find this assuredly is to be brought into being, not by human resources, not by a mere amelioration of the Jew, "but by my Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts." It is not by might nor by power; that is, in no way through external resources, nor even the mental or moral power of man, although there will be a suitable condition of man by grace; but all will be distinctively by the Holy Ghost. On the other hand there is no reference to the operation of the Spirit in the conversion of sinners or the new birth, which is ever set forth under the figure of water. Anointing is a question of power in those already washed and set apart to God.

Obstacles are nothing to God. "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it." David's son is here again the plain type of Him whom Jehovah shall bring forth as the chief Stone with acclamations of Grace, grace, to it. From Genesis 49, Isaiah 28 and Daniel 2 the reference is obvious. "And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that Jehovah of hosts hath sent me unto you." It was but a day of small things now, but the man that despised it would not be in unison with Jehovah of hosts when the accomplishment came. The same spirit which owns God's complacency in what is little will have honour from God in the great day, and none others. But the day when God is morally testing souls is always a day of small things open to the scorn of him whose heart is not content to serve God. Those whose delight is in God's will and work in the day of small things are in communion with Himself. What a thought that Jehovah can and does rejoice in the little efforts of those who are guided by His word in seeking His glory! "Then I answered, and said to him, What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof? And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves?" And we are told here, "These are the two anointed ones, that stand by Jehovah of the whole earth." That I have already explained in few words to mean Joshua and Zerubbabel, as the heads of the religious and civil power then known in Jerusalem, but looking onward to Christ who will unite both, as we see in Zechariah 6.

But now come two other and very different signs of warning. "Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a flying roll. And he said unto me, What seest thou? And I answered, I see a flying roll; the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits." The Jews must not mistake, nor turn the grace of God toward their present condition into a license. It was well to know the gracious intimations of Jehovah, who fully recognises a day of small things, and will mark him who cloaks his selfish unbelief under despite of better men than himself. But the faith that sustains, spite of weakness and contumely, does look onward to the day of great things, when Jehovah-Messiah shall be the full and ultimate accomplisher of the purposes of God. And faith turns all this for use in present difficulties; and it is not blind to the awful results of the evil that was then at work among the people. The introduction of Messiah's kingdom in power on earth supposes evil exposed and judged as surely as the establishment of righteousness and peace. Both will be true, and both are predicted in their place.

We have already had the bright side; we have just seen in the flying roll the solemn testimony of God, that the evil which was then among the Jews would work out its worst results. Its source and doom are here pronounced. "Then said he unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth," or rather *land.* The same word in Hebrew as in Greek means "earth" and "land." We are dependent on contextual reasons to decide which is meant. But here I should suppose it is the whole land only, while unwilling to speak dogmatically. It is entirely a question of the context. The word meaning either, there is nothing to decide us in itself. The real question here, in view of what is treated, is which best suits Jehovah's object in the warning Now the design here is not to lower the estimate of evil in the Jewish people, but rather to prepare the prophet and believer for hopes deferred; to explain how it is that with such glorious predictions there was to be a postponement in their accomplishment. Hence the occasion, actual or at hand, is shown to be frightful in God's eyes. The captivity, humiliating as it was, had not at all stamped it out of the people.

We shall see presently that the sin of the Gentiles against which Israel was raised up to be witnesses, was, or at least will be, at work, and no prospect for the present of its extirpation; and so far was Babylon from being its grave, the Spirit of God points to Shinar as its nurse and proper sphere. Babylon's doom therefore would belong to Babylon's sins; and none the less if done in Israel. It might not appear all at once, but it was there, not purged out.

And what is the wickedness here in view? Two things are noticed more particularly. "Every one that stealeth shall be cut off;" and "every one that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side according to it." These are taken as a sample, not as the whole: one from the second table of the law which deals with man; the other from the first, which deals with direct offences against God. Stealing is the evidence of utter disregard to the rights of one's neighbour in his goods. Swearing is the sign of equal disregard to the majesty and truth of God. In short both man and God were thoroughly despised and rebelled against, so that the curse which took notice of these two flagrant sins comes before us. "I will bring it forth, saith Jehovah of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name." This evidently suits much more "the whole land" than "the whole earth." "And it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof."

But then comes the second part of this chapter. We have had the double curse; but there is a figure appended which shows that God traced the iniquity to its source; and a very important principle this is in God's judgment. "Then the angel that talked with me went forth, and said unto me, Lift up now thine eyes, and see what is this that goeth forth. And I said, What is it? And he said, This is an ephah that goeth forth. He said moreover, This is their resemblance through all the earth. And, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead: and this is a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah. And he said, This is wickedness. And he cast it into the midst of the ephah; and he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof. Then lifted I up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came out two women, and the wind was in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork: and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven. Then said I to the angel that talked with me, Whither do these bear the ephah? And he said unto me, To build it an house in the land of Shinar: and it shall be established, and set there upon her own base." The ephah was a well-known Hebrew dry or corn measure, equal nearly to an English bushel. This is their eye, *ayinim** in all the land. This some take to indicate the intent of the heart set on evil; and others derive from it the sense of sight, and hence appearance or resemblance. It is again (verse 8) said to be wickedness, after the woman was shown sitting in the ephah. The meaning of the sign I take to be that idolatrous wickedness is here seen caught and shut up as it were by the leaden weight, and presently afterwards (verses. 9-11) transported rapidly to the mother source of idols — the land of Shinar — that it might be set there in its congenial haunt: why should it pollute the land of Jehovah?

{*There is a various reading in one of De Rossi's copies which means their iniquity, which seems to have been read by the LXX, Arabic and Syriac, and is preferred by not a few moderns.}

From Shinar religious corruption came, and thither it must go, forcibly and swiftly carried off: such is the measure meted by Jehovah. This again seems to confirm the idea that it is the idolatrous evil of the Jew derived from and sent back to Babylon. This was particularly emphatic. The judgment of God which had transported the Jews to Babylon had not destroyed the iniquity for which they were carried there. The post-captivity prophet lets us know that, when God has traced the evil to its source, it has to be taken out of His land, and set upon its own base, where it really is at home, even in the land of Shinar, the plain on which Babylon was built. He does not speak of Babylon now, but simply the scene of it. It is all no doubt a symbolical prophecy. One may not agree with D. Kimchi and others of the Rabbinical commentators that the woman means the ten tribes, and the ephah Jeroboam's calves and the worship of Israel; but I am farther still from believing that the vision is God's sentence on modern commerce, borne on stork's wings from the east to the west. This seems to be the most unfounded and grotesque of all interpretations, though I do not deny the corrupting influence of commercial principles and effects.

But the vision before us carries us on to the iniquity in the land which God must judge; and I will add too in the last days, confident as some are that idolatry can never be among the Jews again. But the Lord warned them of the contrary (Mat 13:43-45; Mat 24:15), for the last state of that Christ-rejecting generation; and so do the prophets when speaking of the end of the age. (Dan 11:38; Rev 13:15; Rev 18:4) The truth is that Babel was not only the beginning of earthly monarchy, but also, from the beginning of that power (by the man who sought self-exaltation here below in despite of God), accompanied by idolatry. Babel was thus the fountain-head of idols. Now idolatry is the evil that has afflicted the Jews, particularly as is known from all their ancient history, because of which they were at length sent to Babylon, which was no fortuitous scene of exile but retributively chosen of God.

The future should not be overlooked. The Jews have long and completely laid aside idolatry. They always boast themselves that it was unheard of since their return from captivity. But our Lord let them know in His own day, though they were so self-complacent on this head, that as surely as there then was a swept and empty and garnished state, the unclean spirit would in the end return, and this with seven spirits worse than himself, and thus the last state should be worse than the first. This seems to link itself with the comparatively enigmatic vision seen here. The iniquity was but suppressed and shifted for the time. It is only held down, not destroyed or extirpated. Traced up to its own proper source on the plain of Shinar, it will be judged of God in that day, when not only moral offences against God and man shall be avenged speedily, but man shall consign every idol to the moles and to the bats. Idolatry will surely reappear, and this not only among the Christianised Gentiles, but among the Jews, little as they may suspect such an issue. It is an invariable truth of scripture that the mere absence of evil is never a deliverance from its power. An empty, swept, or even garnished condition in itself implies no final escape. It may go on if God so please to hinder the inroads of the enemy; but in fact an empty state always exposes to the return of the old evil. There must be possession taken by the positive power of God in order to keep mischief out. Unless the Holy Spirit seize and fill the scene, there never can be an effectual barrier against the return of the evil which we least of all look for, especially of that from which we count ourselves radically delivered. So far indeed from this it is the old evil that ever tends to come up again when conscience relaxes and faith wanes, and religious habits or traditions grow up instead. There may be other and worse evil: as we have seen, the unclean spirit will come with seven other spirits worse than himself. Thus there will be at the end of the age, and especially in Jerusalem, a combination of these two things, as we learn from our Lord's clear and full and solemn warning. There will be a special power of Satan let loose at the close of this age, as well as the recurrence of the old idolatrous evil which afflicted the Jews in times past.

Plainly then this vision traces the civil to its Babylonish source, and shows us that there will be undoubtedly an idolatrous issue in the land once again, but then to be judged in connection with that which really represents its birthplace. The ephah with the woman within and held down by the lump of lead, next carried from the land back to the plain of Shinar, appears to be the instructive but symbolical form of expressing the true character and source of the idolatry then to be judged. If it should reappear in connection with the Jews, just before the Lord returns in power and glory, they will feel the more ashamed of their folly when it is seen thus transferred to its own place to be disposed of and finally judged there. I should take the vision as a symbolical picture, as simply showing when and how the Lord detects this iniquity at the end. The great flying roll deals with the moral transgressions of the Jew; the vision of the ephah shows that religious iniquity will be taken clean away. This, it seems, is the idea of the measure borne off by the women, with their stork-like wings filled by the wind, and bound for Shinar. They thus take all bodily away where the hidden evil will not be hindered only from working but be finally judged, and this as divinely traced to Babylon, for it had no better source than that beginning of self-will, violence, and pride. I have not the slightest doubt that idolatry will return (that is, virtual heathenism), and am persuaded that principles are at work at present in these lands which will bring it back. Even now they are working in Christendom; but what will it be when God gives men up to strong delusion that they should believe falsehood, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved?

Zechariah 6 closes these preliminary visions. "And I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came four chariots out from between two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of brass [or copper]." Thus we find that God fully maintains His witness of Gentile imperial authority. Israel had ceased to be the place of His direct rule on earth; but He sanctions fully the Gentiles in the government providentially given to them, which the Jew was bound to own, humiliating as it must be to him. The four chariots are an unmistakable reference *(mutatis mutandis)* to the course of earthly power as already made known in detail by Daniel. There is no more real difficulty here than in the statue or the four beasts seen to emerge together when the winds strove on the great waters there. "These are the four spirits of the heavens which go forth." They are looked at not so much as powers, but in virtue of their unseen animating agents in providence: and this is the reason why we hear of spirits in this place. The horns in chapter 1, as was said before, show them as kingly powers strictly; the chariots and horses seem to be more intimate and to exhibit God's purpose, rather than simply to set them out as the powers themselves

"In the first chariot were red horses; and in the second chariot black horses; and in the third chariot white horses; and in the fourth chariot grisled and bay horses." The main point to observe is that of the red* we hear no more than the fact; that the black horses (which were quite absent from Zechariah 1) seem connected with those who followed the empire of Babylon (verse 8); that the white are shown to have pursued their way to the north country in the eastern world; and that the fourth or Roman chariot has a twofold description, an earlier and a later. The grisled are seen to push their way southward, which may indicate the full establishment of the empire by the battle of Actium, which decided the fate of the world in that day. But it is the bay or strong horses which sought to go, that they might walk to and fro through the earth. To these especially the word is, (verse 7) Get you hence, walk to and fro through the earth. The early powers had the title, and aspired after universality of dominion; the third won it by conquest of unexampled rapacity and success; the fourth alone made it good with anything approaching to permanence of power. The context here (I may say in contrast with verse 8) seems plainly to show that we should understand earth and not land in verse 7. How completely all were but carrying out in result the will of God, whatever their own ways, is shown for the comfort of the Jew even now in the close of the vision: much more will it be clear when He takes the kingdom whose right it is.

{*"The red" in this connection here presents a difficulty at first sight when compared with chap. 1 where the second empire is so characterised. But we must not forget that abstractions alone meet symbols. And Babylon in its day had been an instrument of God's judgment, as Persia afterwards became to Babylon itself. Hence Persia might be seen of such a colour among the three, as Babylon had been when the first of the four.}

Hence the chapter furnishes then another picture, yet connected with what goes before. "Take from the captivity, from Heldai, from Tobijah and from Jedaiah, who are come from Babylon, and go thou on that day, yea, go into the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah; and take silver and gold, and make crowns, and set them on the head of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and speak unto him, saying." It is a further prophecy of the Branch, the Messiah, and thus confirms thoroughly what we have seen before. "Thus speaketh Jehovah of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of Jehovah: even he shall build the temple of Jehovah; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne." The building of Zerubbabel was precious in Jehovah's eyes, but most of all as bringing before His eyes a greater Son of David and abiding glory when He sits a priest upon His throne. In no sense was it true that Zerubbabel was a priest; in no sense was Joshua a king. The Messiah alone can build the glory and will display it to the glory of God here below. He is now the rejected King, a priest, the great high priest undoubtedly, but on His Father's throne, not yet on His own, as He Himself expressly declares and distinguishes in Rev 3:21. He is now a priest after the order of Melchisedec; He will then exercise it in all its fulness of meaning (not as now Aaronically in the holiest, but) coming forth with refreshment for the conquerors over the hostile powers of the earth, blessing the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth (manifestly so then), and blessing man, Himself the channel and security of all blessing for ever. "Even he shall build the temple of Jehovah; and he shall bear the glory." It is only prejudice which compels any one to bring in here the church; for the theme is clearly the kingdom, and embraces the Jews as His people on earth, as the temple is clearly that described in Ezekiel, not the New Testament habitation of God in the Spirit. "And the counsel of peace shall be between them both." Anything short of the Messiah is altogether inapt. Further, it seems far-fetched and, if intelligible, rather strange doctrine that the priesthood and royalty should be personified, and the last phrase mean that the counsel of peace is "between *them* both." The notion of Jew and Gentile is also intolerable. The only two persons named previously are Jehovah and the Branch.*

{* There seems to me no force in Dathe's objection: "quondam enim Deus in toto hoc loco loquitur, affixum in senehem non potest ad Jovam referri;" for Jehovah does not speak of Himself in the first but in the third person. This therefore rather confirms than sets aside the reference to Jehovah and the Branch.}

The crowns then were to be for Helem and his companions (ver. 14) not as their property but in memorial of the crowning of Joshua as the symbolic representative here of the Messiah; just as Zerubbabel was before, and as both together, sons of oil, were in Zechariah 4. What strikingly confirmed the provisional character of the then state of things and the symbol of Messiah's kingdom and the temple of Jehovah in the future is given in verse 15. "And those from afar off shall come and build in the temple of Jehovah; and ye shall know that Jehovah hath sent me to you. And it shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of Jehovah your God." So the passage abruptly terminates. Gentiles should come and help toward the temple of Jehovah which Messiah is to build (which could not be the one then in course of building, nor surely Herod's); and the Jews are left in this inexpressible solemnity on that hinge of personal responsibility, just indeed but ever fatal to the first man.

In the fourth year of king Darius we find a strain of prophecy, but broken up like the former into various sections. As to the idea that there was any different writer, it need scarce be said that it is a dream, and quite unworthy of serious consideration for a Christian One may in grace notice it for the sake of others, and seek the removal of the diligently gathered difficulties; but there is no sufficient internal ground whatever for such a thought. There is, it is true, the remarkable fact that Matthew, in quoting words in Zechariah 11, gives us the name of Jeremiah. But this is merely a difficulty, not a ground for denying Zechariah's title to the latter half or the last quarter of his prophecy. It is quite possible that Jeremiah may have predicted the same thing, and that Zechariah may have written what Jeremiah predicted, without affirming that this is the solution of the difficulty. Again, it appears that it was customary among the Jews in quoting from the prophets to take the great characteristic prophet, and to class others under his name. Thus there is a choice of solutions of the particular difficulty in question, which the late Dean of Canterbury was not justified in branding a "means of evading," any more than he is to be followed in the frightful alternative of imputing an inaccurate memory to the evangelist and so compromising the Gospel. But in no way does the point fairly touch Zechariah, though some no doubt would like thereby to lower both the Old Testament and the New. It is enough to notice these facts by the way, in order not to be detained by such external points, while aiding any who may be perplexed by such an objection.

38 Zechariah contd

But it is plain that in the latter half of Zechariah the first two chapters are on the surface distinct from what follows. The occasion of Zechariah 7, 8 was the fact that certain feasts had been instituted by the Jews in consequence of the captivity. They were naturally much distressed that the hand of God should be stretched out against them, as proved by the humiliation to which they were reduced before the whole world. Hence they had recourse to fasts instituted for the purpose of bewailing their sins and imploring mercy before God. Some of these Jews felt now that Jehovah had appeared for the remnant and brought them back into the land; and, the temple approaching its completion, the continuance of these fasts was hardly suitable. This gives occasion accordingly to the prophet for a new communication from God. "Then came the word of Jehovah of hosts unto me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves? Should ye not hear the words which Jehovah hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity."

"Execute true judgment (adds he), and show mercy and compassions every man to his brother." Ordinances, whatever they may do, never take the place of practical righteousness, and still less of faith, in the sight of God. There may be, there is often, the utmost zeal for an external institution where the heart is far from Him. Need it be said how perfectly this falls in both with Isaiah before the captivity, and with the Saviour's application of Isaiah to the state of things then in Israel? But while the prophet shows how Jehovah had scattered the people, spite of the ritual observances, and that consequently having recourse to them was in no way the true remedy for a low or evil condition, although they might have their place along with the weightier matters, he fully predicts the blessing in store for Jerusalem. "Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury. Thus saith Jehovah; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem." He does not say that He *was,* but that He *would be.* "And Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of Jehovah of hosts the holy mountain. Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age." Mark, "every man:" he is looking onward to the day when death should not be, as we are told in Isaiah. "Every man with his staff in his hand for very age" — not that there should not be the young, but that the old should not vanish away. It is the reversal of all past history — "and he died," "and he died." Under Messiah men will go on living and last out the whole millennial reign. "And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof. Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith Jehovah of hosts." Not so; God is always waiting for that day. "Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; and I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people." Thus the sentence will be taken off from them. "They shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness." Then all the degradation to which they had been so righteously condemned would be completely effaced in the day of renewed and better and enduring glory for Israel.

This accordingly is turned to present practical profit in what follows. The chapter ends with showing that fasts should be changed into feasts, and sorrow into gladness. Compare the inverse in Matthew 9 in answer to the complaining disciples of John.) And not only should this blessedness be for Israel, but "in those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you." Such will be the complete change of the day of Jehovah.

Then we enter on two great burdens: the first of them running on from Zechariah 9 to the end of Zechariah 11; and the next taking up some special features of chapter 11, which are expanded in the last burden to the end of the book.

As to the first, beginning with chapter 11, it is said, "The burden of the word of Jehovah in the land of Hadrach, and Damascus shall be the rest thereof: when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward Jehovah." We find accordingly the judgment of the nations which were near at hand. But further, while there should be the overthrow of Tyre and Sidon — while there should be sorrow therefore for Ashkelon and Gaza — it is written that there should be a state of confusion in Judah. But Jehovah would undertake the cause of the people. "And I will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth: and no oppressor shall pass through them any more: for now have I seen with mine eyes." This brings in the Messiah. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." We know how this is applied by the evangelists, just so far as was true then, and no farther, leaving for future fulfilment what did not then apply. It would be hard to wish for a finer instance of scripture exactitude where all is perfect. The mode of citation clearly shows the admirable manner in which the Holy Ghost is pleased to employ the Old Testament. There is first of all His title, and then His character, but *not* the consequences for others, of which unbelief deferred the accomplishment.

As to the early verses of the chapter there seems no reason to question that they distinctly apply to the march of Alexander's army and the heavy blows struck north and south of Judea after the battle of Issus (as well as certain successes of Jews long afterwards over Greeks), and above all to Jehovah's then protection of His house when the conqueror of the east passed by on his return westward to secure the coasts of the Mediterranean before pushing into the interior of Asia (ver. 8). Even rationalists admit the exact parallel between the list of his captures and the places which gave him especial trouble in besieging them, as Tyre and Gaza; as well as the long subsequent Maccabean victories. But plain as this is and in its measure important, how much more so is it to see that as a whole the prophecy like others is of no isolated interpretation? It joins all the rest in converging on the great events of the last days when the King shall make good the sure mercies of David, now established in His resurrection, by coming to them, not as before in humiliation but in power and glory (though that be the pledge of this), and sounding the trumpet as He defends themselves visibly (not His house as erst invisibly in His providence), and saving them in that day as the flock of His people, when they shall be more conspicuous for strength against all adversaries than they have ever been for weakness and fear, and they shall walk up and down in His name, saith Jehovah.

The prophecy most plainly renews the time of the judgment when Jehovah is seen cutting off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse and the battle bow from Jerusalem. At that very time He will undertake for the Jew. "Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope: even to-day do I declare that I will render double unto thee; when I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man." This is the more remarkable, because Greece was then coming forward and soon going to overthrow the Persian master of Israel; but the day comes when the sons of Zion shall surely overthrow Greece If this has never yet been, it remains to be. "And Jehovah shall be seen over them." This clearly marks when the accomplishment must be, even when the glory of Jehovah shall be manifested in this world. "And Jehovah shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning: and Jehovah God shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south." It is really no small absurdity to apply all this to anything that has ever been since here below.

We see that Greece does not merge in the beast when it rises from the abyss according to the energetic symbolical language of the Revelation. We must leave scope for all the actors in the final crisis, for the eastern as well as the western powers, and others of less moment who move rather independently. The last resuscitated empire will represent the previous universal empires as to their principles, — that is Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece, — but will not have their dominions.

The principle is one thing, their territorial possessions another. It seems plain from Daniel 2 that there will be a representative of all in that day when the blow falls on the feet of iron-clay and breaks them to pieces. Then we find the gold and silver and the brass and iron not all changed into iron, but each with a representative, not excepting even Babylon, although the Roman only retain among them imperial power. Thus there will be a representative of Persia, and so it exists now. There will be a representative of Greece, as we know it has begun to be represented afresh, but it will assume, I suppose, a more definite form and greater importance. Assyria, as we have frequently seen, will be represented by the king of the north where the Ottoman Porte is now — I do not say properly or formally Russian, but certainly a power in league with Russia, subservient to its policy and maintained by its influence. The remoter power will be its suzerain, which seems to me implied in Daniel's description (Dan 8:24). It will be an energetic power, which is far from being true now any more than of Greece. As we know, neither can keep head against external foes or maintain order in their own dominions: such is their state of prostration or disorganisation. But there will be a vast development, and with it may be great rapidity. It would appear that much of it will be brought about by Russian power, no doubt to further their aggressive policy. I believe that this lies before Greece; but, coming into collision later with Judah, its total overthrow is shown here in a general way. "Jehovah of hosts shall defend them; and they shall devour, and subdue with sling stones; and they shall drink, and make a noise as through wine; and they shall be filled like bowls, and as the corners of the altar. And Jehovah their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people." Thus we see the union of future power and glory on earth with the statement that He should come having salvation. "For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!" The general beneficence of His reign follows.

In Zechariah 10 it is shown how God will make use of Judah and Ephraim in that day. He will fight not merely *for* them, but in and by them. It is a great mistake to suppose that all will be accomplished by Jehovah single-handed. There is a judgment which He will execute on His appearing from heaven, in which the Jews can have no part whatever, namely, the destruction of the beast and the false prophet, with the flower of the rank and power of the revived Roman empire. Thus the western powers will be completely crushed by the Lord coming in judgment from heaven. After that He will use both Judah and Ephraim, as we see here, to deal with other refractory Gentiles. "When I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion;" and so He further says: "Out of him came forth the corner, out of him the nail, out of him the battle bow, out of him every oppressor together." That clearly shows the meaning. "And they shall be as mighty men, which tread down their enemies in the mire of the streets in the battle: and they shall fight."*

{*The attempt of some freethinking Germans and others to make out two authors, if not more, by a comparison of Zech. 9, 10 with 14 seems quite as futile as usual. If Messiah speak peace not to Israel only, but to the Gentiles — if His rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth, what more consistent with the reign of Jehovah over all the earth? The return of the captive and dispersed Israelites is in no way compromised by the fact that half the city goes into captivity just before their final deliverance; still less is there difficulty in seeing two parts cut off, and the third going through the fire in the land, while Jerusalem has half taken and the rest not. Jehovah acts mightily for His people in Zechariah 9, and not to their exclusion in Zechariah 14. What, lastly, is to hinder Jehovah's cutting off the war-horse from Jerusalem, while the horses employed in peace bear the stamp that their masters are wholly devoted to His name? We shall see that no chapter in the prophecy deserves less than the last to be taxed with "a misty indistinctness" The haze must be in the reader who says so.}

But this judgment is not a description of the empire and its doom, with that of its adherents. The western powers will have gone deeper in evil, and must fare accordingly. Having enjoyed unexampled privileges, they will finally turn them to the boldest impiety and lawlessness, coupled with the highest pride; and so the Lord reserves the blow to Himself. When the last Assyrian comes up against the land, he will find the two tribes there; and perhaps on the last occasion (for there are two attacks on the city of Jerusalem in the future) Israel may be there too, as we shall find further on in this prophecy. The same thing, I think, appears in Isaiah 38, 39. We can easily understand the flocking thither of Ephraim between the two assaults. This is the main question that might be raised. The Lord here promises to strengthen the house of Judah, and save the house of Joseph. Most evidently, therefore, it is the future ingathering of the whole nation, the "all Israel" that is to be saved. "I will hiss for them, and gather them; for I have redeemed them: and they shall increase as they have increased. And I will sow them among the people: and they shall remember me in far countries; and they shall live with their children, and turn again. I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt, and gather them out of Assyria." It is not a mere remnant returning from Babylon, but a complete ingathering of the people from every quarter, taking the north and the south more particularly into account, and specifying them here. Then Jehovah summarily puts down the pride and power of all their enemies. "And I will strengthen them in Jehovah; and they shall walk up and down in his name, saith Jehovah."

But Zechariah 11 is still more solemn, and brings other and deeper elements into the final scene. "Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars. Howl, fir tree; for the cedar is fallen; because the mighty are spoiled: howl, O ye oaks of Bashan; for the forest of the vintage is come down." They are vivid figures of judgment on the outward strength and the dignity of the Jews. The rulers are in grief and dismay at their spoliation when their hopes once more beat high. Their river, even then as ever figuring national resource and power, suffered no less. "There is a voice of the howling of the shepherds; for their glory is spoiled: a voice of the roaring of young lions; for the pride of Jordan is spoiled." The nations are gathering against Jerusalem. "Thus saith Jehovah my God; Feed the flock of the slaughter." "Flock of the slaughter" means those of Israel that men devoted to persecution, to whom the Lord's heart specially turned: "Whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty: and they that sell them say, Blessed be Jehovah; for I am rich: and their own shepherds pity them not." These godly Jews are in peculiar distress and danger. While the Jews themselves as a whole are hated by the nations, the true-hearted ones are hateful to their own brethren. Thus their state is outwardly deplorable. "For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, saith Jehovah: but 10, I will deliver the men every one into his neighbour's hand, and into the hand of his king: and they shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them." It is the final trouble of Jerusalem. "And I will feed the flock of slaughter, even you, O poor of the flock."

The crisis brings to light a remarkable under-current. What lay at the bottom? and how can one account for such a state of things? The prophet accordingly in a symbolical method, which shows us the same hand and mind as the earlier part of the book where it abounds, proceeds to explain how it came to pass. "And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock." As we saw with Joshua and Zerubbabel before, so now the prophet personates first of all the Messiah, and then the Anti-Messiah. From verse 7 to 14 he personates the Christ; from verse 15 to the end he personates Antichrist, as he was directed.

"I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock." These staves represent the authority that properly belongs to the Messiah. The first staff he breaks in verse 10. This is in view of the awful condition of the Jews. "Three shepherds also I cut off in one month; and my soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me." There was no sympathy between Christ and those who led or misled the people — the shepherds, as they are called, who do not answer to Christian ministers, as the ignorant are apt to fancy, but mean the chief government of the nation. "Then said I, I will not feed you: that that dieth, let it die; and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off; and the rest eat every one the flesh of another." Then Jehovah Messiah, personated by the prophet, takes His staff, even Beauty, and cuts it asunder, that He might break His covenant that He had made with all peoples. It is not the people of Israel, but all the nations in relationship with Him.

In short the rejection of the Messiah made it impossible to gather all nations. This seems a plain allusion to the great prophecy of Jacob: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the lawgiver from between his feet till Shiloh come; and to him shall the gathering [or obedience] of the peoples be." The condition of the Jews made it no longer a question of accomplishing this great and blessed purpose of His kingdom. The Hebrew word in ver. 10 signifies "peoples;" and so it is in Gen 49:10 : "To him shall the gathering of the *peoples* be." It is very important for the proper understanding of both. One letter makes all the difference.

Thus the unreadiness morally of the Jews for the Messiah made it impossible to gather the peoples. Their sight was abhorrent to Him, and in point of fact He was not tolerable to them. There was no groundwork therefore for gathering the peoples. It could not be then and must be postponed, but not abandoned save only for the present. So the staff Beauty was broken, the image of the authority of God to carry out this end now. But He will surely put it in force on behalf of all the peoples whom He will gather around Israel when they bow and bless their Messiah. For the time it disappears. The staff was broken in that day; and so the poor of the flock who waited upon Him knew that it was the word of Jehovah. His secret is with those that fear Him.

Then comes another development far more awful and of endless moment. "And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver." It was not only that the purpose of gathering the nations was postponed, but Christ also was sold unto death by His own! and at what a price! "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." The consequence was the other staff had to be broken. "Then I cut asunder mine other staff, even Bands." This went far beyond interfering with the gathering of the peoples; its effect was "to break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel." God would not even gather Israel now, Not only would He not gather the nations round the Messiah according to His earthly purpose of blessing; but He would not even assemble the Jewish people. Thus the rejection of Jesus during His life made it impossible to gather the Gentiles, the rejection of Jesus in His death broke for the time all hopes of gathering Israel. The Jews must be scattered instead of Israel being gathered. All such plans were shattered for the time.

This introduces at once the final struggle. The whole of the wonderful dealings of God with Christianity are passed over. They are not, and could not be, the proper theme of Old Testament prophecy, though words here and there leave room for and illustrate most important points and prove that all was known from the beginning. The immense system of the church, the mystery of Christ, fills up the gap between verses 14 and 15, which last at once plunges us into the dismal circumstances at the end of the age. "And Jehovah said unto me, Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd." Having brought in Christ up to His death, now he brings in the Antichrist as it were straight upon Him. Obviously there is a moral link and a real allusive contrast between the two. So He Himself tells the Jews in John 5 that if they would not have Him who came in the Father's name, they would receive the one who comes in his own name. If in the evangelist the two are brought together, we need not wonder that Zechariah does the same after his manner. "Take unto thee the instruments of a foolish shepherd. For, lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, which shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that that is broken, nor feed that that standeth still." The exact contrary Christ did: "but he [the Antichrist — sad contrast!] shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their claws in pieces. Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened." The judgment of God shall be upon him. It is described here in terms suitable to a shepherd; but we know how it will be accomplished in the Antichrist.

Then comes the last burden of the prophet, which sets out the consummation in great prominence: only instead of confining us to an account of this alone, he interweaves once more a beautiful allusion to Christ the suffering man, yet we shall find nothing detailed, but connected with the subject in hand.

"The burden of the word of Jehovah for Israel, saith Jehovah." Let it be marked here, that the whole people are before Him now. It is not merely Judah. "The burden of the word of Jehovah for Israel, saith Jehovah, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him. Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, [it is the peoples again, not of course the Jews,] when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and Jerusalem. And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all peoples: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it. In that day, saith Jehovah, I will smite every horse with astonishment, and his rider with madness: and I will open mine eyes upon the house of Judah, and will smite every horse of the people with blindness. And the governors of Judah shall say in their heart, The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in Jehovah of hosts their God. In that day will I make the governors of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left: and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem." This, of course the end of the age, is to bring in the full time of blessing for Jerusalem, out of that furnace of affliction, when all nations hang around with open mouth to devour, but in vain. They will not only be disappointed, but themselves be devoured of Him who in that day reverses the long penalty, and protects Jerusalem for evermore.

But it would involve prophecy in miserable confusion to assume that these mean the western powers, which at this time will have been totally overthrown by the Lord's judgment, as already explained. (Revelation 19) All nations must mean here the hostile Gentiles who take up arms against Israel, after the destruction of the beast, and his vassal king of the west, with their false prophet ally in Jerusalem. They are the nations in league with the king of the north, and quite opposed to the beast, though openly the antagonist of Israel. In fact all nations in the prophets never mean the western powers, but all that remain after the ruin of the beast and the horns. This may be to some an important help in interpreting these scriptures. The western powers are only a part of the nations, a particularly favoured and responsible part, with a defined relation to the Jew and even Christ, both in the past and. in the future. Their position is peculiar and their responsibility; so their guilt is apart, and their judgment also. The western powers compose a special parenthesis; their connection is exclusively with the Jews, never with Israel. If this is apprehended, it may serve to make distinctions plain, which are all-important to him who would understand the divine chart of unfulfilled as well as fulfilled prophecy.

"Every horse" here has been frequently referred to as a great array of western cavalry: why it should be "western" does not appear. I am sorry to differ from any who say so; but the inference completely fails. There is no doubt about the cavalry: whence it comes depends on no theory, but on the accurate and full examination of scripture as to that time. I think that all who so take it mistake the true bearing, not of this passage only, but of the then situation. Besides, easterns are more remarkable for cavalry than westerns in general. Infantry was always the right hand of Roman armies; and so it has continued in the west, and will, I doubt not, spite of modern inventions, to the last. But the easterns are described as very particularly notorious for their abundance of fine and showy cavalry. Other evidence may appear as we go on, which I trust will commend itself to all unprejudiced minds; for the point is not without importance. It is a difference found among prophetic students generally, growing out of the confirmed habits of thought which tended to make everything of the beast and his satellites the ten kings.

Indeed the reason lies further back still; for it clearly is an off-shoot of the old system which loved to see the Pope in every evil one whom scripture denounces as the enemy of God's people. It was really therefore the narrowness of mind which shut the vast field of prophecy up to the limits of the circumstances which we Christians or rather Protestants were connected with. In truth, properly speaking, this is not the scheme of prophecy at all. As the rule, it embraces for its subject-matter the earth and all the nations of which the Assyrian will be the head. The imperial course of the four beasts is an exceptional intermediate system, of which Daniel treats, and Zechariah in a measure, but only touched incidentally by the general stream of the prophets greater or lesser. It is no doubt of deep interest, but still a very small part of the prophetic vista.

We must then distinguish between the Lord appearing in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those that know not God, etc., and the earthly judgments He will after a certain interval execute, as in Zechariah 12. This is not His appearing to destroy the beast and the false prophet. It is afterwards that He makes Jerusalem a cup of trembling to the nations. His first judgment is on the apostates, whether Jews or Gentiles. Jerusalem will tremble for her own sins and punishment. Instead of its being as yet a cup of trembling to others, the city must bow under the Lord's righteous dealing with her own misdeeds. But when the Gentiles rise up against the chosen city, "In that day shall Jehovah defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem." When He appears in glory from heaven, and the beast and the false prophet are cast alive into the lake of fire, there will be no question of such a defence of the city still defiled, but of purging it of the rebels. The man of sin will have been sitting as God in the temple of God, who will not have the iniquity passed lightly over; neither on the other hand will He turn His back after His appearing till the evil is judged thoroughly, and He can reign in righteousness over them. "In that day shall Jehovah defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David." When Antichrist was suddenly overwhelmed, the Jews took no part whatever in that most solemn act. Long before, according to His warning (Mat 24:15), the godly ones had fled from Jerusalem. They were not inhabitants of Jerusalem from the day the abomination of desolation was set up in the sanctuary, but had fled here and there through horror at their sin, and for refuge from the predicted tribulation. "And the house of David shall be as God, — as the angel of Jehovah before them. And it shall come to pass in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem."

Here again the difference of time and circumstance is as plain as can well be conceived. "And I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon me* whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon. And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; all the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart." Thus our prophet gives the general account of Jehovah's gracious action, when He espouses the cause of the remnant already delivered from the inward evil, and exposed to the attacks of the nations who believe not that Messiah is with His people. And now that this mighty overthrow of the gathered Gentiles has been wrought, an immensely deepened spiritual work goes on in their souls. The word of God enters profoundly into their conscience, the effect of which is that each retires alone as it were before God. For indeed their grief of heart is such that they feel the need of having to do with Him alone: if they could bear another's presence than His against whom they had so variously and long sinned, what could any other avail at such an hour? No; they must go to the Lord with it all — to the very One who is not more surely their Jehovah-Elohim than their pierced Messiah! It is not despairing remorse, but a gracious sorrow. It is self-judgment that takes to heart their own sin, that looks back at all without excusing any, that takes God's side against every evil way, and above the rest their shameless rejection of His Messiah. All, no matter how far back, own it as their own sin. So they mourn as for their only son — a mourning in love, but with the deepest pain and shame that they had so treated Him who loved them perfectly. This is what they most feel now — it was against Him.

{*The reading of the Keri "on him" instead of the textual "on me," seems evidently to bear the stamp of a correction designed to remove an apparent anomaly from the construction as well as to get rid of the plain truth, as the text stands that the pierced One is Jehovah. Hence the correction has even crept into the text of not a few MSS. of both Kennicott and of De Rossi. The truth is that these tamperings with the reading and the efforts of others to enfeeble the translation only show the deep moment of what is here written by the Holy Spirit. It was to escape from this text in particular that some of the Rabbis invented the absurdity of two Messiahs, Ben-Joseph and Ben-David, but even so with singular inconsistency as Mc.Caul has well shown. One may lament but need not be surprised at such a version as Mr. Leeser's who uses the transition from the first to the third person as a reason for interpolating as well as changing the natural import of the clause. He gives it thus: "They will look up towards me (for every one) whom they have thrust through." Even Abarbanel and other Rabbis condemned D. Kimchi's "because they pierced," depriving the verb of its object which is invariably expressed. What would even they have thought of introducing an imaginary one to get rid of the true one? And where is the propriety either of such rapt looking to Jehovah for "every one" so thrust through, or for the grief beyond measure that follows in the passage? The prophet could only compare the bitter yet gracious lamentation to that for Josiah are the Jews to wail for every one they slay of their gentile assailants? And is the spirit to be poured out for an end so strange and unworthy? were it for some One incomparably glorious whom they woke up to find that they had blindly pierced, who after all appeared to save them in their last trouble, one could understand the striking force of the whole context, and especially if somehow He could unite in His person one nature entitling Him to be called Jehovah, and another which might leave Him open to be pierced.}

Thus too, we find certain families mentioned with a very peculiar choice and beauty. The family, we are told, of the house of David, beginning with the very highest or royal line. "They mourn," as it is said, "the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart." But the family of the reproving prophet is also there: the descendants of Nathan are mourning too. Instead of now reproving David, they unsparingly judge themselves, and confess each his own sin. Grace no doubt can identify itself with others' sins; but this cannot rightly be unless one walks with God in pure conscience. Here it is the thorough repentance of those who are the first to own their long and guilty blindness. Hence it will be no question of David exposed before Nathan, or of Nathan dealing with David: each will find his own sin, and all will deplore their common sin against the Messiah.

But further still, this might be said to be when the nation was grown up into a maturity of greatness. The work, however, will go farther back still; it will mount right up to the beginning. For as we read, "The family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart." Notoriously Levi and Simeon,* or Shimei, were the very heads who conspired in revenge for their sister Dinah, and caused the names of the sons of Jacob to stink in the earliest days; and now the posterity of the two who were together in their cruel wickedness are named together in bending alone to confess each his guilt before Jehovah. There is no more beautiful description of the power of divine grace in searching the heart, fully trusting in the Lord, yet condemning one's sins to the uttermost. There is nothing finer in its way than the view it gives of the operation of the Spirit on the conscience, which so isolates the soul that we hear of the husbands apart, and their wives apart. The closest relationship is as nothing in presence of sin and God as its judge. Each must be alone: the husband apart and the wife apart, shut out from every influence and thought save of what He is spite of what each had been to Him whom they pierced, yet who died for them. The whole work must be done — the work not of deliverance only, but of restoration in conscience before God.

{*So the LXX, the Syriac and the Arabic versions.}

It is not that they were not quickened before, nor that they only now first knew real compunction of conscience by the Spirit of God. But the dealing of the soul with God and under His truth is far more profound when the sense of danger is gone and the power of God has wrought unmistakable deliverance. In this case, as we have seen, not only was the beast destroyed who rose up against the Lamb, but now the open and earthly enemies of Israel. The rich and manifest mercy opens the heart, and conscience unburdens itself before God.

It seems to be after the destruction of the king of the north. Till then the Jews will be harassed and threatened. They will be in circumstances of danger and difficulty until the Lord has won the final victory for them. Not till then will there be the full work in their souls. He can then use them freely, as they can enjoy Him without a question. They will have been converted before; but this brings them by self-judgment in all that dishonoured and grieved Him into the communion of His mind and love. So true is the distinction between the two things for the Israelite as well as the Christian.

"In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." It is not merely that they will "look on him whom they have pierced," but besides there is the washing of water by the word. There is no such thing in scripture as a fountain of blood, spite of our own poet Cowper. To be cleansed with blood is not enough. We need to be bathed in water and to wash our feet also day by day. And all this we have in our Lord Jesus. "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood." He cleanses His people morally as well as atones for them.

But in Zechariah 13 it is the water, not the blood. Here the Spirit uses the word as the moral power of the death of Christ doubtless; but still it is the word. Along with expiation, before God we need communion with the truth practically. Then appears the result for others. "And it shall come to pass in that day, saith Jehovah of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land." Everything now is weighed that was offensive to God's character. "And it shall come to pass, that when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of Jehovah." How many and grave had been the defilements, uncleannesses, and false prophesyings in the days of Antichrist! False Christs and false prophets had abounded then. All this will now be completely purged out.

"And his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth." They will play the part of Phinehas now in indignation at what dishonours the Lord. "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied; neither shall they wear a rough garment to deceive." Most seem disposed to take the two next verses as a continuation of the deceiver, who now repudiates any such claim, professes nothing but a mean condition, and either pretends that the idolatrous marks in his hands were the effects of maiming in grief for friends, or alleges that he was already punished for life, though not put to death for his fault.

This may be a simple enough meaning; but it certainly presents a poor sense of verse 6. Others accordingly apply it to Christ thus: "But he shall say, I am no prophet, I am an husbandman; for man acquired me as a slave from my youth." This last is a difficult passage, because it brings in Christ in so abrupt a manner; if I mistake not, contrasted with the false prophets, as we saw similarly with the shepherds. Just as in Zechariah 11 so in this, He is heard so suddenly that it is not easy to decide where Christ begins; but I suppose it to be from verse 5, which shows that the Lord was not in any way connected with the schools of men. He accepted the place of a Nazarene which God in His wisdom gave Him according to the record. For man had acquired Him as a slave from His youth. Compare the Hebrew servant in Exodus 21. He was the bondman of all, so much the more because He was the perfect servant of God. It is a figurative expression as applied to Christ; for I am now assuming this to be the true meaning. "And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends." It can hardly be doubted save by an unbeliever that verse 7 applies to Christ. There may be a question about the preceding verses, but it is better in my opinion to take in all.

Then is heard a voice still more solemn. It is not wolves now, but God. "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith Jehovah of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones." There is no more difficulty in "the sword" here than in Zec 11:17, where it is spoken of for the judgment of the worthless shepherd: it is used figuratively as to both for a violent end of life; but O how deep the contrast! No longer do we hear of deceivers, or idolaters, or other wicked persons, who are outwardly and ostensibly in the house of the Messiah's friends; but Jehovah Himself gives Him up to complete humiliation and rejection. A most solemn consideration; and how true! For we must remember that whatever the mischievous and miserable hatred of the Jews against the Messiah, it could have availed nothing unless Jehovah had allowed it for His own mighty purposes; and this He did. Consequently here it is applied to Him. "Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered; and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones." Out of the rejection of Christ comes all blessing to those that are His — out of that which was His unexampled shame and His unutterable sorrow in the cross; and this, in every point of view, not only for the counsels of grace, but also in the government of God. There is nothing holy in God which is not vindicated by it; there is nothing gracious toward man for which it has not laid a righteous ground.

At the same time the discerning government of God will have its way, for it is said here, "And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried." The dross must perish, and what is precious be refined and tried. His people must go through trouble. "They shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, Jehovah is my God." It is humiliating to read the comments even of such a man as Calvin, starting with the erroneous confusion of the church with the Jews in such a passage as this: "For when three hundred shall profess to worship God, one hundred only, says Zechariah, shall be saved." Not so; it is only a mistaken expositor who says so, applying to the church in general what is really said of the Jews in their last crisis.

Finally, Zechariah 14 shows us how all this is brought out. "Behold, the day of Jehovah cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city." It is a truly singular state of things. The siege has taken place, with the king of the north at the head of all these nations. It is clearly not the beast who, instead of besieging Jerusalem, supports the false prophet with all his might, and the latter is "the king" who reigns in Jerusalem, whom "the many" accept as the Messiah and Jehovah of Israel. The king of the north is an outside enemy who at the head of all the nations of the east attacks Jerusalem. We must always remember that the man of sin, or the Antichrist, is inside Jerusalem; he is nowhere said to besiege it, for it is too submissive to him as "the king." With him the beast and his ten kings make common cause. The Assyrian or "king of the north" is at the head of all the opposed external nations.

This is an important point to bear in mind, and contributes to make the general outline plain. The man of sin, the Antichrist, is accepted by the Jews as the Messiah, and He will reign over the land with the highest pretensions. But he none the less hates and is hated by the king of the north, who will seek his ruin and the capture of Jerusalem. Two bad princes may bitterly hate one another, because they are each striving to get the mastery. So the man of sin is not only the lawless enemy of God, but also obnoxious to the ambitious leader of the eastern powers, namely, the Assyrian, who will stand forward the then representative of what may be called the old heathen policy, as well as of modern Russian feeling. Russia will indeed oppose to the last the powers of the west; as it will also be destroyed by the distinct judgment of God (Ezekiel 38, 39) at a different time and in a somewhat different way from the antichristian coalition.* There is nothing to choose between them. The western powers have no ground to glory over Russia, unless it be that they are to be more openly apostate and audacious, as they will also be destroyed first. But the doom of the Assyrian will be substantially similar to that of the beast and the false prophet; for if the beast and the false prophet be thrown alive into the lake of fire, the Assyrian will be so a little later. Isaiah 30 reveals that the Assyrian is to have Tophet prepared for him as well as for the king — the anti-Messiah. "For the king also [not "yea"] it is prepared;" but the Assyrian will be cast alive into the lake of fire no less than the beast and the false prophet, which last is the Antichrist. The Lord Jesus will appear on both these occasions and take the lead in them, first of all from heaven dealing with the beast and the false prophet, then on the earth and now as the king of Israel, though in an infinitely glorious way, disposing of the Assyrian at the head of all the combined nations who were not destroyed with the beast.

{*Unless Gog be identified with the Assyrian, there is no intimation that the former is thrown alive into Tophet, as the latter is.}

It is to be hoped that these distinctions of scripture may help souls and not perplex them; for it need hardly be said that the object is to solve the chief difficulties by which most students of the prophetic word are arrested. At the same time it is quite possible that those to whom the subject is somewhat new, or who have not maturely considered it, may at first find difficulties suggested or increased, which is necessarily the case in any untrodden and varied ground. But I am satisfied that the true line of things has been pointed out. For, while difficulties may first be augmented by drawing attention to the various actors in the scenes who are too often confounded to the injury of the truth, the darkening of enquirers and the strengthening of objectors, the result will be that the different persons and actions of prophecy will in the long run get cleared and settled in the minds of any who examine with care this large and momentous portion of the divine word.

Let it be observed that siege is laid by the Assyrian with all the nations who own him as leader against Jerusalem, and that the siege is partially successful, for half the city is taken. Nothing like this has ever been since Zechariah's day: still less does anything in history resemble what follows, as we shall see presently. It was not so when Ptolemy Soter took the city about B.C. 320, nor when Antiochus the Great took it B.C. 203, nor again B.C. 199, when Scopus the Egyptian general took it once more, nor the following year when it yielded to Antiochus, nor even when it was pillaged B.C. 170 by Antiochus Epiphanes, nor two years later under the frightful efforts of his army under Apollonius to destroy the city and the people, nor after that when his emissary Athenaeus profaned the sanctuary, and set up heathenism, with the utmost scorn to the law, which was followed by the exploits of the Maccabees, the issue being under Simon that the foreigner was expelled B.C. 142, and Acra demolished, as is commonly known. Under John Hyrcanus, the Syrian king Antiochus Sidetes was obliged to abandon the siege. Passing over internal or family disputes which have no possible resemblance, and the intervention of Aretas, it is impossible to identify with the prophecy Pompey's capture of the temple B.C. 63, nor Crassus' plunder of the city B.C. 54, nor the Parthian surprise B.C. 40. Herod's siege was more similar perhaps, but essentially distinct, as we shall see by and by. Neither its final destruction by Titus, nor the move of Bar-Cochba under Hadrian, calls for lengthened remarks, as they are obviously different. Nothing since bears the smallest likeness to the prophecy.

How any sensible persons can venture to say, as many have done, that the opening verses describe the past destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans is a real wonder. Waiving "the day of Jehovah" which may no doubt apply providentially as an earnest of the great fulfilment), was that a gathering of all the nations? Is it true then that half the people went forth into captivity, and that the rest were not cut off from the city? It is in vain also to smooth over verse 3 with such words as "the Roman power was doomed in its turn to destruction." For what the prophet intimates is a speedy and awful overthrow, not in the course of ages and elsewhere, but as part of the same suite of events and in the neighbourhood by a special display of divine power and glory on behalf of the Jews when at the last extremity; and this attested by the splitting of the mount of Olives toward the east and toward the west into a very great valley, half receding toward the north and half toward the south. To resolve such a carefully put geographical statement into a poetical figure, and to extract from it no more than the disciples fleeing to Pella, as Eusebius tells us, in the breaking out of the Jewish war with Rome, is to run the risk of reducing the prophets to the rank of bombastic dreamers. But the sober fact is, that the application of this chapter in the Dem. Evang. 6:18 is as dismal a specimen of forcing scripture as anything forged by the mind of a rationalist. There is this only difference between the two, that Eusebius meant well by the Bible, which is not the case with those who plume themselves on "the higher criticism." But as an unfolding of the divine word they are alike misleading and I must say contemptible. He interprets the chapter of the Saviour's first advent and of the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus. The change of circumstance for professing Christians under Constantine seems to have turned a head which never gloried in the reproach of the cross, and led to such misinterpretation.

But there is a second siege after this first, or a second attack, at any rate, after the first success. When the Gentiles have been partially successful, Jehovah will "go forth and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives which is before Jerusalem on the east." This is not His coming from heaven to destroy the lawless one and his party. It is a subsequent and an earthly action. "And the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. And ye shall flee to the valley of my mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah." There the paragraph ends.

What is put as the last clause of the verse ought to be the beginning of a new section. These divisions are not inspired. They are only the effect of an editor's effort to give the sense, and are sometimes mistaken, as I believe the fact is here. That physical changes are meant seems to my mind beyond doubt. There will be for the alarmed Jews in that great day a complete passage made instantly by divine power through the mount of Olives — a standing witness whether or not this prophecy is fulfilled. "And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah." The distress would be immense, the danger in appearance most imminent, when safety opens by the seemingly awful door of a valley so suddenly formed for them through the solid mountain, or as it is here styled (and no wonder) the "valley of my mountains." It would seem that the alarm is compared to a flight that occurred during a well-known earthquake in Uzziah's days. We can understand such a phenomenon adding to the terror of successful enemies till they know that it is the hand of God on their behalf.

After this the new section begins. "And Jehovah my God shall come, and all the saints with thee." For it would be harsh to suppose that He comes afresh after His going forth and fighting against the congregated nations, as already described in verse 3. I think therefore that the context proves it must be taken as another paragraph, presenting His coming in another point of view and for other ends.

There is a peculiarity in the construction of the last clause of verse 5: "And Jehovah my God shall come, and all the saints with thee." The MSS. differ too; for near forty, and all the versions, give "with him;" and some again follow the Rabbis in understanding "with thee" of Jerusalem. But the difficulty is cleared up as the text stands by seeing that the prophet turns to Jehovah who is thus to be seen interfering for the Jew, and for the greater force exclaims "Jehovah my God shall come," following up this sudden change by describing in such a scene the presence of others foreseen in his vision, "and all the saints with thee." Zechariah supposes himself addressing Jehovah in these words.

"And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark [or possibly "and dark"].* To take this as the prediction of a period of unmitigated calamity, which may be regarded as comprehending the long centuries of Jewish suffering since Titus took the city, is an idea natural to such as can interpret the preceding verses of that famous siege. The phraseology in the close of the verse is hard. The text would mean that the precious lights should withdraw themselves; others with the Keri take it as "shall not be, but condensed darkness," or thick fog.

{*One can hardly regard as certain the reading at the end of this verse, that of the Keri being apparently the best and well supported, especially if we give weight to the ancient versions. Translators and commentators differ widely. According to the Ketib, the sense would run, "there shall not be the light of precious things, they shall withdraw themselves," or be withdrawn; according to the Keri, it might be "and density" or "but density," that is, darkness. Dathe, Maurer, etc. contend for the rendering "lux non erit sed frigus et gelu," and so the LXX. Sym. Syr. Vulg. But the process of extracting such a result seems as precarious as the result when extracted. kind is it not pitiful the comment of such a man as Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus near the Euphrates early in the fifth century, and one of the most learned and moderate of the Greek fathers, who perverts all this to the Gospel history, and finds this verse for instance fulfilled in the darkness of the cross, and the leader of the apostles warming by the fire with the high priest's servants. One wonders not that such trifling breeds or provokes rationalism.}

But the incalculably great event of the day is plain enough, having its effect not only on the earth, but even in the heavens. This was reserved for the new section. The earthly fact and the destruction of foes were mentioned in the former part; another and higher fact with its consequences falls under the latter. Now the prophet looks at Jehovah coming with His holy ones — not so much here to fight a battle, but His saints coming with Him. This has an evidently deeper purpose. Hence the marked outward change which introduces that day, in order that in every way it may stand out distinctly from all before. It is absurdly wrong to dislocate verse 7 from verse 6, as if a time wholly different were intended. Not so; it is the continuation of the same unique circumstances. Hence there will be no such changes as men have known through light and darkness following each other, but it shall be one day which shall be known to Jehovah — not day succeeding night, "but it shall come to pass that at evening time it shall be light." God thus marks the new era as significantly by a revolution in the heavens as He had by His intervention and the rent of mount Olivet on the earth. Thus evidently is there another paragraph introducing another order of events, with their accompaniments and effects.

But what follows is not dreadful like the yawning mountain, but most encouraging. At the evening time, instead of the darkness of night coming on, the brightness of the day continues. If the rending of Olivet was in keeping with the hopeless confusion from which they had to emerge, when all things must be shaken, the dawn of a new and brighter day shines on all from above. "And it shall be in that day that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be." Unlike the torrents of the desert which dry up in time of heat, this should be ever flowing. It is a literal fact, I suppose, but highly significant of spiritual blessing at the same time. From the holy city go forth westward and eastward the waters which are destined to heal the long miseries of a world groaning under Satan's thraldom, themselves the effect and the symbol of the rich blessing which Jehovah then diffuses far and wide, and this above all the changes ordinary in nature: in summer and in winter it shall be. Drought and frost will not affect them; neither will the obstruction of the hilly ground toward the west: the waters shall flow as steadily to the great sea on the west as to the Dead Sea on the east.

In this connection the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea are specially named. For it may be well to explain that in Hebrew the east is reckoned the point at which one looks, and the west is thus behind the spectator Hence Arabia is called the land of the right hand, as the north would be the left. Of course therefore to one with Palestine as his stand-point and thus facing, the Dead Sea would be in front and the Mediterranean in the rear.

But there are better blessings still. "In that day there shall be one Jehovah, and his name one." Idols fall; the King of kings reigns without rival or dispute. This is explicit, as if to cut off all possibility of evasion on the plea of previous figurative language. Who can pretend that it is so here?

A chart minutely distinct is appended, which refutes all pretence of heavenly glory being meant, or the spiritual blessing we have now in Christ: "All the land shall be turned as into a plain from Geba [in Benjamin on the northern frontier of the kingdom of Judah] to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; and it shall be lifted up and inhabited in its place [the city on its old site] from Benjamin's gate unto the place of the first gate up to the corner gate, and from the tower of Hananeel unto the king's wine-presses. And they shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more curse; and Jerusalem shall dwell in safety." Then in verses 12-15 we learn the provision for the due maintenance of order and honour in the earth. The awful judgment of the nations which fought against Jerusalem is set forth. We see the last sample of this stroke in Ezekiel 38, 39 before peace flows like a river. It is really painful to see how Catholics like C. a Lapide and Protestants like Venema pare down the glorious hopes of Israel to the circumstances of the Maccabean times.

From verse 16 we have the regulation of the homage imposed on the residue of those hostile nations during the kingdom. Its proper theocratic character is unquestionable, and too distinct from the nature of Christianity to call for argument. "And it shall come to pass that every one that is left of all the nations which come against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, Jehovah of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, Jehovah of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith Jehovah will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles." I do not pretend to say how, or how far, all the nations will attend the final feast of ingathering, the type of glory: the fact is certain, and God will see to its fulfilment. Jerusalem thus, as the city of the great King, is the religious metropolis of the earth; and there all must be at least represented year by year. We are not warranted in concluding that absence of the Passover here implies that it will not then be celebrated; for we know from the end of Ezekiel (which clearly speaks of the same time and circumstances) that it will be observed as well as the feast of Tabernacles, but *not* Pentecost, the characteristic feast which finds its full meaning exhausted in the church that now is, and therefore a

38 Zechariah contd1

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{*The statement in Hebrews, that where remission of sins is, there is no more offering for sin, applies to the Christian simply, and in no way forbids other facts which the prophets clearly predict of an age wholly different and not yet arrived.}

But so thorough and complete would be the change,that holiness pervades things the most common. The very pots, the humblest utensils in Jehovah's house, "shall be like the bowls before the altar" — those that were most holy. "Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto Jehovah: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of Jehovah of hosts." I admit the curse of a mercenary caste of religious teachers, and we see what a stumbling-block the covetousness of the Jewish priesthood proved in Israel; but I see no reason to abandon the simple force of Canaanite here, while allowing broad and deep principles as well as facts. He was in the land when Abram entered it; he was not banished from the land by the victories of Joshua. The enemy, never fully expelled before, should vanish then. All is to be according to God, as far as this can be in the earth till God in the most absolute way make all things new. Who can wonder when Jehovah takes the kingdom?

39 Malachi

Malachi.

Lectures on the Minor Prophets.

W. Kelly.

The Lord has not been pleased to give us much express information of the prophets in general, with the exception of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel, and in a measure of Ezekiel and Jonah. Of the rest we know but little, and of none less than of Malachi. So much so that some have indulged in no small imagination about him, yea, have doubted, as learned men will doubt (none more probably), of his proper existence, some of course making him out to be anybody else than himself. I do not see what is the object or the profit gained by such speculations; or why people should suppose that he was not a man at all but an angel. It may be well briefly to allude to these dreams if it were only to show the exceeding want of good sense, to say no more, of such as indulge in them, and to caution souls against the trashy way in which they occupy themselves and their readers.

It is clear that God has an object where He does not speak as truly as where He does, and the essential difference of the prophet from others lies in his giving us not man's mind but God's revelations, though surely for the good of man. If then the person of the prophet be hidden, we may gather that it is best to leave it so. The design is only met by what God had to say. It seems plain however both by position in the canon and by internal character that the last of the prophets is to be classed with the last of the sacred historians, Malachi with Nehemiah, as Haggai and Zechariah are expressly with Ezra.

"The burden of the word of Jehovah to Israel by Malachi." Let him be a person but little known, at least we should know the burden of the word of Jehovah by him. These were the last prophetic words. The nature of the case shows that, if we had no kind of tradition, a spiritual mind ought to say that Malachi is necessarily the latest of the prophets. As Moses himself has a place, naturally the earliest in the Old Testament so Malachi just as simply is the last. The whole strain of Malachi falls in with this. There does not therefore seem the slightest reason to question the soundness of the arrangement by which he is put at the end of the prophets in the Jewish canon. One ought never lightly to disturb facts of an external nature generally received though one may not make them a matter of faith. But it is not good to call everything in question. There is no small difference between not doubting and believing. We are not called to believe except where God speaks. On the other hand, where is the wisdom or the modesty of doubting what is without evidence for us, yet generally accredited. The best way is to let such parts alone?

But here there are moral considerations. The book consists largely of various moral appeals; and they are of such a nature as to indicate that they are the last words of the Old Testament. They leave nothing before or between the Messiah Himself except His messenger. From Him they pass by our calling altogether and go on to what follows Christianity — the mission of Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of Jehovah. For we must remember that Christianity is no prolongation or improvement of Judaism. It is a thing of its own kind. If it follows, and could not but follow Judaism, it is none the less completely a thing of another clime and character, like the sheet that was let down from heaven and went up again in the vision of the Roman centurion.

The book opens with words just as suitable as those with which it closes. "I have loved you, saith Jehovah." It is the expression of sorrow, but certainly of affection. "I have loved you, saith Jehovah. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?" I was going to call it a disappointed affection; and in one sense this is true. But we must bear in mind that in another sense there is nothing that fails with God. He steadily carries out what is wisest and best, though it may be ever so humiliating for man. He does not force His purposes, nor anticipate in His ways what is suitable to the present state of His people and testimony. But in a most real sense we may say that, if there be continual disappointment on the surface, there is always the onward accomplishment of what is for His own glory, and this is nowhere more verified than where all seems confusion on the outside. It is necessary that the creature should be put to shame, being now in a fallen state and its very condition one great lie against God — nay, a great lie against itself, false to its own nature, false to the law of its being as created of God or called of God, as the case may be.

In this case how unbecoming the language of Israel: "Wherein hast thou loved us?" What was it for Israel to ask such a question of Jehovah? Yet He deigns to answer in grace: "I have loved you, saith Jehovah; yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?" Jehovah, as usual, rises up to the source of things. "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith Jehovah: yet I loved Jacob." Then He adds, "and I hated Esau." I do not think it would be true to draw this inference at the beginning of their history. But it is just an instance of what the best of men do in their haste. God withholds the sentence of hatred till it is evidently justified by the conduct and ways of Esau, more particularly towards Jacob, but indeed towards Himself. In short, it would be quite true to say that God loved Jacob from the first, but that He never pronounces hatred until that be manifest which utterly repels and rejects Himself with contempt, deliberately going on in pursuit of its own way and will in despisal of God. Then only does He say, "I hated Esau." Along with this He draws attention to the fact that He "laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness." Thus, apart from such profanity, if God "despiseth not any," we may be perfectly sure He hates not any. Such an idea could not enter a mind which was nurtured in the word of God, apart from the reasonings of men. I say not this because of the smallest affinity with what is commonly called Arminianism; for I have just as little affinity with Calvinism. I believe the one to be as derogatory to God's glory as the other, though in very different ways — the one by exalting man most unduly, and the other by prescribing for God, and consequently not saying the thing that is right of Him.

Abstract reasoning is like that of Job's friends, who were not bad Calvinists before Calvin, but they certainly did not say the thing that was right of Jehovah as Job did. The reason was this — that Job did not indulge in theories about God and His government as they did. Job held to what he knew. Not that he had not his faults; for he showed himself at length naughty and disputed against God's ways, as we know. But he was right in rejecting their effort to carry their point by human reasonings, which, ignorant of God's grace as much as of His government, insinuated that the tried saint was only a hypocrite after all. He was really farther from it than any of them; and justly clave to the Lord, no matter what they might urge: cockles might grow instead of barley before he would give up his integrity. He would not forswear God's grace nor his own faith. Things must lose their nature and the creatures of God change their being before Job would yield to man in what touched his relationship with God. No doubt there was too much vindication of himself, and there he was wrong; but he was right about God. He was quite sure that God was Himself, and would not deny Job, and held to both firmly. He was quite sure that none of his inquisitors loved God better, and this too was true. The book is a fine unfolding of man with God and God with man: nothing is finer in all Old Testament scripture in this way. Such is the value of a real knowledge of God; it may be imperfect and it may require to be corrected, but there is a real knowledge of God, and this too in the face of human reasonings which may come from pious men, but are none the better for that. I see little difference between the reasonings of the pious and of others when they judge by appearances and speak outside the revealed truth of God. Nobody can answer or feel for God. No one can by searching find Him out; still less can any by reasoning anticipate His ways. And there is seen the blessedness of the pursuit. For knowledge of God is open to the simplest, yet withal is it the only joy and strength of the greatest saint or servant whom God ever formed. There is no difference as to this in principle: the most mature is as much beholden to the word of God as the least; and what lifts up the least is the only thing that gives real truth or solidity to the strongest.

This is a grave practical lesson, and Malachi, I think, is deeply interesting in this way. At the beginning of the history of Jacob and Esau we find the purpose of God before the children were born. Indeed to make election a question of the deserts in the two parties is simply to destroy its nature, if allowed in word. Election is necessarily from God entirely apart from those that are the objects of it, as it means the exercise of His sovereign choice. If there is the smallest ground in the party chosen because of which God chooses, it is not His choice, but rather a moral discernment, which, far from being sovereign, is only an appraisal whether the person deserves or not. One may hold then as strongly as the stoutest Calvinist the free sovereign choice of God, but the reprobation of the wicked which the Calvinist draws from it, as an equally sovereign decree, is in my judgment a grave error. I do not therefore scruple to say a word upon it now, inasmuch as it is an important thing in both doctrine and practice. The idea that, if God chooses one, He must reprobate another whom He does not choose, is a fallacy and without, yea against, scripture. This is exactly where human influence comes in; that is, the petty self-confidence of man's mind. Now I do not see why we as believers should be petty; there is every reason why we should gather what is great for God. To be simple is all well; but this too is a very different thing from being petty, and no reason why we should limit ourselves to ourselves; for what does God reveal His mind for? Surely that we should know Him, and be imitators of Him.

To my own mind then it is full of the deepest interest, that while God chose before the children were born, and decided what was to be the lot of the one relatively to the other, He never made any man to be a sinner. No doubt the children of Adam are conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity; mankind are born in that condition. Their whole being is lost in it. It is no question therefore of making man a sinner, because since the fall he departed from God and the race is evil without exception. Man belongs to a stock now wholly depraved — evil the sad and universal heirloom. God's election is entirely independent of what He finds, and spite of all evil. He elects angels no doubt that never fell: even so they had nothing to do with determining the rest who were not so kept. In every case it is simply a question of God's choice. But the fallen condition of man gives to God's election, where sinners are the only possible objects, an exceeding beauty and very deep moment. He chooses entirely apart from anything that deserves it, in the face of all that is out of harmony with Himself. It is not so where He judges and rejects.

When He says "Esau have I hated," He waits to the last moment, till Esau has shown what he is. The first book of the Bible lets us see His choice of Jacob. Only the last book tells us of His hatred of Esau. I do not say that we do not find His moral condemnation of Esau's spirit long before this, but He is patient in the execution of judgment. Long-suffering belongs to God, and is inseparable from His moral nature, while He delays to execute judgment on evil. All-powerful and good, He is nevertheless for that very reason perfect in patience. Now the sentence comes forth from His lips, and may well be felt to be a serious matter.

Yet Esau's ill-conduct to Jacob was not the only or the worst element of evil which comes into judgment. He was profane Godward, despising everything done on God's part, save that which brought sensibly before him the greater dignity to which his brother was promoted. Then he who sold it for a morsel of meat in the hour of want feels and resents keenly his loss of place and honour, even though he seemed one of those characters devoted only to that which man can do in this present life. He had no confidence in God: beyond this life no thought, no desire. If he could live in ease and honour, not without energy and action, that was enough for Esau. Why should he seek more than to enjoy present life, or, if needful, carry his point by main force? But that is practically a denial of God, particularly of His goodness and His sovereign choice. It is also a denial of one's own sin, of the real import of death, of resurrection, and of glory. There was undoubtedly a great deal unsatisfactory enough in Jacob, just as there is alas! in most of us. There is a great deal beyond question which proves how brittle and broken we are as men. Jacob shows us the difference by comparison with one who walked with God, and hence styled with singular beauty the friend of God. Jacob stands in painful contrast with Abraham in many respects. Though Abraham, we know, failed gravely now and then, still failure was not what characterized him in the same way as it chequered (we will not say characterized) Jacob. Intercourse with God stamped its attractive, softening, ennobling influence with a wonderful disinterestedness on Abraham's life and ways; whereas Jacob has the feebleness that belongs to one who knew not so to walk with God by faith. Craft, or a mind ever seeking to manage and so accomplish his ends, belongs to such as he. Self tarnished, but did not shut out God, with nothing but will to govern: this is rather what we see in Esau. Jacob was really a different man. Even when going on with his devices to benefit himself, he looked to God for a blessing of which he realised the need. Thus it was certainly by no means the happiest form of the life of faith — far from it; hence a great deal takes the shape of warning to us in Jacob as in most, but genuine faith was there spite of all. Thus, not having a good conscience, he fell into a sort of fraud on his brother Esau in the first instance, and not much better when we last hear of the brothers meeting each other. We must remember he was a man naturally timid: only dependence on God does not find but make us what we should be.

"And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness." God was against him. "Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places." Thus we see the strength of will to the last: he would fight it out even with God. "Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom Jehovah hath indignation for ever. And your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, Jehovah will be magnified from the border of Israel."

Then the prophet comes to closer quarters. "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith Jehovah of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?" The higher the relation, the greater the danger where God is not before the soul. It is not only that sin in such is more serious, but also there is greater exposure to it. A priest has to walk not merely as becomes a man outside the sanctuary, but as one who goes into it. There was a more perfect consecration in the case of a priest than with an Israelite; and familiarity with the presence of God, unless it be kept up in His fear, borders on contempt. "If I be a master, where is my fear? saith Jehovah of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?" Hardness of conscience goes where there is habitual carelessness as to God, while at the same time keeping up appearances Men thus become insensible to all. "Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of Jehovah is contemptible."

It had a voice of deep insult to God, however they might seek to excuse it. This is a serious thing practically for the Christian now. A man will endure in worship what he would not suffer anywhere else. Many who are critical enough about the preaching make very light of the prayers, have no sympathy with much, and would alter or throw it overboard. They bear with the general service often for the sake of the sermon. Now it is surely a serious thing when we remember what worship should be; and I am not speaking of an imaginary case. There is nothing which more betrays the state of people than their prayers, unless it be their hymns or, in general, their worship. Therefore the ordinary form of prayer and hymns, being wholly beneath true worshippers adoring in Spirit and in truth, is a fatal sign and shows how low they are sunk. For certainly worship ought to be the highest expression of spiritual devotedness toward God. If real, it ostensibly rises up as the outgoing of the power of the Holy Spirit to God Himself. A sermon is quite a different thing; it has its place and value of course, but its direction is toward men, the hearers. Without being hypercritical about terms, let the discourse be addressed to the unconverted to show them the way to be saved, or to the converted to instruct them in the truth of God more perfectly, it clearly has man for its object, converted or unconverted, or both, but assuredly man.

But evidently what has God for its object ought not to be polluted — ought not to be what people know is beneath His grace and truth, or unsuited even supposing, it were true, and not according to the height of the faith of those that present it. There is scarce anything which has a more lowering effect than habitual contentedness in worship with what is not the character of praise our hearts feel to be due to God; and yet I suppose there is nothing in which even children of God put up with more shortcomings than here. Thousands of Christians know that what they acquiesce in as worship is not according to God's mind. They bear with it for reasons of their own, certainly not for God's honour. This is sometimes the case where there is not an outward or fixed form. We have known, among such as externally are free enough, how there may be an order formed by traditional habits and ways which is inconsistent with God's will. Do not be deceived by appearances: unwritten prayers may offend as really as written ones. Its being an extempore prayer does not make it spiritual: and if it be a bad one, it is the worse because unwritten. For he who prays by that very fact is free, and yet the prayer is low and bad. Of course nothing heterodox is supposed or anything morally injurious: I mean simply what is unsuitable to one who stands in conscious redemption, and has the Holy Ghost indwelling and making him the temple of God. Now I say that this is the position of every Christian, and that worship is founded on the place in which Christ has set him, — the revelation of Christ as He is risen and in heaven.

Take, for instance, the common habit of getting on the ground of the Almightiness of God or the name of Jehovah. How could a Christian who knows what he is saying fall back on either out of the place of a child with his Father or of a member of Christ? I can understand a person bringing both in by a slip; but there would be always the correction at hand — perhaps the person having a consciousness more or less that it was so, or the Spirit of God would give him something altogether better. On the other hand, it seems wrong above all in prayer or worship to be too critical about what is said by others. It is a miserable thing to be sifting prayers or worship where we ought to be praising God with simplicity. But it may be a necessary duty where there is that which falsifies what ought to go up to God acceptably.

This may show the great analogy between what is going on now in Christendom with the state described in Malachi; and I am perfectly persuaded that Christendom has taken a serious stride of late years into a farther departure from God, and that the Jewish spirit (and Gentile too) of love for outward forms and splendour of building and music and appearance in general has developed immensely: in short there is a kind of race of rivalry in Christendom generally as to this. Those who not many years since used to be remarkable for their simplicity, and in fact were wont to indulge in rather opprobrious comments on national bodies for it, are now really seeking to out-do them in the same taste. All this appears to be a very deplorable thing for the children of God. I do not say a word about men of the world. These people of course cannot be debarred from having temples if they please: God will judge them by and by. But our business surely, as children of God, is with the interests of Christ. We have the interests of His love and of His glory, and to me it is serious that the state of Christians should be so singularly like that which is supposed in the very verses of Malachi we have been looking at.

Now much of the negligence is due to the assumption that God has left nothing definite in His word as to a great deal which they consider outward and nonessential. Willing to bear all that in mind, still I say, how comes it that they should be false to their own position, and allow themselves to sink below their communion with God, and their own knowledge of the gospel in worship — the very place where we ought most to be at the height of what we know? The truth is that the scriptural idea of worship has never had its place in their souls. Hence they get into the habit of speaking of the preaching of the gospel as worship. The united praise of God, in contradistinction to teaching or preaching, is almost lost sight of. Then again men go on in their usual routine in that exercise of conscience as to pleasing God in it.

There is a large class with whom one occasionally meets who have some thought of worship, and who know what is not worship; but unfortunately these may be obscure about the gospel. One dislikes referring to names; but those commonly called "high churchmen" have notions of worship though extremely wanting in sense of liberty: I am speaking now of godly persons — for there are such among them. They in general have stricter thoughts of worship, such as it is, than many who are before them in point of knowledge. Their standard may be low; but still, in their measure, they understand worship to be the outpouring of the heart to God. Consequently they all tend in their zeal for the expression of worship to slight preaching. Now it is very evident that Christian wisdom is to slight neither the one nor the other in its place. The true course here, as everywhere, is to leave scope for all the word and will of God, whatever the thing may be, without confounding them together. It is impossible for a soul that has not liberty to worship in the power of the Spirit.

But there are curious inconsistencies among real Christians. Often persons are kept back by the difficulties that seem so vast and insurmountable; and in this way frequently godly men are kept back by the idea of doing good. I do not know a greater hindrance, nor anything more evil, in fact, than allowing the desire to do good — more particularly in what people consider a large sphere — to embarrass their action for the Lord, and their faithfulness to what they know. In this way godly men are held in fetters, contrary to what they know. The state of the soul in the presence of God, independent altogether of position, has much to do with the spirit of worship.

In the case of such men as Samuel Rutherford, devout and God-fearing in tone and spirit, I should think there was much of the outgoing of heart which responded to the grace of Christ whose personal glory was dear to them. This mingled itself with their conversation and service of every kind, though they did not know the Christian's death to law, and were in the greatest bondage as regards the true expression of worship. It is thus we see now and then godly souls, where a burning sense of who and what Christ is imparts the tone of the soul which goes out in worship, and so we recognise it largely in Rutherford of old, though in controversy his severity was something tremendous. Like many mild men we may have known, he startled his opponents by the extremely hard blows he dealt out to his adversaries. When one turns from his keen and trenchant defence of Presbyterianism or legality, it is difficult to realize that the same man wrote the letters which charm all who love the Saviour. But when we look in a little more closely, we see that doctrinally he was as cold as Calvin, the secret of his difference from his fellows being his power of telling out the joy of his heart in Christ's love.

This spiritual tone is ever attractive, and justly so; but much more is needed to set a soul on the solid ground of Christian worship. For this is required another thing besides the living faith working by love, which is kindled by such a knowledge of Christ as the Holy Ghost gives. We need the sense of complete freedom through Christ our Lord — deliverance from flesh, world, law, everything that can come in between the soul and God. I speak now not of the power which here as everywhere is in the Holy Spirit, but of the condition antecedently requisite. That this is a matter of great moment will not be contested by those who love the saints of God for Christ's sake, and desire His honour in and by them. It is what we have most of all to seek with our brethren wherever they may be. For it ought never to be assumed. Many a Christian knows the prophetic word fairly and the truth in general, who is far from being consciously dead and so serving God. We must not then too hastily take this for granted that real believers are in this respect thoroughly clear as to their own souls. The same principle applies of course to knowledge about ecclesiastical position and government. It does not follow in this case any more; though church truth, while distinct, is connected more closely than prophecy with that which clears the soul. But we ought to set the full delivering grace of the gospel before every one that has been converted to God Even if those we come in contact with have been ever so long following the Lord, we should seek to learn whether they are consciously clear before God, and thus brought out of all bondage of spirit; for without this there must soon be not a few hitches and difficulties, by which in the day of trial unestablished persons break down, cause trouble, and certainly suffer in their own souls.

However we shall see what Jehovah thinks of the neglect of His name, and the slight put on His worship. "And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil?" It soon took the shape of what was really profane in Israel. "And if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith Jehovah of hosts. And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us; this hath been by your means: will he regard your persons? saith Jehovah of hosts. Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought?" And is not the love of mammon the known and confessed bane of Christendom?

Then we come to the next root of evil — intense selfishness, which God brings out by the prophet. "Neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith Jehovah of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand." But this very thing, the judgment of their evil morally, brings in, as in prophecy always, what God will do in His own gracious power; "for," says He, "from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles." For Israel were profaning His name and insulting His worship. Then Jehovah undertakes the care of it Himself, and declares that He will make His name great among the Gentiles whom the Jews despised, and this everywhere, from places at hand to the remoter isles which will await His law. I understand this to be a promise not yet accomplished. Many may apply it (and this may be allowable in the way of principle) to what is going on now under the gospel. But it is evident on a closer inspection that the passage looks onward to the millennial day. "And in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering." This is an instructive and interesting prophecy, proving as it does that, while the temple at Jerusalem is to be the metropolitan temple for the worship of all nations, it will not be to the exclusion of means and places of worship among the Gentiles.

It follows that there will be a universal testimony to the true God among all the nations; and one can see how right this will be, and suitable to the new age. For although I do not doubt that God will then provide better means of going to Jerusalem than man's wit or skill has yet devised, still there would be a void indeed if there were no maintenance of God's worship anywhere save in that one centre. Grace has now under the gospel gone out to the nations; and God, though He may display new ways for His own glory, will never go back from this at least. Under Christianity Jewish exclusiveness is unknown, because grace puts the believer even now in relation with heaven. In the future kingdom the Lord will take the earth as well as the heavens under His manifest sway, and the Jews and the Gentiles will be owned and blessed in their respective place on the earth, Israel having the position of special nearness but the nations rejoicing and worshipping everywhere; for Jehovah shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Jehovah, and His name one. Thus it will not be the Jew superseded or superseding in any way, but Jehovah going out in His goodness to all the Gentiles, while the mountain of His house is established in the top of the mountains and exalted above the hills, and the nations flow to it. Of that day, not of the present, Malachi speaks.

"In every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering," — in contrast with the polluted one which the priests of Israel presented then. I see no reason to conclude that the sacrificial terms are transferred from their original ceremonial objects and acts to such as are strictly spiritual, as we know now. (Hebrews 13, 1 Peter 2) The later chapters of Ezekiel, which clearly bear on the future, not on our time and position, are too explicit to be thus explained away, if indeed we prefer scripture authority to the thoughts and wishes of men. There is the strongest possible proof that the offerings will then be material, though no doubt used with intelligence and as memorials of the great sacrifice, when the blessing of the Gentiles will not be as now a reproach to Israel, but these will be as life from the dead to all the world. We must leave room for both these things, which are distinctly revealed and contrasted by the Holy Ghost in Romans 11. It is not therefore a question merely of interpreting the Old Testament, but of believing the interpretation authoritatively supplied to us by the great apostle of the Gentiles.

Doubtless the Romanist use of the passage is to the last degree puerile, and the more as they pretend the mass to be a witness of Christ's sacrifice where blood-shedding is essential. But the painful thought to my mind is the poverty of Protestant teachers, who apply the passage equally with Roman Catholics to the church now, instead of confessing worship in spirit and truth for the Christian, but the resumption of incense and offering by Jews and Gentiles by and by in the new age. Thus it appears to me certain that, beside the great centre of earthly worship for all in Jerusalem, literal offerings (and from Ezekiel we can add more) are here predicated of all the Gentiles in every place. Compare also Zep 2:11 for the latter truth, and Isa 56:6-8 for the former. But both are for the future exclusively in the world or age to come: and the more we reflect upon it, the less need we wonder, and the more its importance will be felt by unprejudiced minds which tremble at God's word. Universal profession of Jehovah's name, not testimony only, will be the specific character of the millennial age. There may be gradation in the results; as it is plain there will be the highest manifestation as far as earth is concerned in Jerusalem. Israel will compose the inner circle for the earth, but not to the exclusion of divine and acceptable worship everywhere among the Gentiles; "for my name," says He, "shall be great among the heathen, saith Jehovah of hosts."

With the new heart given then to the Jew, he will rejoice in the flow of God's mercy to the Gentiles, and will call on all lands to shout joyfully to Jehovah — will invite their old enemies to enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; as even before the blessing is fully established they will pray that God's grace may shine on them, so that upon earth men may know His way, among all nations His salvation. How deep the change when old narrowness shall thus yield to grace, and the Jews will delight in all nations as such flocking up to Jerusalem! We have not forgotten how they heard Paul till the word from the Lord that he should be sent far from Jerusalem to the Gentiles. This was intolerable to their pride and jealousy: it was not fit, they cried, that such a fellow should live; but in that day they too will be Sauls no longer but Pauls. Many of the Psalms breathe the new spirit which will animate the generation to come, in vain now because of their blindness and hardness of unbelief, but to be full of life and power then.

The real source of the difficulty then is not the ambiguity of scripture, for contrariwise its language is clear and precise. It is due entirely to the habits of what is called spiritualising, so ingrained in Christendom since the days of Origen among the Greeks and Jerome among the Latins, though at work subtily from earliest days, when it came into constant collision with the apostle Paul. Not to maintain the distinctively earthly glory to Israel, as their future hope under Messiah and the new covenant, invariably undermines Christianity and the church, which flourish only in proportion to firmly holding Christ and union with Him in heavenly places. The danger of the Gentiles thus becoming wise in their own conceit, and forgetting that the natural branches are only broken off in part for a season from their own olive tree, is strongly laid down in Romans 11. Hold fast the new and heavenly glory for us with Christ dead, risen, and glorified, and you keep the promised earthly supremacy for Israel, who will (not reign with Him on high, but) be reigned over by Him when He appears again in glory, the undisputed Head of all things, heavenly and earthly.

For the heavenly people (who by the Holy Ghost sent down are one with Christ at the right hand of God, the great high priest, gone in through the rent veil) earthly sacrifices and incense, priesthood and sanctuary, are all passed and inconsistent with their standing and relationship. But it will not be so with the earthly people or the Gentiles who shall be blessed under His visible glory in the day which hastens. Theologians may dogmatize in an abstract manner; and their disciples may scorn to receive what will not mix with their traditions or their inferences; but the word of God is so explicit that a reverent and lowly man, if his knowledge were ever so scanty, should hesitate before he rejects that which is to be the distinctly revealed condition of this earth when the days of heaven shine on it, simply because he cannot make it fit into his religious system — the principle of rationalism, even though it largely obtain among those who flatter themselves that they are most opposed to that system.

As to the re-appearance of a vast central temple on earth, a human priesthood, sacrifices, and every other peculiarity of a ritual religion, it appears to my mind indisputable in the end of Ezekiel. I am aware that the great mass of Dissenters are as opposed to such an idea as the less intelligent portion of the high and low church parties. None seem more horrified at it than the members of the Society of Friends. I may be allowed to say that I once glanced at a review of a book of mine in one of their organs, in which the writer gave me quite enough credit in other respects, but seemed to suspect a craze on the subject of a restored theocracy of Israel, converted yet with priests and sacrifices once more. Nor is it a question of a single, however considerable, portion of scripture. The Psalms and Prophets abound in anticipations of the new age, when the temple and its services and priesthood should be to Jehovah's praise, on a new ground indeed, but otherwise substantially similar. And as to Ezekiel 40-48 the evidence is so strong that even Dr. Henderson, trained in the most hostile school of Nonconformists, the Congregationalists, was forced to concede that, as far as the temple and its ordinances are concerned, the vision is to be interpreted literally, though he tries to take other parts symbolically. But it is plain that this is the inconsistency of a hard-pressed interpreter, and that the vision is homogeneous. The city, the distribution of the tribes, the healing waters, the return of the cherubic glory, all go together and point, not to an imperfect copy of certain points of the temple in the post-captivity state, but to the glorious renovation, the times of restitution of all things, spoken of by all the holy prophets since the world began.

Here, as is known, the so-called Fathers fell into the most serious error, even such as looked for the return of the Lord and His future kingdom over the earth. But not one of them, as far as I remember (and my friend Dr. D. Brown has proved the point well), bore witness to the future national restoration of Israel to the promised land. They on the contrary embraced the further error of supposing that the risen saints would be in the earthly Jerusalem: thus ignorantly were the best of them agreeing to blot out the distinctive hopes of both Israel and the church; and so rapid was the departure of the early Christians even from plain prophetic facts. Still earlier had they lost sight of our heavenly relations to Christ, and of the capital truth of the Spirit's presence and action in the assembly here below. The consequence was that then was consummated the fatal scheme of treating the church systematically as Israel improved. Maintain simply and firmly the literal restoration of Israel as wholly distinct from Christianity, and you have a bulwark against pseudo-spiritualism, and a groundwork, if rightly used, for seeing our special and heavenly privileges. The Fathers thought that Jerusalem during the millennium would be the city of the heavenly saints, that the Jews would be Christians, and that all would be together, risen and uprisen, reigning in glory. Can one wonder that men such as Dr. B. should set themselves against so incongruous a mixture of things heavenly and earthly? Nevertheless there is no good reason to deny, as he does, that Christ's advent precedes the millennium, any more than to explain away the restoration of Israel to their land according to prophecy and Romans 11, as his friend Dr. Fairbairn does.

Scripture reveals both headed up under Christ (Eph 1:10), the heavenly part distinct from the earthly, the glorified saints in the one, the Jews and Gentiles in the other, and all under the Lord Jesus, the risen Bridegroom of the church. It is a serious error to mix them up; is it less serious, because of the confusion of ignorant men, to deny the revealed truth as to either one or other? Let it be noticed further that in Ezekiel we see a temple as well as a city for the earthly people. It is remarkable, on the contrary, that in what is expressly said to be the bride, the Lamb's wife (that is, the church or heavenly city of which John speaks), no temple is seen. Thus the distinction is maintained even in glory. Where a temple is on earth, a priesthood accompanies it; and if there be a priesthood, it is hard to see the use of it without sacrifices. With us spiritual priesthood and spiritual sacrifices go together. (Compare Hebrews 10-13; and 1Pe 2:5.) Nor does scripture leave it to inferential reasoning whether there be Aaronic priests, offerings, and sacrifices or not; for this is affirmed and even minutely described. (Compare Psa 96:8; Psa 115:10; Psa 118:26-27; Psa 132:13-18; Psa 135:19-21; Isa 60:6-7; Isa 60:13; Isa 66:21; Jer 33:18; Ezekiel 43-46; Zec 14:16-21)

The chief source of difficulty and hindrance is the system which assumes that Christianity is a final condition for the earth, and that the testimony will be as now until all the earth is converted, the Jews being at length brought in among the rest. It is another thing with those who believe that there is another age to follow the present, characterized by the salvation of all Israel as such, with the Gentiles largely blessed also, but not brought into the one body as we know now, but the Jews in their own land with the temple and its ritual and all the nations not only coming up there year by year, but having worship each in his own place also by the will of God. When the national restoration of the ancient people is seen, it is hard after this to deny their priests and sanctuary, their incense, and sacrifices. Further we learn that just as certain changes came in with the temple of Solomon, so will it be yet more conspicuously in the future day. Absolute silence as to Pentecost; but we see Tabernacles observed with special prominence, when the nations go up to worship Jehovah. Nobody need be afraid that all this will interfere with the value due to the sacrifice of Christ: we may trust God and His word that no dishonour shall be done to that only efficacious atonement. I presume that the sacrifices will be of a purely memorial character and nothing more. In that day no Israelite will ever again use the form to slight the substance. All will know that there is nothing efficacious in such sacrifices, any more than we acknowledge in baptism or the Lord's Supper. So with the Israel of that day. That they are to have sacrifices is a revealed fact; so they are to have priests over again on earth. It is well to see that this will not for them interfere with their resting on Christ; but, understanding it or not, we should believe, and not seek to explain it away. The saints since redemption will be above, as also the Old Testament saints, then risen from the dead; but on the earth will be the converted Israel of that day in their unchanged bodies, and the spared Gentiles, not possessed of exactly the same privileges, for Israel will then have the better place, but all blessed richly under Jehovah Messiah. As it is quite a different state of things from Christianity, so there will then be two distinct positions, heavenly and earthly, instead of one and the same as now.

As to the details of the future sacrifices of Israel, one could not expect them given everywhere. It is enough that God has been pleased to give the particulars in one clearly defined prediction. And whatever may be thought of obscurity elsewhere, it is impossible to say that Eze 43:18, Eze 44:15, Eze 45:15-25, Ezekiel 46 leave any question as to shedding blood sacrificially and offering victims on the altar of Jehovah. The Popish application of Mal 1:10, I may remark in addition to what has been already said, is a striking proof of the evil of the so-called "spiritualizing" of scripture. They draw the mass from it, as is well known, construing the pure offering of the wafer changed into Christ's body. This would be without force, but for the error prevalent among Protestants that it is here a question of the church, an error derived from the Fathers. In this as in other things the Papists simply took up the mistakes of the early writers, and worked them into a still more fatal system; while Protestants have but partially cleared themselves from that general and early declension, and in no way serve as a testimony to the authority of the word or the power of the Spirit.

"But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of Jehovah is polluted." Thus Jehovah resumes His expostulation, after having brought in the bright promise of millennial worship among the Gentiles. "Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith Jehovah of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith Jehovah. But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto Jehovah a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith Jehovah of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen."

This leads to further appeals, and still with the priests more particularly in view. "Like people, like priests:" if the people were bad, the priests were worse, as must usually be the case. "And now, O ye priests, lay it to heart." It was not only that they acted wrongly, but where was their conscience? "Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it." Jehovah proceeds to speak with the greatest contempt of the state to which He would reduce them as a chastening on their unfaithfulness. "And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith Jehovah of hosts." Levi is purposely introduced, because of his faithfulness at the crisis of the golden calf, in striking contrast with the conduct of him who ought to have been the most careful of Jehovah's glory, even Aaron the high priest "My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name." Jehovah looks back to the time when Levi consecrated his service at the cost of every human consideration, in not less striking contrast with once bitter revenge for his outraged sister. Here again we see how habitually the Lord goes, as in Malachi 1, to the source of things. So He took up Esau and Jacob at the beginning, and judges at the end. He pronounces on Levi and the priests. "The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of Jehovah of hosts." Then comes His solemn estimate: "But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith Jehovah of hosts. Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law."

As thus the sanctuary was polluted, and its ministers, and the offerings, so further we shall see the social life of Israel suffered no less. There is the deepest connection between a false religion, or a non-religion, and the practical ways of the people. "Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers? Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of Jehovah which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god." Thus, though not idolators, they had contracted the nearest relationship in life with the heathen. "Jehovah will cut off, the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto Jehovah of hosts. And this have ye done again, covering the altar of Jehovah with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand." The prophet describes the weeping of the Jewish wives, now repudiated for the sake of the heathen they chose. It is the same state of things in Ezra, and especially Nehemiah. The heart of the people was sick as truly, yea, much more sick than in the earlier days when Isaiah laid it to their charge.

Nor was the moral insensibility less now but more. "Yet ye say, Wherefore?" They could not see wherein they were to blame. "Because Jehovah hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant." They were both placed on a common footing with God. "And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For Jehovah, the God of Israel, saith he hateth putting away." What alienation from God's mind and ways! They were given up to self. Their light spirit in divorce was now reaching its head among the Jews — in the remnant. "For one covereth violence with his garment, saith Jehovah of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously."

Thus, as the first chapter looks more at their religious life, the second, at least the latter part of it, takes in their social life; and in both we see total ruin and hardness of heart before God. Nevertheless it is well to observe how He connects together both elements, the social and religious. He begins with the root of it. If the soul is wrong towards God, there is not much hope for man, even in the closest relationships of this life.

Then we come to Malachi 3 which runs on really to the end, the third and fourth forming one strain of which the fourth is more a division than a separate chapter; and so it stands in the Hebrew. We find now the introduction of that which introduces the day of Jehovah in the last verse of Malachi 2, which, it seems, should rather be the first of chapter 3. "Ye have wearied Jehovah with your words; yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of Jehovah, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?" Did any thus complain that evil prospered? The answer follows: "Behold, I send my messenger." It is rather the introduction that we see here. "And he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple." There is more than a messenger now; it is Messiah Himself, "even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith Jehovah of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi" (beginning with what most needed it, and what was nearest to the Lord), "and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer them unto Jehovah an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto Jehovah, as in the days of old, and as in former years. And I will come near to you to judgment." Here is the challenge of Mal 2:17 taken up by the God of judgment. The blessing of Jehovah is bound up with the judgment of Jehovah. It is a totally different thing from the gospel. Christianity shows us Christ bearing our judgment, and consequently brings in perfect grace towards the believer, except only that, being thus received on the ground of grace, he becomes a subject of the government of God in his earthly life of every day. Hence arises the need for patience on God's part, and growth on man's part, with watchfulness, prayer, self-judgment and the Father's chastening, as well as above all the priesthood of Christ. But this supposes a soul resting on righteousness: Christ is made unto him righteousness. Then he has to walk accordingly; and this is carried on under the moral government of God. But it is a different thing from what we have here, where public power accompanies righteousness.

John the Baptist, as we know, was an accomplishment of the messenger in the past; Elijah the prophet seems to be the one who will make it good in the day that is coming. Why should we reason on these things? Let us receive the word of God with simplicity. We are fertile in difficulties. Our minds easily find hindrances in the way, and plenty of reasons not to believe what is revealed. Yet I think it plain that Elijah as a prophet is to be sent, but not before the Lord comes for us. Man makes a great mistake in confounding grace and judgment, the present with the future. Here it is in view of coming to judgment. Now the Lord has brought in grace, and He will finish its testimony and its dealings before He brings in judgment. The coming of the Lord in grace is the complement of the work, of grace. He will fulfil His new work with its eternal consequences. Then will come another age.

I should think Malachi 3 was fulfilled at that time, but that, being so very like what Elijah will do by and by, it is put in this general way. Then the Spirit of Jehovah by Malachi would still present to Israel the Lord's coming to them. One fully allows a partial accomplishment of Malachi both in John the Baptist and in Christ's coming to the temple (chap. 3); while it is evident when we come to the fourth chapter that it is exclusively the future. The third chapter touches partially on the past; but we can see that we are constantly arrested — that the first coming of Christ did not bring out all that is said even here. "And then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto Jehovah as in the days of old and as in former years." It is well known how far this was from fact. Consequently what follows far exceeds anything then realized in the judging of all wickedness among them. "And I will come near to you to judgment, and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith Jehovah of hosts. For I am Jehovah, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them."

Then the call to return met with an unreasonable and rebellious reply: "Wherein shall we return? Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings." Jehovah takes them on the lowest possible ground. "Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation, Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith Jehovah of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith Jehovah of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed." Such will be the case in the millennium: they will prove the Lord thus. They will humble themselves; they will trust Him; and all nations shall call them blessed. "For ye shall be a delightsome land" — which they have never been since this was written. On the contrary, "Your words have been stout against me, saith Jehovah. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before Jehovah of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered."

But then the wickedness of the people in general was used of God for rousing the conscience of some in their midst. Among the returned remnant there was a godly portion. "Then* they that feared Jehovah spake often one to another: and Jehovah hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written." It is plain that we have the spirit of this verified when Christ came. We see the Annas, the Simeons, and the shepherds, who show us exactly this state of spiritual feeling. They could and did communicate with all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. And what was known then will be true again in a still more manifest way before the Lord comes and brings in the great and dreadful day of Jehovah.

*Venema takes verse 16 in contrast with the preceding verse, as the pious of old set thus off against the evil ways of the present generation. Hence the particles of time are taken in opposition. This, I confess, is to me more than doubtful; for the sense conveyed in the English Bible, which is that of other versions I have examined, seems preferable.

"And they shall be mine, saith Jehovah of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not." The Jews themselves will no longer take the ground of being mere Jews. They will see the vanity of an outward place; they will value what is of God; they will abhor the more those who are wicked because they are Jews. The transgressors are to be made an abhorring to all flesh by the judgment of God in Jerusalem, as we find in the end of Isaiah 66; but here we find the discerning of it even before that judgment is accomplished. The heart of the righteous will be brought to feel the nature of what Jehovah will do when judgment comes.

"For, behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble." What matters where pride and wickedness may be? It is everywhere hateful to God, whether among Jews or Gentiles. It is even, if possible, more heinous among the Jews. "And the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith Jehovah of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." This is not the morning star, which is rather the way in which we know Jesus, and look for Him. The morning star is as decidedly for those who during the night look up into the heavens, as the Sun of righteousness causes His force to be felt in calling man to be occupied with his work here below. It is the sun that rules the day. Be it that the day of Jehovah is come; the Sun of righteousness rules it. You cannot avoid seeing sunlight unless you shut your eyes, and even then may have an instinctive sense of it. But with the morning star it is not so: you must look for it when others sleep. This is the way therefore in which the Spirit of God shows us our watching for Jesus. It is exclusively heavenly, and supposes faith, love, and hope in the power of the Holy Ghost.

There is more however to notice here. "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked." Here is a twofold issue — mercy to the righteous, and judgment to the wicked. This is not at all applicable to Christianity, because every one is now judged by Christ's cross as wicked until they receive Jesus; and then, no matter what they may have been before, they are justified by faith and enter on an entirely new course. But there is no treading down the wicked yet, nor will it be at any time as long as Christianity goes on. It is wholly future, and will be when Jehovah takes up the Jews and judgment comes upon the world. "And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith Jehovah of hosts."

Next follow two points of interest. One is the remembrance of the law of Moses. They look back; and this is the test to judge their whole course from first to last. Again they will look forward: "Behold I send you Elijah the prophet." Thus, though about Israel, it shows us the two ways of judging aright the present — in the light of the past, and in that of the future. It always therefore requires faith to judge according to God. Hence Malachi brings in morally the giver of the law and the restorer of the law, the two great pillars of the Jewish nation, heralding the way before Jehovah who alone can bestow and sustain the blessing.

39 Malachi contd

"And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." Such is the warning note given here by Him who is the best blessing He can bestow. Heaven and earth and all things shall be shaken, but Jehovah abides; and blessed are all they that put their trust in Him. We know that the restoring of all things morally will be wrought in the hearts of fathers and sons in Israel, and that God will make them as life from the dead to the world, and thus spread His saving health among all nations who shall be blessed, not cursed, in the Seed of promise.

In the spirit and power of Elijah came Jehovah's messenger, John the Baptist, and many of the sons of Israel did he turn to Jehovah their God. The language seems expressly to guard against the error of supposing that it was the predicted mission of Elijah the prophet. If ye will receive it, said our Lord Himself, this is Elijah who should come. It was a testimony to faith, not the fulfilment of the terms of Malachi's last intimation. (Malachi 4) Even in our Lord's own case all that was bright and manifest blessing for Israel was arrested by the unbelief of the people, and thus the door was opened on His rejection to heavenly blessings for all believers indiscriminately. Hence for the time the moral restitution of the Jews was partial; and (the mass being impenitent, and family bonds utterly relaxed and broken) the land was smitten with a curse from that day to this. But it will not be always thus. For grace will work in a remnant once more in the last days when the full accomplishment of Elijah's mission shall be realized (Mat 17:11), and, the apostates perishing under divine judgment, all Israel shall be saved to the joy and blessing of the earth and of all its families. And such is the common voice of the holy prophets since the world began.

We have now in the goodness of God followed the course of the lesser prophets from beginning to end. We have glanced at themselves and briefly compared them with each other. How solemn for the believer to see the same ominous sign of sure coming judgment in Christendom as we may have discerned throughout the course of Israel, The possession of much truth no more guarantees now than then that we are true witnesses for God in our own day; still less the assumption that we have a position according to God because we are in a certain historical line of succession. So thought those who broke the law, rejected the prophets, slew the Messiah, and refused the fresh testimony of the Holy Spirit. Let us beware of making the same fatal mistake, and rather examine whether we are walking in the distinctive truth God has revealed to us for His own glory in Christ, not merely in truths, however momentous, which do not so much put conscience to the proof. The unity of the Godhead was perverted by the Jews to the dishonour of the Son; the Son as He was on earth under law is now abused in Christendom to ignore redemption, union with Him on high, the presence of the Spirit in the assembly of God here below, and the constant hope of Christ's coming. These are the truths which try the ground of the heart in the Christian. May we be found faithful and strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus!