An Exposition of Isaiah

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Introduction

An Exposition of Isaiah.

Part I: Inspired Prophecy

1. Its Nature

“The prophetic word” means the communication of things to come which God has been pleased to make in scripture. The apostle Peter, in so using the expression, compares it to “a lamp that shineth in a squalid place.” It makes manifest man’s evil, which God declares He will judge and supersede by His kingdom in Christ (2 Peter 1:19). Those addressed did well to heed it, though he desired for them still better light, and this for the heart — “till day dawn and the day-star arise in your hearts.” He had of course this heavenly hope bright in his own heart, and he desired it for all of them. But the saints of the circumcision were slow in apprehending what was new and heavenly: so we see over a larger area in the Epistle to the Hebrews. They were content with the elements of the doctrine of Christ, and had to be exhorted to go on to perfection, or that full age in Christ which is proper to the Christian, based on accomplished redemption and the gift of the Holy Spirit, as well as occupied with Christ’s glory on high. Here they were dull, as 2 Peter shows them, about the Christian hope.

But the apostle encouraged them to heed the lamp of prophecy till they seized the brighter light that the gospel brings of the hope of which Christ Himself is the one personal object — Christ about to receive us and

present us in the Father's house, that where He is, there we also may be. Useful as a lamp is for guiding us in darkness or guarding us from the defilements around, far better is the light of Christ fully revealed, and the accompanying hope for our hearts even now, before He gives us the Morning Star, that is, association with Himself at His coming. It is the coming again of Him Whose love we know, Who suffered once for all for our sins, Who will then consummate in heaven the love He proved for us on earth. When the day of Jehovah comes for the world, according to prophecy, it will burn as a furnace for the proud and wicked, but to those that fear His name, as Israel thus will here below, shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings. Our hope is much higher, whether for our hearts now, or when it is fulfilled at His coming. It is not associated with judgement on adversaries, but founded on His own bearing our judgement on the cross, and taking us to heaven to be with Himself, apart from all thought of the earth or of man upon it.

Meanwhile, and from the earliest days, God has given prophecy in this sin-darkened world; and He took care, when human life was shortened to its present span (Ps. 90:10), to embody it in scripture as "the prophetic word." In it lay, when Adam transgressed, the warrant of faith. Man fell and paradise was lost through sin. All hope turned on the woman's Seed, Who would with bitten heel bruise the Serpent's head. Whatever else might be intimated and learnt from God's sayings and doings in those sad circumstances of ruin, a Deliverer was revealed in the future, Himself deeply to suffer, but to crush the enemy who had so soon and completely misled man. This Deliverer somehow must be man, the

woman’s Seed, itself a fact absolutely unique, and a phrase of mysterious moment and ineffable grace; yet must He also be immeasurably above man, not only to resist and beat off the old Serpent, the devil, but to deal him destruction beyond remedy.

The word translated “prophet” in the O.T. is derived from “bubbling or pouring forth,” alluding to God’s action in inspiring him; “Seer” points to the vision which distinguished such. Its scriptural meaning transcends the classical usage as the living and true God rises above the demons, who acted behind the idols that were adored by the heathen and interpreted by their prophets.

In the New Testament, as well as in the Old, the term prophet or prophecy is applied when God’s mind was communicated, as in Gen. 20:7, Ps. 105:15, John 4:19, 1 Cor. 14:24, 25; but its strict and appropriated sense of unveiling the future, which belongs to God only, is unquestionable. When idolatry prevailed, and God separated Abraham and the line of promise, He made known clearly and severally His design to bless the chosen family, and in a specified land assured to them. He disclosed also a still larger and more wondrous purpose, bound up with their Seed to bless all the families in the earth (Gen. 12:3, Gen. 22:18, Gen. 26:4, Gen. 28:14). While prophecy thus embraced the laying bare of facts or persons at any time (1 Sam. 9:20, 2 Kings 5:26), so as to put conscience in God’s presence, none the less did the revelation of the future characterise the prophet, as we see throughout the range of scripture.

Nay, more, while the five books of Moses are distinctly called the Law, as in a vague way are the Psalms and the Prophets, yet every part of the Pentateuch is brimful of prophecy. Adam is authoritatively declared to be figure of the Coming One; this in righteousness and life, as that in sin and death. Cain presages the way of woe in walk and worship, as righteous Abel's blood witnesses that which speaketh better. And if we omit not a few, Noah foreshadows Him Who will unfailingly govern the world after it is again judged as a whole for its iniquities. The Messiah underlies every promise and every office of special dignity, Godward and manward; covenant; sacrifice, and offering, point to His work. Holy and suffering witnesses give glimpses of Him, as the wicked manifest their awful antagonism. The past public dealings of God typify greater things to come. The first battle in Genesis is vividly impressed with signs of the last; especially when we read at its close Abram's meeting the royal priest, who blessed the conqueror on the part of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, and blessed God Most High, Who had delivered the enemies into his hand: the clear prefiguration of Jehovah's day, with its issue of blessedness, above and below, in righteousness and peace.

One might dwell ever so long on broad outlines and minute details alike, each and all telling the same tale of the bright future that gilds to the instructed eye the humbling lessons of the history, pointing to Christ's day, which made Abraham glad, when the whole earth shall be filled with His glory. But one must forbear even as to Genesis, rich as it is in furnishing the germs of what is developed now, or what is to be in another and more blessed way during days to come. A similar character

pervades in some form every one of the other books of Moses, nay, of every book of the Old Testament. Thus Exodus points to a better redemption of God's people, and by power as well as blood; and to His subsequent deigning to dwell in the midst of the redeemed, as He will for ever. Leviticus again, and Numbers, are no less predictive; and Deuteronomy, besides its more veiled intimations in its course and close, has more open prophecies of Christ and His coming triumphs than its predecessors. As the historical books that follow are said by the Jews to be written by "the earlier prophets," so all are stamped inwardly to the intelligent Christian with shadows of good things to come, which centre in Him Whom in their blindness they rejected. So more evidently are the Psalms full of Christ, and of the Spirit of Christ in His people. It ought to be needless to say this of the "later" avowed prophets. But we live in days of rebuke and blasphemy, when in Christendom even professing servants of His are eagerly encouraging one another to obliterate from the Old Testament Him Who, if seen therein, shakes of itself the new critical system to atoms, and convicts its adherents of shameless incredulity.

The New Testament is the manifestation of the Son of God, Jesus the Christ come in flesh; and it declares redemption accomplished in Him, rejected by men, notably by the Jews, but risen from the dead and glorified Head over all things to the church His body. Consequently the kingdom, pledged in the Old Testament, assumes, while Christ is on high, a character of "mystery" (Matt. 13:11; Mark 4:11), or the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens; till He, having caught up the risen saints to the Father's house, returns in

displayed power to enforce the rights of God, and bring in the long expected times of refreshing for Israel, the nations, and all creation. The cross of Christ, being as it was the rejection of God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, gave occasion to Christian blessing in the gospel, and in the church united to its exalted Head; which is wholly distinct from the things to come. Yet the apostle, in Romans 16:26, designates the divine word which reveals this new and heavenly secret, “prophetic scriptures.” From everlasting, silence had been kept about that mystery; a statement inapplicable to “the prophets,” and yet more evidently to their scriptures in the Old Testament. But now it was manifested, and by prophetic scriptures, according to the eternal God’s commandment, made known for obedience of faith unto all the nations. In thus making it known, the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians, with those to the Corinthians and others, have a primary place. And thus the saints are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief cornerstone. The instruments of this special teaching are hence shown to be exclusively the New Testament apostles and prophets, as a joint class for this inspired work. But the New Testament in no way lacks the richest testimony on things to come, as the Lord promised (John 16:13). Witness Matt. 24; 25; Mark 13; Luke 21; to speak only of the fuller predictions in the Synoptic Gospels, and in 2 Peter and Jude, but especially 2 Thess. 2; 1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 3; with the Revelation, the most abundant, systematic, and profound of all prophecies.

In the Old Testament, as in the New, the greatest variety of moral appeal accompanies prediction almost everywhere, and in volume commonly exceeds it, as

being of the utmost importance. But specific predictions are given throughout to be fulfilled in due time. Apply this test to Christ's first advent, incomparably the most momentous of all facts here below, so declared to be by both the Old and the New Testaments; and what can be more decisive? From Moses to Malachi the grand testimony was to the coming Messiah. Even Genesis narrowed the limits down from the first woman to Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, successively; as the Psalms did to One Who should be David's son, yet David's Lord, sitting at Jehovah's right hand before He strike through kings in His wrath (Ps. 110) Who is set on the holy hill of Zion, and sways the universal sceptre as Son of man over all nations (Ps. 8; Dan. 7). The time was fixed by Daniel, the place by Micah, the birth from a virgin by Isaiah, even the strange land (where Israel was a bondman) to the Messiah a shelter from the Edomite king of Judæa, as the Spirit showed by Hosea. (Hosea 11:1-3). So we have in Isaiah and Malachi His herald, "A voice crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of Jehovah"; for indeed He was Immanuel and Jehovah. By the same prophet His servant-character, so hateful to man's pride and rebelliousness, was fully made known. It told the tale of the world's state, His utter rejection by man, though Jehovah's chosen, in Whom His soul delighted, Whom man despised, Whom the nation abhorred. There, too, the ministry of His life, the atonement of His death, are with equal clearness revealed. So long before, David wrote in Psalm 22. what was immeasurably beyond his own sufferings, and any kingly power of his — indeed, what He alone of all men knew. He is on the one hand the Holy One of God, abandoned by His God, as He must be to make expiation of sins, and on the other raised and glorified in virtue of

it, so as to praise “in the midst of the congregation” or church (v. 22) now, as He will ere long “in the great congregation,” i.e. “all Israel” then saved (v. 25); when all the ends of the earth shall remember, and all the kingdoms of the nations worship. So it is to be, when the kingdom becomes de facto, as it is de jure, Jehovah’s, and He is the ruler over the nations.

When the dread scene of the cross drew near, was the prophetic word in vain? or did it utter generalities, or easy guesses, or dubious oracles? Was it only within the space of man’s life or observation that one predicted the treachery of a disciple (Ps. 41:9), as another did the goodly price He was prized at by them — the thirty pieces of silver (Zech. 11:12, 13)? Was it within the compass of man’s mind to say centuries before that He, over Whom Jehovah watched with delight and loving care without parallel, should, in His obedience, be surrendered to the basest smiting and the cruellest contumely (Isa. 1), because His vindication was to be by resurrection (Ps. 16) and heavenly glory (Ps. 8, 110) that grace might reign through righteousness unto life eternal through Jesus Christ our Lord? Was it the prognostic of a mortal to say of Messiah (for of Him only Psalm 22 treats), “They pierced My hands and My feet,” and again, “They part My garments among them, and upon My venture they do cast lots”? anticipatively to provide the very words the Lord Jesus appropriated when suffering once for all for sins, Just for unjust? Was it a mere conjecture to lay down that not a bone of Him should be broken (Ex. 12:46; Ps. 34:20) when the legs of the others were? or that only He should be pierced (Zech. 12:10), whereas they were not? Was it fortuitous that even in such circumstances He should be with the

rich in His death, whilst His grave would naturally be made with the wicked? (Isa. 53:9).

No good man's fancy more unreliable than Dr. T. Arnold's (Sermons, 1. on the Interpretation of Prophecy, 377) that history deals with particular facts, prophecy with general principles, so as to make it conditional because of evil in the creature. It was blindness to both history and prophecy, as God has given them in the scriptures; and outside His word we need not concern ourselves. In all the Old Testament, avowedly historical, or ostensibly prophetic, there are deep moral principles as surely as the facts which embody them or draw out the word that conveyed them. In all too one still grander Object of faith arose before such as believed.

This hope of a Deliverer acted with such power that the mass of Jews were found as a whole pervaded by it everywhere; so were the Samaritans down to the woman at Sychar. Never was it more general than at the time the Lord was in their midst, though their unbelief was really at its lowest, as they proved, when to their eyes He had no beauty that they should desire Him. Indeed their soul loathed Him, because He did not then take His world-kingdom, exalt the Jew, and destroy the Roman. Even His own followers had to bear His reproof, "O foolish and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to suffer these things [their stumbling block], and enter into his glory? And beginning from Moses he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:25-27).

It may be urged that the minute circumstances, of which we have had but a selection as they occurred to one's

memory, are peculiar to Christ, but that outside His person prophecy takes into account broad maxims, which can only apply in a measure, because of the mixed condition of man, and are not adequately fulfilled save in Him. But the fact is that the theory is true nowhere; and its effect is to destroy the truth, as far as men strive to carry it out. Prophecy often launches out, even at an early day, into the magnificent and solemn display of the Lord coming in judgement of the quick, the habitable world, as we read in the Epistle of Jude, who was enabled by the inspiring Spirit (whatever the means) to give us the testimony of Enoch; not as in the spurious Ethiopic book, which betrayed its source by its inability even to make a correct use of scripture. Enoch "prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with myriads of his saints to execute judgement upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their works of ungodliness which they have ungodlily wrought, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (vv. 14, 15). At a later epoch Moses spoke all the words of his wondrous song, as given in Deut. 32, which testify to the same consummation, when Jehovah shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants; and the nations shall rejoice with His people, and He will make expiation for His land, for His people (vv. 36-43).

Take another instance, which in a brief compass illustrates the nature of prophecy in symbol as well as in simple language; as elsewhere figures are employed to give vividness. In Hosea 3 (where we are spared the usual insinuations against the alleged early date) under the prophet's purchase of a woman beloved yet an adulteress, Jehovah set forth the relation of guilty Israel,

no longer to be idolatrous, yet not properly wife. The words that follow are plain and terse. “For the sons of Israel shall abide many days without king and without prince, and without sacrifice, and without pillar, and without ephod and teraphim. Afterward shall the sons of Israel return, and seek Jehovah their God and David their king, and shall come with fear unto Jehovah and unto his goodness at the end of the days.” Here we have a description of the most surprising facts which no human mind could have divined beforehand, and conveyed in the most precise terms: verse 4 in course of fulfilment to this day, verse 5 awaiting it in that auspicious day which all the prophets hailed, and all saints of Old Testament or New ought surely to expect.

Who before Hosea distinctly conceived for Israel’s history a state of things “without a king, without a prince”? One, if godly, might well have thought of national disaster and humiliation; but what of the pledges to David and his posterity? But even if he had discerned in Psalm 89:30-32 the probability and danger of royal eclipse, what more opposed to his feelings and stranger to his mind than a religious anomaly without parallel among his brethren, and so hard for the few to conciliate with a divine ritual from the ever living and true God? Alas! he knew already how prone the chosen people were to lapse into idolatry, and how grace had as often intervened to recall from false gods. But here is announced a condition altogether unique, a religion neither divine nor idolatrous, but a wretched negation, “without sacrifice, and without pillar, and without ephod and teraphim.” Even D. Kimchi interprets this justly enough if not fully, saying, “Without sacrifice refers to God, without pillar refers to idols, without ephod refers

to God Who declares the future by Urim and Thummim, without teraphim refers to idols who declare the future according to the opinions of those who believe in them."

Beyond controversy sacrifice is and has ever been the foundation of all true worship since sin came in. It had an authoritatively spiritual place in Judaism. Christianity has it perfectly and for ever in Christ. And as the ephod points to the ministry of the high priest in Israel, so we have now Christ High Priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek, the Son of God passed through the heavens (Heb. 5-7) But the Jew has nothing! neither sacrifice to purge sins, nor high priest to intercede for them: the astonishing spectacle before all eyes and for long centuries of a people that hate the idols they once loved, yet without the divine worship and service which their law demands imperatively. Never did such a state enter the imagination of Israel before Hosea, nor did it come to pass till long after him. Yet here it is predicted beyond a doubt as a lasting state; and so it has been and is. But the last verse (Hosea 3:5) is equally clear and conclusive to faith that they shall as a people return, not to their land merely (though this is certain from all scripture), but to Jehovah their God and to David their king, Who can be none other as the context demonstrates than the Messiah. "And so," says the great apostle, "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. 11:26). None can deny the national and unparalleled religious ruin of Israel according to prophecy: why should any stop there and entirely disbelieve their restoration, not only as a nation, but to be the earthly centre of all the nations for the word of Jehovah in Zion? But how, we may ask, were either of these stupendous changes, in ruin or in

blessing, within man's horizon when Hosea wrote with such startling plainness of speech?

Ps. 22 is just as striking as Isa. 53 for its first half sets out prophetically, as if a fact before us, the Messiah rejected, suffering, crucified, starting with that most wondrous of truths from His own lips to which atonement alone gives meaning — His God abandoning Him when in the deepest abyss of need and shame. But so it must be when God for us, as for the Jew, made to be sin, Him Who knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). For if sinners are to be forgiven righteously, or justified, it must be on the righteous basis of sin judged as it deserves, and of God then glorified about it in an adequate sacrifice; so that He can be righteous in blotting every sin of the believer from before Him. And as the sufferings were unfathomable, so is the glory in divine answer to them; as our Lord said in a still deeper way looking on to both, "If God be glorified in Him (the Son of man), God will glorify Him in Himself, and will straightway glorify Him" (John 12:32). Righteousness set the risen Christ, the Second man, at God's right hand on high, as He declared His Father's name to His brethren. Blessing unbounded flows through His atoning death. In the midst of the congregation He praises, as in John 20:19-22, Heb. 2:12. By-and-by the "great congregation," when all Israel is saved, will re-echo His praise. Nor this only, but all the ends of the earth follow. For the day will then have come, not for gospel testimony as the church is now, but when the kingdom is Jehovah's, and He is the ruler of the nations as an actual fact. All mortals shall bow before Him, from those most at ease to the utterly destitute hitherto, and that not of the then generation but of those to be born, to whom it

shall be declared that Jehovah hath done this — His infinite work transcending all before and after.

Neither David is here, nor any that ever lived or died, but only the Messiah Who once for all suffered for sins, Just for unjust, that He might bring us to God; Who is glorified on high while the church is being gathered, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ; and Who, after receiving them to Himself changed into His glory, will come to make good the kingdom according to the prophets, to the joy of heaven and earth. Who but God could have conveyed these anticipations, wondrous beyond all comparison? It is an eminently feeble effort to ascribe such a psalm to the exile or later, in the desire of taking it from the greatest of the psalmists; but put it where you will, you cannot silence the voice of God in His word, sounding across the ages, and still witnessing of glories to come in Christ the Lord. Fully owning the true and sound application of the principle to the gospel (as in Rom. 15:10), one is bound to look for the fulfilment at the end of the age, when Jehovah will no longer hide His face from Israel, and they are not only reduced to the utmost extremity, but turn in repentance to Messiah Whom they slew, saying, “Blessed be He that cometh in the name of Jehovah.”

Indeed, it is upon this coming age that the prophetic word converges; so much so that 2 Peter 1:20 pronounces, as a thing we ought to know, that no prophecy of scripture is of its own interpretation. Far from being thus isolated, as it must have been if it emanated from the human mind or will, it forms part of the great scheme which, as the Father counselled it for the glory of His beloved Son, so the Spirit reveals in the prophetic word which centres in His coming kingdom.

So, in contrast with His action in the Christian, and in the church, the Holy Spirit in Rev. 19:10 is designated "the spirit of prophecy," and said to be the "testimony of Jesus." In the Acts and the Epistles He acts as the power of communion on the ground of known redemption.

The truth is that the earliest book of scripture completely refutes the assumption of such contemporary interests as blind to the future of God, and illustrates what the last book of scripture proves as matter of fact, that prophecy exhibits the greatest variety of form according to God's wisdom. The first intimation (Gen. 3:15) is worthy alike of Him Who spoke, and of Him Who was spoken of, as it disclosed the end from the beginning, the judgement of the subtle foe, the suffering grace and overwhelming power of Him Who would deign to be the woman's Seed. It was sovereign grace, Satan's irremediable overthrow and punishment; while it was conveyed in terms adapted to an earthly people, and in view of divine government with present results, like the law as a whole. On the other hand, Noah (Gen. 6:7, 13) is divinely warned of things not seen as yet, both on the ground of special relationship and on that of His nature; while Gen. 7:4 follows up the general intimation with precise details, and as it was predicted, so was it punctually fulfilled, as scripture expressly affirms. No history could be more precise or circumstantial in few words. Gen. 9:25-27 is a luminous prophetic sketch of the world, with both divine names, and each in its requisite place as ever: no sketch more opposed to appearances for centuries; none more verified as time rolled on; yet to be proved absolutely true in the day of Jehovah, as later prophets declared to the ear of faith. This, however, may be said to be only a vast outline.

But to take only one instance more, what of Gen. 15 when “the word of Jehovah came unto Abram in a vision”? Can any prediction be conceived plainer or surer? Yet it stretched over more than four centuries, and defined the relative position of the chosen race and of the nation they were to serve in affliction, but at length to triumph over by a judgement unequivocally divine. Nay more, it maps out the limits of another land — the land wherein the father of the faithful was a pilgrim, which was by Jehovah’s covenant to be given long after, when the usurpers of the inheritance (enumerated in full detail) should be judged, as the old oppressor of the heirs had been. Who can say that these predictions have been answered only in Christ’s person? Who can deny that they are particular facts, yet accomplished to the letter in the Egyptians, in the Amorites, in the Jewish people, and in their land?

But a more advanced and unscrupulous school of unbelief have now the popular ear, who to get rid of God’s inspiration plead that the prophets were shrewd politicians that observed closely the movements of history, and saw in the rise and fall of nations the exhibition of a divine purpose (Canon Driver’s Lit Old Testament, 200). Is any man bold enough to think thus of Abram, or of Gen. 15? Is the situation, presupposed by this prophecy, that of the patriarch’s age? Is it the fraud of a human book or the revealed truth of God? The circumstances foreshown are wholly different from Abram’s then, and they change from a quasi-exile in sorrowful bondage to a coming out therefrom with great substance, and to a subsequent conquest, not one of which conditions were yet existent. Yet beyond dispute here in this brief and clear prophecy all is of its essence

and substance, instead of being alien to its spirit. How did any one of these vast changes arise out of the circumstances of the time? The system, calmly stated at home, and violently abroad, is nothing but a distressing libel on scripture, and rank rebellion against God, under the show of a critical investigation of the record that leaves untouched the divine inspiration and authority of scripture. But he is a simpleton who trusts these smiling augurs, who, in their own imagined processes of literary composition, lure one another and their followers on to the deadly sin of undermining God's history and denying prophecy in any genuine sense.

How strong the contrast of His word by Isaiah in his great continuous discourse! All flesh is grass. The word of our God stands for ever. And He it is Who is coming, Who is a tender Shepherd to His people, though the Maker and the Master of all the universe. Who will teach Him? What are the nations, or the idols they have made? To Israel speaks He Who knows the end from the beginning, and He it is Who acts above the powers He employs to chasten or deliver.

"Produce your cause, saith Jehovah; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. Let them bring them forth, and declare unto us what shall happen let them show the former things what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare unto us things to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter that we may know that ye are gods, yea, do good or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold it together. Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work of naught: an abomination is he that chooseth you" (Isa. 41:21-24).

“Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them” (Isa. 42:9). True prophecy is His claim; and it is an abiding one.

“Thus saith Jehovah, thy Redeemer, and He that formed thee from the womb, I am Jehovah that maketh all things; that alone stretcheth forth the heavens, that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself (or, who is with me?); that frustrateth the tokens of the liars (or boasters), and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backwards, and maketh their knowledge foolish; that confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers; that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited, and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built, and I will raise up the decayed places thereof; that saith to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers; that saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built, and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid” (Isa. 44:24-28).

“Declare ye, and bring it forth, yea, let them take counsel together: who hath showed this from ancient time? Who hath declared it of old? Have not I, Jehovah? And there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour, there is none beside me” (Isa. 45:21).
“Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; 1 am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure; calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. Yea, I have spoken, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed, I will also do it” (Isa. 46:9-11).

“I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I showed them; I did them suddenly, and they came to pass. Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass, I have even from the beginning declared it to thee, before it came to pass, I showed it thee; lest thou shouldest say, Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image hath commanded them. Thou hast heard, see all this and will ye not declare it? I have showed thee new things from this time, even hidden things; and thou didst not know them. They are created now, and not from the beginning; and before this day thou heardest them not; lest thou shouldest say, Behold, I knew them” (Isa. 48:3-7)

These citations from a single prophet suffice to prove what stress God lays on that communication of the future which modern criticism seeks to belittle or deny; and Christians beguiled by its assurance are willing, yea, anxious to throw it into the background, so as to render prophecy indistinct and powerless. No believer need shrink from the demand of a notable sceptic in his Creed of Christendom: — to mark (1) What the event was to which the alleged prediction was intended to refer; (2) That the prediction was uttered in specific, not vague, language before the event; (3) That the event took place specifically, not loosely, as predicted; (4) That it could not have been foreseen by human sagacity. Take the following predictions of Christ as they are given in the Revised Version:

“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). “Bind thou up the testimony seal the law among my disciples. And I will

wait for the LORD that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him. Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth in Mount Zion" (Isa. 8:16 18). "In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time hath he made it glorious by the way of the sea beyond Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined" (Isa. 9:1, 2). "And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots shall bear fruit; and the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; and his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD," etc. (Isa. 11:1-3). "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone of sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa. 28:16).

Let us turn now to the later testimonies briefly.

"Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my Spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgement to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgement in truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged till he have set judgement in the earth and the isles shall wait for his law" (Isa. 42:1-4). "And he said unto me Thou art my servant; Israel, in whom I will be glorified. But I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my

strength for naught and vanity: yet surely my judgement is with the LORD, and my recompense with my God. And now, saith the LORD, that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob to him, and that Israel be gathered with him: (for I am honourable in the eyes of the LORD, and my God is become my strength:) yea, He saith, It is too light a thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the ends of the earth. Thus saith the LORD the Redeemer of Israel, [and] his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, whom the nation abhorreth," etc. (Isa. 49:3-7).

"The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of them that are taught, that I should know how to sustain with words him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as they that are taught. The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away backward. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore have I not been confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? Let us stand up together: who is mine adversary? Let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord GOD will help me: who is he that shall condemn me?" (Isa. 50:4-9).

"Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. Like as many were astonied at thee, (his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men,) so shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut

their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider" (Isa. 52:13-15).

"Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and as one from whom men hide their face he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, yet he humbled himself and opened not his mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb, yea, he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgement he was taken away; and as for his generation, who among them considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living? for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And they made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; although he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall

see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many: and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul unto death: and was numbered with the transgressors: yet he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:1-12).

"Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given him for a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander to the peoples. Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and a nation that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee" (Isa. 55:3-5).

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD," etc. (Isa. 61:1, 2). "I am inquired of by them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name. I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people," etc. (Isa. 65:1, 2).

Comment is almost needless. The passages speak for themselves, and can apply to none but the Lord Jesus: to His birth as unique as His ministry in the least likely sphere; to His followers associated with Him during

Israel's non-recognition by Jehovah; to the lineage of which He was born no less than the power of the Holy Spirit that rested on Him beyond any of the sons of men; to His person, peculiarly put to the proof, and a foundation for the believer as none other was or could be to the delight of Jehovah, the meekest in Israel, yet righteously blessing the Gentiles in the face of all opposition; nor this only, but when owning His apparent failure through Jewish unbelief and rejection, to His having the promise from Jehovah to be a light of the nations. And what can incredulity do, but gnash its teeth at Isaiah 50; Isaiah 52:13- Isaiah 53? The suffering Messiah alone answers to the prophetic picture. Here there can be no possible pretence for imagining, as in the case of Cyrus, a sign on the horizon. For as the prophet wrote indisputably many centuries before His advent, so the events intended are unmistakably, specifically, and exclusively verified in the Lord Jesus, and this from His birth to the grave, yea, beyond it, to His resurrection and the work that occupies Him now in heaven, His intercession, as well as that which He carries on by His servants on earth, even to the call of the Gentiles and the rebellion of the Jews. Hence the notion of human sagacity foreseeing all, or most, or any from first to last, is unreasonable in the highest degree. Even the blindness of Israel that withstood the light in Him Who has blessed, Who is blessing, once besotted heathen, is a distinct trait of the prophecy; as it has its counterpart now in Christendom where men receive not the love of the truth that they may be saved. Nay, more, part remains to be fulfilled in His earthly exaltation, which is incompatible with His present work, both in executing judgement, and in establishing His glory in power over all the earth.

It is allowed that there is One Who is the true object of prophecy, being man in His sufferings and temptations, God in His holiness no less than His strength and power. We see says one, how His resurrection and ascension into heaven are its entire fulfilment. All the promises of God in Him are yea, and through Him, Amen. But as to all others the language could not be literally accomplished: firstly, because it was not properly applicable to any earthly nation from the imperfection of all human things; and secondly, because even that character of imperfect good or evil, which made certain nations the representatives of the principles of good or evil themselves, was not and could not be perpetual. As every people changes for better or worse in time, the prophecy could not be fulfilled at all, as in the case of Jonah's prophecy of Nineveh's destruction. In all cases the fulfilment will fall short of the full strength of the language, because in its proper scope and force it was aimed at a more unmixed good and evil than have ever been exhibited in the character of any earthly people. Hence is deduced as the general principle of interpretation, a uniform historical or lower sense, and also a spiritual or higher, almost involved necessarily in the very idea of prophecy.

It is striking to find how such a false start exposes souls to perilous delusion. In this case the effect is to discard openly the latter part of Daniel. And no wonder. Prophecy, as was assumed, has to do with general principle, history with particular facts. Now it is plain that Daniel 11, on the face of it, is as minute as a history, so far as it speaks. There are evident gaps, not by error but by design, in its course; one brief after verse 3, the other very great after the Maccabean era till "the time

of the end," as verse 33 itself points out. This scripture should have arrested Dr. A.'s steps. Instead of judging himself and his fallacious principle, he fell into the sin of rejecting God's word the root of infidelity. Inspired history is as suggestive of general principle as prophecy; and prophecy is occupied alike in the Hebrew and the Greek scriptures with distinct places, fixed times, definite persons, and particular facts. Even in the symbolic forms of Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and the Revelation this holds good: how much more from Genesis throughout the entire range of discursive prophecy! The general difference is one of degree only. Prophecy is anticipated history, though it is much more; and its language is occasionally no less explicit, though we can understand that in divine wisdom it is often veiled, so as to exclude human intention from its fulfilment. Thus it becomes all the more impressive when surprisingly accomplished. Scripture whether historical or prophetic, is full of anticipations of Christ in contrast with the first man led of Satan. It abounds in particular facts and precise dates, which no wit of man could have anticipated. God divulged the future to act on souls there and then according to spiritual zeal and intelligence, whilst not a little might remain only to be cleared up later. No maxim, however, is more erroneous than the assumption that it is only the event which explains. This is to deny the proper value of prophecy, till, becoming history in effect, it ceases to be prophecy. Not so did Noah, Abraham, Daniel, Simeon, Anna, or those that looked for the redemption of Jerusalem. Doubtless it yields evidence when accomplished to convince unbelievers; but its proper function is to cheer, guide, and edify believers beforehand. "Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do?"

The exceptional cases of Jonah with Nineveh, and of Isaiah with Hezekiah's sickness, were indeed admonitory; but they are perverted to overthrow the rule: when prophecy is made conditional, its true character is annulled. In an exceptional instance, conditions may be either expressed or understood; but to take advantage of this fact, which no one disputes, in order to deny the general current of absolute prediction, is deplorably evil. Is God to be shut out of prophecy? Can He not, does He not, know the end from the beginning? Man changes, no doubt; but God in prophecy reveals the future with absolute certainty and precision, and this is a mark of favour to His own. Nor is it merely as to their own circumstances; for God disclosed to Abraham the destruction which, concerning Lot far more than himself, fell with unmitigated severity on the guilty cities of the plain. Earlier still God had revealed the long affliction of the chosen race in a land not theirs, but their coming out with great substance, and the divine judgement of their oppressors, and their entrance into Canaan in the fourth generation. There was ample evil in Israel; but it did not hinder the punctual fulfilment of the prophecy. Ishmael too had his lot foretold both to Hagar generally, and to Abraham with yet more particularity, and independently of moral conduct. And what shall we say of the flood predicted with its defined space of warning for 120 years, to say nothing of the seven days that preceded the actual deluge (Gen. 7:4, 10)? And Noah's curse on Canaan, as distinguished from the blessing of Shem and the enlargement of Japheth, what has conditionality to do with it? The word of the Lord endureth for ever. One might dwell on Joseph's dreams and interpretations, as well as on Jacob's blessings on his sons; but enough is

said to demonstrate the error, its grave character, and its consequences.

The fact is that scripture everywhere rises up to break the theory that prophecy is uniformly conditional. The assumption would really annul the largest part, if not the whole, of proper prophecy. Its author felt surer of its harmlessness than of its truth; but he lived to point the moral for others, if not for himself, that an error in principle about God's word is an unmitigated evil, which may injure ordinary men yet more, because in his own case the poison found an antidote in the ardent homage his soul paid to Christ and in unfeigned faith in His atoning work. But in itself falsehood defiles and severs from God's mind, as the truth gives communion and sanctification. Evil communications corrupt good manners.

2. Its Object

Scripture itself lays down, in a text already referred to, the criterion of its object so clearly as to preclude argument when it is understood. "And we have the prophetic word more sure whereunto ye do well to take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a squalid place, until the day dawn and the day star arise in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of its own interpretation. For not by man's will was ever prophecy brought, but men spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:19-21).

Here we learn that the prophetic word was confirmed by the vision on the holy mount, where the King was seen transfigured, the Old Testament saints represented, the chosen witnesses of Israel in their natural bodies; and the Father's voice was heard from the excellent glory

pronouncing His complacency in His Son, the centre of the whole scene. The apostle, in his making known the transcendent blessings of the gospel, admits the value of taking heed to prophecy. It is like a lamp for those that need one where all is dark wretchedness, till the heart appreciates evangelic daylight, and, further, the heavenly hope of Christ coming to receive us to Himself, a light higher than the luminaries of heaven exceed a candle. How slow the Christian is to make good practically (and this the apostle urged) his own peculiar privileges! If it is so with us now, it was perhaps more so with those who then laboured under Jewish prejudice and were unwilling to admit aught superior to that which Daniel or David, Moses or Abraham, enjoyed. Vain thought! which none would have reproved more sternly than those saints of old. Did not the prophets (and such they were) seek and search diligently, who prophesied of the grace toward us, searching to what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ that was in them did point, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ (literally Christward), and the glories after them? To whom it was revealed that not unto themselves, but unto us they ministered those things which were now announced to us by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven; which things angels desire to look into (1 Peter 1:10-12). Can any words more explicitly assert the peculiar blessing attached to this day of, not promise only, but accomplishment enjoyed in the power of a present Spirit? Among other results is the heavenly light so far surpassing the lamp of prophecy, good as this is. The hope is as much enhanced as the faith; and love proved, tasted, and shed forth as it could not be before, whatever be the reasoning or traditions of men.

But further, we have it laid down as a known first principle, that no prophecy is of its own (i.e. isolated) solution (2 Peter 1:19). Local and temporal circumstances give occasion; but it forms part of a great whole, of which Christ the King is the centre. Taking it by itself is like severing a bough from a majestic tree, of which it is an integral part. All points to Him in that day. Hence the way in which both advents are connected habitually in the Old Testament, whilst the second is set forth prominently in the New. Hence the habit of the Spirit, when predicting the fall of Nineveh, Babylon, Tyre, Egypt, etc., of ever linking them with the day of Jehovah, when the Lord will in personal presence inflict vengeance on ungodly Jews and Gentiles. Making these prophecies of their own solution is when men stop short with present fact, and even misuse this to the deeper unbelief of effacing the great unravelling of that day when Jehovah alone shall be exalted, and every word verified indisputably by divine judgement.

Such is the genuine unforced meaning of this scriptural canon. It is not “our,” viz. the readers’, any more than “of one’s own,” viz. the prophet’s, solution; for neither is here in question. Not the prophet but the prophecy had as yet been before us. Nor again does ἐπίλυσις mean γένεσις production, but “interpretation.” The verb γίνεται, here translated “is,” does not warrant any such thought. Even if we plead for its primitive force of becoming or coming, the meaning is that no prophecy of scripture becomes a matter of its own solution. It is by its nature such as to exclude isolated interpretation. It belongs to a vast system which has Christ and His kingdom for its object. For though the prophets were men, they “spoke from God” under the power of the

Holy Spirit. He Who used them to write is the only source of sound interpretation; and this views each prophecy of scripture as a component part of God's testimony to Christ, in and by Whom only His glory is secured and yet to be displayed.

This, it ought to be evident, excludes the notion that history interprets prophecy. Of course, man's history, as far as it is true, must coincide with prophecy, as far as it is accomplished; but what of the great mass of prophecy which bears on the day of Jehovah? Will it not be too late to get its interpretation then? The very text itself disproves the thought: prophecy was given as a lamp for the dark place all through; and now that Christ is come, a better light — the True Light — shines, at last for the sons of light and day, indeed for all who truly bow to Him. Plainly one must understand or interpret aright the prophecy, before it can be applied save by guess-work to any event of history; but even so, if this be made all, prophecy is made of private solution. In fact it would be truer to say the converse — that prophecy interprets history; for God's mind is given in prophecy, which ever looks to Christ s glory, anything short of which is at best partial and misleading. The only effectual interpreter of prophecy, as of all scripture, is His Spirit, Who deigns to work in the believer.

It is only then, as we seize the association of Christ with each subject coming before us in the prophetic word, that we really understand it as a whole or in detail. For the divine purpose is to display His glory on the earth, not only in a people called to the knowledge of Jehovah as His own, but with all nations yet to be blessed when His own people are blessed (Ps: 67; Isa. 60). It is Israel

that have the earthly call and purpose of God, the nations then subordinately.

But there is blessing for none apart from Christ, the object, centre, and security of all the promises of God. And this, in varied form and fullness, the Old Testament demonstrates. Of old a curse came, not the blessing, as the law was violated, God's witnesses were despised, and idolatry more and more prevailed, first in Ephraim, then in Judah, "till there was no remedy." God's people not only vanished from the land of promise, but were pronounced Lo-ammi (not-My-people). The return from Babylon, important as it may be, was but provisional, and in no way the restoration of God's people according to patriarchal promises or early and later prophets. It was only a remnant of Judah and Benjamin, with individuals of other tribes especially of Levi, who were in time appointed to have their King, Messiah, presented to them, and, alas! rejected disdainfully to death but in that death glorifying God and atoning for sin, as He had already glorified the Father in a life that bespoke the Word made flesh,. full of grace and truth. When the Jew rejected the testimony of the Spirit to the Messiah exalted in heaven, Whom they had crucified on earth by the hand of lawless men, it was all over with the returned remnant, as before with the nation. The same evil heart of unbelief, which gave up Jehovah for idols, rejected Jehovah-Messiah in Jesus, as well as the gospel through His blood; and "wrath is come upon them to the uttermost." The King was wroth; and He sent His armies, and destroyed those murderers and burned their city, as the rejected Messiah forewarned (Matt. 22:7).

Then God began a new call above, believers from among Jews and Gentiles united to Christ on high, as the one

body wherein is neither Jew nor Greek: all the old distinctions are blotted out; Christ is all and in all. They are not of the world, as Christ is not, they are heavenly, as He is heavenly, though they be on the earth for the little while that God is calling them out. This explains why the church of God is not properly an object of prophecy; for prophecy regards the earth and living man upon it. But the members of Christ have died with Him, and belong to Him for heaven, being warned against "all that is in the world," and exhorted to set their minds on things above: a state not at all contemplated by the prophetic word, which is, we saw, as a lamp shining in a squalid place. This lamp we can use, and do well to heed; but we have by grace already a better light in our hearts, and are waiting for Him to take us where He is, the constant hope of the church, wholly independent of prophecy with its earthly times and seasons, its judgements and blessings under Messiah's government here below.

But has God cast away His people? This the apostle has answered elaborately in the Epistle to the Romans (Rom. 11). To the saints in the metropolitan city of the world that then was, the Holy Spirit has declared on the contrary that the day is coming when "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. 11:26), that is all Israel who survive the tremendous judgements of that day. He, Paul, was himself a pledge of it: as in Elijah's time there was a remnant, so there was in the apostle's day. No doubt, the mass now, yet more than then, are blinded, and salvation is for the Gentiles, not to cast off the Jews but to provoke them to jealousy, as Moses predicted (Deut. 32). Now, if their fall be the world's wealth, what will be their future rise? Life from the dead. After all, the

Gentile was but a wild olive grafted into the olive tree of promise, and is warned not to be high-minded but to fear, seeing how God spared not the natural branches. It is only Gentile pride and delusion that Israel are gone for ever to make themselves "the Israel of God,"1 and abide till time melts into eternity. Not so! Assuredly if the Gentile abide not in God's goodness (and who will dare to affirm this?) he will be cut off, and the Jews will be grafted into their own olive tree. Then the apostle drops argument and figure, declaring in plain terms that a hardening in part (it has never been complete) has befallen Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in; "and so all Israel shall be saved," according to the prophet (Isa. 49:20). This will be the true restoration of Israel in the day of Jehovah, when the Gentiles meet with condign judgement at His hand. It is only fleshly Israel that can be said to be "enemies for your sake as touching the gospel." It is only they who are "beloved for the fathers' sake, as touching the election." What theologians call "the spiritual people," "the Israel of God," or believers, cannot answer to this language. It is the same people, enemies as regards the gospel yet beloved as regards election, who shall be saved. For, adds the apostle, the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance — they are subject to no change of mind on His part. God will assuredly restore His people yet.

Thus does the great prophet join the great apostle. "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In overflowing wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith Jehovah thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for

as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall my covenant of peace be removed, saith Jehovah that hath mercy on thee" (Isa. 54:7-10). So perfectly coincides the teaching of Paul with the prophecy of Isaiah; as both are set aside by the figment that it is henceforth only a question of the church, in which merge all that believe, whether Jew or Gentile: as if God had cast away His people according to Gentile conceit!

Without full credit to God's purpose in this respect, the prophets are unintelligible. Given the restoration of Israel not only to their land, but to Jehovah their God, Whom they will own and see in their manifested Messiah; the field of prophecy begins to be truly discerned. Jerusalem is the city of the great King. "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced." More than carnage may open "that day," when the garments, rolled in blood, shall even be for burning, for fuel of fire. But how blessed when they say, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given! And the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace, there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon the kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with judgement and with righteousness henceforth even for ever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this" (Isa. 9:6, 7).

Nor is this all. As grace called Gentiles when the Jews rejected the Messiah, so prophecy shows us Him in glory

the Head of Israel and the Gentiles here below. “And it shall come to pass in that day [not in this], that the root of Jesse which standeth for an ensign of the peoples, unto him shall the nations seek, and his resting-place shall be glorious” (Isa. 11:10). “And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him [the Son of man]; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:14). And Jehovah shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall Jehovah be one, and his name one” (Zech. 14:9).

The key of all is Christ seen in His various glory: not alone Only-begotten Son of God in personal right, but Christ Jesus a Man, dead, risen, and glorified in virtue of His work as well as person; Son of David, Son of man, and, withal Head over all things to His church, the body of Him Who filleth all in all. It is this fact which emerges with heavenly brightness in Ephesians and Colossians, as well as partially elsewhere. It is the omission of it (the mystery, hid in God from the ages, now revealed), which enfeebles alike Fathers, Greeks, Orientals, Copts, Abyssinians, Romanists, Anglicans, Lutherans, Reformed, Moravians, Methodists, etc. Yet the proper character even of Christianity cannot be intelligently apprehended without it. Thus it is a far larger question than prophecy; for it affects all things spiritual, individual and corporate, inasmuch as we ought to be now on earth, as by-and-by in heaven, the answer and witness to Christ at God’s right hand.

Hence also we need not disparage in the least the Old Testament saints, but can allow ungrudgingly their future and heavenly glory in reigning with Christ. Hence

we can leave adequate room and time for the displayed kingdom of Christ over the habitable world to come, which is therefore neither the present age nor yet eternity, but between the two. Then the Jews and the Gentiles shall be blessed under Christ's reign — Jehovah King over all the earth, the peoples all suitably and sovereignly blessed, none confounded one with another, still less with the bride, the Lamb's wife, the new Jerusalem, the metropolis not of earth only but of the universe in heavenly glory, yet specially connected with the earth. Even now on earth is neither Jew nor Gentile in that body of Christ, but He is all and in all.

Now there ought to be not the smallest hesitation about this great truth; for it is no question of prophecy as to its full revelation, but of the weightiest and plainest dogmatic scripture, as in Eph. 1:9, 10: "Having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself for the administration of the fullness of the times, to sum (or head) up all things in the Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things on the earth — in him, in whom also we were allotted (or obtained) inheritance, being fore-ordained according to the purpose of him that worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will." Thus it is sure that God's purpose in the coming economy is to put all the universe, heavenly and earthly, under Christ as head, we who believe (whether Jews or Gentiles) being His joint-heirs in this unbounded and glorious inheritance; of which, as the apostle proceeds to explain, the Holy Spirit, Who has sealed us unto that day of redemption, is meanwhile the earnest in our hearts. The latter part of Colossians 1 may be compared in proof of the general purpose, grounded on the work of

the cross, and of the church's special relationship with Christ as the head of His body. Hence we shall reign in that day with Christ, not certainly giving up our characteristic blessings in heavenly places, and therefore, as Rev. 5:10 says, "over" rather than "on" the earth, where the Jews shall have the central place and first dominion (Micah 4:8), and the Gentiles willingly bow, even their kings and queens, to Jehovah's disposal and ordering (Isa. 11; Isa. 49; Isa. 60; Isa. 66).

It is thus the special relationship with Christ that makes all clear in scripture, and assigns the just place to each, whether to Israel, or to the Gentiles. As the church was part of "the mystery," which is expressly declared to be hid from ages and generations and hid in God, it is never as such the subject-matter of the prophets, though principles of the glorious future are already verified in and applied to the gospel now. We may regard it as bound up with, and eclipsed in, Christ (comp. Isa. 1:8, 9, with Rom. 8:33, 34). But when the day is come for the display of His glory before the universe, Rev. 21 shows the bride, the Lamb's wife, as the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, the witness of grace, even then with healing for the nations (Rev. 22:2); as the earthly Jerusalem will be the witness still of earthly righteousness. "For that nation and kingdom that will not serve thee, shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted" (Isa. 60:12). She, in the heavenly places, will reign with Christ over the earth; Israel will be reigned over, but the inner circle on earth, as the Gentiles also more distantly but blessed indeed.

What throws all prophecy into confusion, darkness, and error, is making ourselves, the church, its object. This the church is not. Give Christ, the true centre, His place;

then everything falls into order, and shines in the light of God before our souls. Such is the effect of God's word intelligently enjoyed by His spiritual power. Without it all vision becomes "as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee, and he saith, I cannot, for it is sealed. And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee; and he saith, I am not learned" (Isa. 29:11, 12). "By faith we understand." There is no other way, nor ought there to be.

3. Its Occasion

The occasion, or moral ground, of prophecy is departure from God, Who sends thereon His word, which convicts of the sin, and holds out His intervention in power to deliver by the judgement of His and their adversaries those who believe. This we see verified in Eden from the fall of man. God at once appears on the scene, brings home to conscience the sin of each, and, in pronouncing judgement on the Serpent, points to the blessing that hangs on the triumph of the bruised Seed of woman, the bruiser of the Serpent's head. A state of innocence before, or of fidelity afterwards, drew out no prophecy; which, on the contrary, laid the evil of the creature bare, and held out God's sure resource in bringing in not only judgement of the evil but a better hope: the first man superseded by the Second.

So it is always as a general principle. If Enoch prophesied, it was, Behold, the Lord came with His holy myriads to execute judgement against all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly works, and of all their hard speech against Him (Jude 14, 15). If Noah so opened his mouth, it was the wickedness of Canaan that

drew out the curse, whatever the blessing to Shem and Japheth. It was the foreseen oppression of Egypt and iniquity of the Amorites that formed the background for the predicted gift of the promised land to the seed of Abraham; and it was the too plain failure of his sons which led the way for dying Jacob to tell beforehand what should befall them in the latter days, culminating in the advent of Shiloh, to Whom the obedience (or gathering) of the peoples shall be, however long the interval between the first part and the second.

Man's theory is that the people of Israel, their kings, and their prophets, stand forth in the history and in the prophecy of scripture as the representatives of God's cause and of goodness; and that as the history shows them imperfect representatives, so they can only be imperfectly the subjects of predicted blessings, which did or did not belong to them in the measure of their faithfulness. Thus Moab was not all evil, Israel was not all good. Prophecy spoke without reserve of God's triumphs and of His servants: if Israel belongs to God only imperfectly, her share in God's triumphs must in that proportion be imperfect also. But the theory does not hold: for it is alleged on the one hand that Moab, Ammon, Amalek, are vanished out of history; it is allowed on the other that Israel exists still unchanged. Yet what were the sins of those nations compared with Israel's, if at least we bow to the Lord's estimate (Matt. 11:21-24)? Jonah's case, too, is misused to prove that it all depends on circumstances whether prophecy could be fulfilled or not. In all cases the fulfilment is supposed to fall short of the strength of the prediction, because it was aimed at a more unmixed good and evil than ever was in any people. Christ, therefore, remains the real

subject of all prophecy for good; the Son of David has reigned for more than eighteen hundred years, owned over all the earth as King and Lord, and of His kingdom there shall be no end!

Scripture in no way sanctions this sliding scale and the uncertain or partial fulfilment it involves. The only thing true is that Christ is the object and security, not only of all God's promises to faith, but of executing His wrath and threats. He is the Son of God, in Whom there is life eternal for those that believe; He is the Son of man, the executor of judgement on those that believe not. That God used Jonah's preaching to awaken the Ninevites to repentance for a season did not hinder Nineveh's utter ruin ere long, as Nahum predicted, nor Nahum's going on to the last Assyrian, when Jehovah will make a full end, and affliction shall not rise up a second time. He may go forth in the pride of power, imagining evil against Jehovah; but, behold, upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! Keep thy feasts, O Judah, perform thy vows; for the worthless shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off (Nahum 1:15). The Ruler out of Bethlehem shall be thy peace, when the Assyrian shall come into the land (Micah 5:2, 5). Prophecy, whatever it may take in of partial accomplishment, stays not short of the consummation at the end of the age, when He, Whose right it is, takes the kingdom. Thus what is partially accomplished amply encourages that faith which ever waits and longs for His appearing, whilst it furnishes material, because it is necessarily partial till then, for the unbelief which doubts the past and disregards the future, because its pleasure and its confidence are in man, not in the true God Whom it knows not.

But the thoughts even of good men are far from God's mind and counsel; and deeply interesting it is to trace how true it is that moral ruin in man's past brings out more and more God's voice in prophecy. Never were the Israelites in the wilderness lower than when Balaam was hired of Balak to curse them, after their manifold unfaithfulness in the day of temptation. His false prophet went forth to meet! But Jehovah met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth. In His moral government He passes over no fault in His people, but blames and chastises. Before the enemy He brings out His thoughts and grace and purposes of glory. Every effort of Balak draws forth a fresh blessing from Balaam, compelled to be the mouthpiece in Jehovah's hand. Israel dwell alone, are justified, and beautiful in God's eyes; they have Messiah coming to be their crown of glory and power. But even so it is Israel, and not some other people, and carrying all expressly on to "the latter days." For no prophecy of scripture is of its own or isolated interpretation. It is part of God's revelation in view of Christ's glory on earth in that day.

So Moses' song (Deut. 32) flows from Jehovah's unchangeable purpose, whatever the undisguised failure of Israel, the centre of His government of the world (v. 8). The very call of the Gentiles is but to provoke them to jealousy (v. 21), as the apostle drew from this long after, when it came to pass (Rom. 10:19). No doubt, the Gentiles proved utterly unworthy, and God will take vengeance on them (vv. 40-42); but even when He restores Israel as He will (v. 36), He calls the Gentiles to rejoice with His people (v. 43): a principle already, as we know, accomplished in the gospel, but to be fulfilled in the kingdom of Messiah.

When the priests failed as fully as the people, we hear of Samuel raised up on God's part; as Peter says (Acts 3:24), "beginning with Samuel and all the prophets." And as the prophet was raised up in sovereign grace to speak for God, so a King is held out even before this as the hope of Israel. "And I will raise me up a faithful priest that shall be according to that which is in my heart and in my mind; and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever". The Messiah is the key, the King in God's counsel, the new and only true Anointed (1 Sam. 2:35), before Whom the priest should walk (soon to have an earnest in David and Solomon who rejected the house of Ithamar, and brought forward Zadok of the line of Phinehas), as will be seen fully in the kingdom.

Then, when the kings even of David's line fail more and more palpably, the prophets proper, who were inspired to write their imperishable books whether on a great or on a lesser scale, were raised up of God. Here, if we take Isaiah as a sample of the greater, and Hosea of the less, we may see the same principle as clearly at least as ever. For the introductory chapters (1-5) of Isaiah self-evidently lay the ruin of Israel as the basis of his announcing divine intervention in judgement of evil, and mercy to the repentant remnant, as chapter 6. reveals his formal inauguration on that very ground. Nor is Hosea 1 less explicit, called during the same kings of Judah, but adding Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, with children given as signs of the kingdom ceasing from the house of Israel; of no mercy thereon and, what was still more serious, of Lo-ammi pronounced, yet withal of the gathering of both another day under one head; "for great shall be the day of

Jezreel," thus carrying us on to the glorious scenes of the latter day. In both the ruin was imminent and irretrievable, save provisionally, till Messiah reign over the earth.

But Christ was wholly rejected in that capacity, as the New Testament clearly shows, in fulfilment of Psalm 2 and a crowd of Old Testament prophecies. He has never reigned for one day as Son of David. Undoubtedly the cross brought in higher things, and He sits on the Father's throne, where David never did, never will sit; as by-and-by He will sit on His own throne. Then not only will the holy hill of Zion be the seat of His power, but He will ask and receive the nations for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession, to break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel — a statement of His rule clearly future, and incompatible with His grace as now under the gospel. And though we Christians gladly own Him Lord, "King" does not express His relation to us, but Head, for we are members of His body; and the difference is as momentous in practice as in doctrine. In that day, when Israel is restored, and spiritually as well as literally in their land under Messiah and the new covenant, the nations shall be blessed, and bow before the Son of man. In that day the races that have vanished out of history will once more reappear, according to prophecy, as Isaiah distinctly declares (Isa. 11. 14), and others also. The mouth of Jehovah has spoken it. Infidels cry, Impossible. Good men as credulously listen to their vanity, as they fear to trust the word that lives and abides for ever. But God will justify it in its time, and all the more, because not a trace appears now. Scripture cannot be broken. Races remain, whatever the shiftings

of time, place, or circumstances, as Jehovah will prove in honour of His King.

John 13:31, 32 puts the case from His own lips in the light of God. The moral glory of the cross is the basis of the Son of man's heavenly glory, and this straightway, i.e. without waiting for the kingdom which He is to receive, when He returns in visible power and splendour. Then only will the inhabitants of the world learn the righteousness which they dislike and disdain, while favour is shown as now in the gospel of grace to the wicked (Isa. 26:9, 10). Meanwhile Jesus is a world rejected Lord, but on the throne of His Father — a seat which none ever had or can share; and He will only take His own throne (Rev. 3:21) at His coming. And hence the only true place of the Christian now, according to the uniform strain of New Testament teaching and sanctioned practice, where fellowship with Christ's sufferings and conformity to His death are the highest privileges. We who are His are called in the measure of our faith and love to share loyally His reproach in separation from the world till He comes, Who is Lord of all. Then shall we be with Him where He is and for ever; then too shall we reign with Him, instead of being blessed and reigned over here below: a prospect bright beyond all thought, so that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory.

4. Its Sphere

Prophecy is occupied, not with heaven, but with the earth, and consequently with Israel and the nations. This is evident to any familiar with its general scope or its details. Principles which apply in the highest degree to

the Christian, the gospel, or the church, may and do appear therein. But the more closely the prophets are scrutinised, the more evident it becomes that Christianity and the church as such lie outside its purview, and that a wholly different condition is contemplated: the government of the world, or divine dealings there to introduce it, not the action of heavenly grace by the power and presence of the Spirit, uniting those who believe, freed or justified from sin, to Christ their Head on high.

Hence it is, as the attentive reader of scripture will not fail to discern, that times and seasons and external signs, as they are not for heaven, so belong not to heavenly men while on earth, save as they may read and understand them concerning others. They are given in profusion about God's earthly people, whether for their own help directly, or to signify God's hand on their enemies. Where the Jew is concerned, alike in the New Testament as in the Old, there do we find those suited landmarks. The hope of the Christian and of the church stands wholly on the Lord's sure promise of love. "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, [there] ye may be also" John 14:2, 3). It is His word, expressly and wholly independent of earthly events.

As their faith, so is their hope. Pharaoh was not in question, nor Balak, nor Sihon, nor Og, nor the many hostile kings of Canaan. Satan did resist to blood by human instruments; but an infinitely greater must be met in death and judgement of sin. And so it was in the life of Christ, if we read it, as we ought, in the light of

heaven and eternity. There sin is seen levelling all distinctions, and no difference before God between Jew and Gentile is proclaimed; for all are lost. But grace through faith saves all equally and for ever, and constitutes a “new” man of which Christ is head above, wherein is neither Jew nor Gentile, but all are one in Him. This is the church, the fruit of sovereign favour, the heavenly Eve of the last Adam. It has nothing to do now with the government of the world, or with the execution of earthly judgements. God in love gave His Only-begotten Son, not only to become man for us men, but even to be made sin for us sinners, that we might become God’s righteousness in Him, yea, and be raised up together with Him and seated together in Him in heavenly places indeed, in the glory of His grace: for His own counsels in Christ alone account for it all. We are accordingly called to a walk quite different from that which was imposed by the law on the ancient people of God; created, as the apostle says, “for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them,” the details of which fill the New Testament in general. Our worship too is confessedly distinctive, as is our service or ministry. Christ is the centre and object and expression of all, as the Holy Ghost is the power acting by the word of God. And the heavenly hope is the crown: His own coming, we are sure of soon, we know not when, to receive us to Himself and present us with Himself in the Father’s house on high.

Prophecy, strictly so called, is quite distinct, and bears directly on the future tribulation, whether that which is called “the great one,” out of which God-fearing Gentiles come from every nation and tribe and people and tongue (Rev. 7), or the unparalleled hour of Jacob’s trouble, out

of which he will be saved (Jer. 30:7). In either we never hear of the church; and no wonder. For the Lord, apart from those predicted sorrows, will have called us to meet Him in the air; so that we follow Him from heaven when He appears to deliver the Jews and Israel who are ready to be swallowed up by their adversaries. On all this the lamp of prophecy sheds its light, deeply needed for the squalid place of the world. But we can say believingly, and without presumption, that we are not of the world, for Himself has told us so. We therefore find a better hope spread before us in His word, though many lose it by confounding it with the just expectation of the Jewish remnant, who look for deliverance by His appearing to take vengeance on their foes. Our hope has no such connection, as it is by our being caught up to meet Him. It is the translation of heavenly grace. For "that day" we come along with Him from heaven. Hence when Christ, our life, shall be manifested, then shall we also be manifested with Him in glory. "The day" is a time of displayed divine power, when "every eye" shall see, and Jehovah be exalted in that day. On this all prophecy converges.

"The land," and the earth too as a whole, will then become a direct object of divine blessing; and the reader of Old Testament scripture is inexcusable, who overlooks the many obvious places in which God pledges Himself to this end. Doubtless His people and the nations are nearer to His heart; but the long groaning earth, the creation travailing in pain together until now, shall be set free from the bondage of corruption into the liberty (not of grace, which is for souls by the Spirit now, but) of the glory of the children of God at Christ's appearing. Does this surprise or offend any? It was here the Son of

God, Who created all, became man, and lived, and died, by the grace of God. It was here was manifested the wonder of a divine person humbling Himself in obedience unto death — yea, death of the cross. It was here God was glorified in the Holy One made sin and here that Satan was vanquished for ever by Him Who had accomplished redemption by His blood, and was raised in power according to the Spirit of holiness. If heaven and God's throne be the worthy reward, this earth shall be delivered and reconciled. It may be a little spot compared with the universe, but it is the little spot where Christ wrought in divine love a work matchless in value, to which not man only is indebted for blessing, but God for His retrieved moral glory, and in virtue of which blessing the man who believes is made God's righteousness. If sin of the first Adam subjected all to vanity, how meet it is that the second Man should more than restore all things! How blessed that Satan should be banished, not only grace as now reigning to eternal life in Christ, and that Christ, no longer hidden, should establish the rejoicing earth with His power and blessing, yet still to the glory of God the Father!

Undoubtedly our best portion is in Christ and with Christ where He is, to share His love and see His glory: better even than being manifested in the glory which the Father has given Him and He has given us, when we shall be perfected in one, that the world may know that the Father sent Christ and loved them as He loved Him. For they appear together in the same heavenly glory, as we see in Rev. 17:14; Rev. 19:14; Rev. 21:9, etc. But every spiritual mind will feel that it is far better to have Christ's desire fulfilled, for which He asks the Father as to that which He has given Him — that where He is they

also may be with Him, that they may behold His glory which the Father has given Him, for He loved the Son before the world's foundation. There shall we be in the richest grace; nothing else could explain it, as it all depends on the Father and the Son, and is outside all prophecy, save so far as the very exceptional glimpses in Rev. 21 and 22 may suppose, if not reveal it. We can readily account for this exception; because at that time those who are heavenly enter with Christ on the reign over the earth; and it is exactly the province of prophecy to speak of God's government of the world, which cannot be in the full sense till Christ has taken His great power and reigns, and we shall reign with Him.

There is thus a two-fold error to avoid. Many, if not all, the post-apostolic fathers of early date were chiliasts (without noticing other heterodox men); and their tendency doubtless was to see little, if at all, more than the earth glorious and the glorified saints with Christ: an unworthy view which not only gave up heaven, but shut out Israel from the Messiah and the new covenant, to say nothing of the Gentiles, blessed distinctively on the earth. Revolting from the thought of nothing higher than the millennial earth, Origen, Jerome, Augustine, etc., thought only of heaven for those that are Christ's, and saw no prospect for Israel and the nations, beyond coming into Christianity by the gospel as now preached, which they conceived to constitute Christ's everlasting dominion, where all nations should serve Him in perpetuity. Moderns etherealized yet more, so that the soul practically became all for heaven at death, and resurrection faded away save in name. Revival of prophetic study and testimony recovered many from views so vague. But rarely have the children of God

taken in the full truth of placing all things, both those in heaven and those on earth, under Christ as Head and the heavenly saints, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, thus comprehending the universe as His, both heavenly and earthly, to the glory of God the Father. This alone maintains the promised earthly blessings of the Old Testament, not set aside but sealed in the New Testament, leaves room for all that divine mercy has in store for Israel and the nations and creation generally, and without confusion conciliates with the accomplishment of the prophets the resurrection glory of the departed saints from the beginning, and above an, one incomparable results of the mystery of Christ and the church, now revealed in the New Testament, then to be displayed in the heavens and over the earth.

Thus also is the progressive character of the divine dealings made evident. For under Christ's reign in this fullness of glory, Israel will advance from the old to the new covenant and to their Messiah glorified, as the church from her present anomalous ruin to be the glorious bride of Christ; and all nations be delivered from their infidelity, superstitions, and other abominations, to flourish in righteousness and peace; the whole earth be filled with His glory, and the heavens no longer severed from it through the first man's sin, but maintained in the power of the Second Man from heaven. Not only is there nothing retrograde in any sphere, but there is blessed progress everywhere for heaven and earth. It is only from looking at part of the coming glory that Christians have failed to seize the truth of an advance so marked and universal.

Prophecy then treats of the earthly people, or rather the righteous remnant (Isa. 1; Isa. 4; Isa. 6; Isa. 10, etc.),

saved by the Lord's appearing for the destruction of their enemies, not by translation to heaven, as the heavenly saints will know like Christ Himself, without any dealing in vengeance on the world. The difference is simple and complete. Hence it connects itself with day-light dawning and the day-star arising in the heart, as compared with the prophetic lamp. Our hope rests on the assurance of His love that He will come and take us to heaven prophecy tells of blessing and glory for Israel and the nations too on earth by the judgement He will execute on its evil. Hence a Christian might and ought to be waiting for Christ with all his heart, who knew little of prophecy, however good to be known in its place; as on the other hand, souls might be familiar with prophecy, on whose heart that heavenly hope has scanty power, if it have dawned there at all. The apostle Peter was solicitous that the believers he addressed, besides heeding prophecy, should enjoy a brighter light and the hope that belongs to it.

Thus, to say nothing of prophetic "burdens" on the various nations that assailed or oppressed Israel, it is striking to observe that the blessed result of prophecy is, in every case where it is predicted, associated not with the energy of divine grace as now in the gospel, but with the unmistakable execution of God's judgements at the close of the age. Who does not hail with joy the assurance that "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9). It is certain, however, that the prophet declares that the Lord shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth and with the breath of His lips (cf. Isa. 30:27, 33) slay the wicked (Isa. 11:4), as introducing this blessedness here below. The apostle cites this in 2 Thess. 2:8, and binds it up

with the manifestation of the Lord Jesus. Moses had referred to the same thing in Num. 14:21. Judgement there too, not preaching the gospel, is connected with filling all the earth with the glory of Jehovah. Hab. 2:12-14 is yet more explicit; for after pronouncing woe on violence and iniquity, the prophet asks if it is not of Jehovah that the peoples labour for the fire, and the nations weary themselves for vanity: “For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea.” What the peoples toil at is but for the fire to consume; their weariness for vanity (cf. Jer. 51:58) the judgements of the Lord will demonstrate, but will do more and better. They will cause the earth to be filled with the knowledge of His glory. Then only will the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness, whatever be the vain hopes of Gentile conceit. Not the gospel in man’s mouth, but judgement in the Lord’s hand, will inaugurate the earth’s deliverance, blessing, and glory (compare Dan. 2:35, 44, 45; Dan. 7:11-14). The gospel is now calling and forming souls, apart from the world, for heaven.

5. Its Language

As much is often essayed to mystify prophecy on the score of its language, it may be well here to notice the subject a little.

The fact is that all language is more or less figurative, more especially where it is poetic or impassioned. History, if it be not a dead chronicle, abounds with figures; but none the less does it aim, or at least profess, to give nothing but the truth. Simple language is distinguished from figurative, though both styles are freely used and understood readily in all compositions,

as well as in oral address and ordinary conversation. Carnal and spiritual are the true correlatives, as also literal and mystical; but these respectively apply to the sense of what is said or written, rather than to the diction. Allegory, parable (or its abbreviation in proverb), and symbol, again, are varieties of form in which truth may be conveyed, but they ought not to be confounded with figurative language. A symbol may be a material object, actually existing, and applied morally; or it may be made up by combining in one a variety of existing objects, so as to give God' s moral view of what is thus revealed, as the four beasts or Gentile imperial powers of Dan. 7, the fourth of which reappears in Rev. 11-19. But symbolic language is exceptional, and seems limited to prophecy during the times of the Gentiles. It is in no way characteristic of prophecy in general. In every case what was conveyed was real, not artificial: when accomplished, it is history from the divine side.

It must never be forgotten, however, that, whatever the form or figure employed, the subject-matter referred to in prophecy is not ideal but real, any more than in the rest of scripture. It may be a fact or a place, a person or a people, a time or a state of things. Simple language may be used alone, or with figures to impart vividness, as in all speech; or symbol may be the method, as sometimes in Ezekiel and Zechariah, and yet more in Daniel and the Revelation; but what is conveyed is a reality, and not a figure. Poetical elevation is not uncommon, any more than figurative representation; and only in an exceptional way, as in Daniel 11, have we the revelation of events successive in relation to each other, though with gaps first and last, for which room is carefully made in the terms of the prophecy itself, before

the grand terminus of all, the conflict of the close, in which figures for the first time “the king” in “the land,” as distinct from him of the north and him of the south. “The king” it is as idle to confound with Antiochus Epiphanes as with the Pope or Buonaparte. It is the final catastrophe, ending where all the visions of Daniel, and we may say generally of the prophets, do end, in the coming kingdom of the Messiah. As they have one divine authority, so have they one glorious consummation, when He takes His great power and reigns. Thus, as all prophecy looks to that end, none is of private or isolated interpretation. It is the Spirit glorifying Christ, when He shows the things that are to come.

The Revelation, as it is the latest, so it is by far the most elaborate, of all prophetic books, consisting throughout of visions, in which symbolic objects fill a larger place than anywhere else in scripture. Still, it is to be observed that the prophet conveys literally what he saw in the plainest language. The objects and acts in the scenes which he in the Spirit saw, and the words announced to his ears, are given with precision. The symbols we have to study and comprehend in the light of general usage and of the particular context; for symbolic forms, though less pliant than the ordinary expressions of thought, are, like the rest, modified by their associations; and the Holy Spirit alone can guide rightly in this and in all else of scripture; as common sense does in the affairs and intercourse of natural life. Save in the symbolism which forms a comparatively small part of prophecy, its language differs only in degree from that of scripture generally, and must be interpreted on exactly the same principle. Indeed even the symbolic portion finds its counterpart in the types not only of the

Pentateuch, but of scriptural history as a whole. The form may vary according to divine wisdom, but one mind and purpose will be found to pervade all. Every scripture is inspired of God; and as Christ is the image of the invisible God, and He alone declared the Father, so is He the object of all revelation, and others only appear as related to Him.

The late Dr. P. Fairbairn (Prophecy, 86), who sought to allegorise the prophetic word, contends that, if Gen. 3:15 is to be read literally, “it speaks merely of the injuries to be received from serpents on the one side, and of the killing of serpents on the other: and any member of Eve’s future family, who might have the fortune to kill a serpent, should, by so doing, verify the prophecy.” But no spiritual mind could tolerate such an interpretation, no fair mind allow the relevancy of the argument. Jehovah Elohim addressed the tempter, and winds up His sentence by the words (so pitiably travestied for controversial purposes) which, understood in simple faith, have comforted believers from that day to this. It is burlesque, not argument, and utterly vain to maintain that Israel means the church, or that Jerusalem means the New Jerusalem, which is the desired conclusion. Nor is there the slightest force in explaining away the bearing of Isaiah 40:3, which was accomplished in the Baptist’s ministry preparing the way of Jehovah; as Isaiah 53 was in Messiah’s humiliation and atonement. But all that these scriptures say is not yet fulfilled, and cannot be till His second advent in power and glory, which will make good every word which the allegorical school dissipate into thin air. The rejection of the herald and of his Lord has suspended very important parts of both predictions as of

prophecy in general, which await “that day,” when Jerusalem’s heart shall hear what is spoken, and rejoice that her warfare is accomplished and her iniquity is pardoned: then the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. Even the first prophecy, like the great mass, awaits that day for its full effect in the execution of judgement on the Serpent. For prophecy, as the rule, lets us see the glorious end of God when Christ takes His great power and reigns. We may and ought to see what faith alone can see now; but the future King of glory will be the public display to every eye.

Those whose theory it is that all prophecy is ideal, have to face the fact that a vast deal given out by the prophets has been fulfilled literally. Ignorant self-will denies in vain what is patent. Its accomplishment is plain in Nineveh and Babylon, in Tyre and Sidon, in Edom and Egypt, as well as in the Medo-Persian and the Macedonian powers, to say nothing of Rome; above all, in Israel before the Assyrian and Chaldean captivities, and in the subsequent partial return of the Jews to be dispersed again, as they were by the Romans, still more terribly after the cross of Christ and the rejected gospel. In the predictions simple language, figures, and symbols were employed as God saw fit; but the cities, the nations, and the lands were known historically, as the changes were punctually accomplished; and many an unbeliever has been arrested by this evidence, to learn still better and deeper things from God’s word, even Christ and His redemption.

Take an example of symbol in Ezek. 17. The parable of the eagles is as determinate as if the prediction had been couched in literal terms. The scripture itself

interprets the first great eagle as the king of Babylon, the second as Pharaoh. By the breaking off the topmost twig of the cedar of Lebanon, and placing it in a city of traffic, was meant the king of Babylon putting down Jehoiachin, and carrying him captive to Babylon. By the taking of the seed of the land to become a vine of low stature, we are to understand his setting Zedekiah (for so Mattaniah was new named by the conqueror) to be his vassal king in the land. The king of Egypt, though typified by a great eagle with great wings and much plumage, is not said to be of long pinions, nor with feathers of various colours like the king of Babylon. Yet Zedekiah breaks his oath, and turns for aid to Egypt against Babylon, to the destruction of his kingdom by Jehovah's decree. The manner of conveyance differs from that of history; but the parties in view, and the results of the action, are no less certain, fixed and exclusive. If there are general lessons in divine prophecy, so there are in inspired history. Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh-Hophra (the Apries of the Greeks, and perhaps Psamatik 3. of the Egyptian monuments) are here intended, and none else. So it is with the two deposed Jewish kings.

But it has been contended with no small assurance that Ezekiel, referring in Ezek. 17 to Isa. 2, connects it with circumstances which oblige us to understand the elevation of the sacred mount spiritually, and as verified in what has already been, and not in what is to be. the reference is dim to moderate eyes, without disputing that the elevation of Moriah is of a moral kind. But the evidence is certain that the glorious promise is future in both chapters. In the tender young twig from the highest branch of the lofty cedar is undoubtedly meant the Son

of David, and not Zerubbabel. Yet it is not the first advent, but the second, which is in the perspective of the prophecy. It is the kingdom, and in no way the church. Never will the “little stone” expand into the great mountain that fills all the earth till the blow is struck on the toes of the image of the Gentile powers and breaks them all into pieces, like chaff to be swept away by the wind. The lowly condition of Messiah is no doubt pointed out here, but yet more the power and glory of His kingdom, when He is set, as He will be set, on His holy hill of Zion. The church on the contrary, is unfaithful to her calling if she be not a despised pilgrim and stranger here below, as He was, till she joins her coming Bridegroom in the air, before she appears with Him, when He appears to fulfil His glory over all the earth, as He will in that day. Symbolic language therefore is no more vague than any other.

Again, the attempt to turn the prophetic style and diction into an engine for setting one prophecy in opposition to another is unworthy of a Christian. Isa. 56:7, 8; Isa. 60: Isa. 66:21-23, are in no conflict with Isa. 56:3-5; Isa. 65:17; Isa. 66:1-3; any more than Jer. 3:16 with Jer. 30:18-22; Jer. 31:31; Jer. 33:15-22. Such objections spring from ignorance; for evidently the statements arrayed, one against another are quite consistent, and teach distinct truths. So Ezekiel’s last vision, where the temple is so important on earth, in no way contradicts John’s last vision of the New Jerusalem on high, wherein is no temple. These cavils are a fair sample of the follies of spiritualizing, which confounds heaven with earth, and sets prophet against prophet, and even the same inspired men against themselves. It is too sad to find such teaching in a believer, set forth

and accepted with no small blowing of trumpets, though worthy only of an infidel. But it may be for that very reason the more instructive a warning against false principles of interpretation. Nor is it prophecy only that is misunderstood. The error substitutes Jewish for Christian relationship to our Lord, destroys that bridal separateness which is enjoined on the church (2 Cor. 11:2, etc.), and consecrates desires and ways of undisguised worldliness to the dishonour of God and His word about us.

Granted that prophecy in each case exceeds what history can tell. this is an essential constituent of its character. It is a vast system of divine prediction, the centre of which circle is Christ, and Christ assuming by God's gift the government of the world with Israel nearest to Him at the end of this age. If the prophecies, even about races supposed to have vanished, were exhausted, every one might be made of its own interpretation. But it is not so. They look onward to "that day." Their partial accomplishment is the pledge of all that remains to be fulfilled. Faith, accepting the part, assuredly awaits the whole.

Unbelief, over-looking the divine mind, works evilly in two forms. Some are too instructed to deny the tallying of facts with the words of the prophets. Starting with the assumption that prediction is impossible, they essay to prove that the alleged predictions must have been written after the event. Hence the importance of knowing when the prophet wrote; for, this once clear, their inspiration by God flows from the correspondence of word and fact, which is confessed. There is another class, however, who, if they could, would pare down or eliminate all exactitude, and reduce the word of

prophecy as much as possible to general principles and ideal forms, without definite line or historical issue. Vagueness of interpretation is so complete that even in the Apocalypse distinct prediction is nowhere, unless there remain enough Protestantism to discern Romanism in Babylon.

It is vain to reason from the curse on “the Serpent,” or the raising up of “David” in the future (Ezek. 34:23, 24), against a strict and full accomplishment of prophecy. All who are worthy of consideration agree that the context demands the great enemy in the one case, and the great King of Israel in the other; all repudiate a lowering literality, with which the surrounding words are incompatible. There is a genuine as well as a spurious literalism, with figures interspersed, as in Isa. 2 or 40, which none but adversaries urge in their efforts after allegory. As vain is it to argue the discrepancy of Isaiah in his later chapters, which await the days of the world-kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; as do the passages cited from Jeremiah, and yet more obviously those from Ezekiel. That Revelation 21 is symbolical is true, as it treats of a heavenly object; whereas all the others speak of Israel and the Gentiles on the earth in plain terms, with figures here and there. Scripture is perfectly consistent. The fault is in the confusion of its misinterpreters. Israel and Judah mean expressly the two houses or families of Jacob’s posterity, and none other; Zion and the mountain of Jehovah’s house mean the seats of the throne and the temple respectively in the land, and the Gentiles are the nations of the earth, distinct from Israel here below, and from the church and risen saints generally on high. The attempt to spiritualize these objects is a mere dream, which no

idealist among Christians at least has ventured to act on consistently. For the theory is that all these objects distinguished in prophecy are the Christian church now, or in the future, under the gospel. What? Israel, Judah, Jerusalem, and the New Jerusalem, Zion, Moriah, and the blessed Gentiles too! Can any scheme to interpret be more despairing or grotesque? It is really the aim of the enemy to discredit and destroy the true force of the prophecy, and thus of God's word altogether. The result is little but cloudland, as it would be wholly, if it were applied logically throughout.

If it had been drawn from an induction of scripture that prophecy is not mere history anticipated, but admits of a perspective, and that an accomplishment may be true and not complete, that only the manifested kingdom of our Lord in a day yet to come will exhaust it in its opening, its establishment, and its results, no sober Christian could rightly deny this. But the principle is false; for as the rule, prophecy sets forth divine intervention, not in grace, as in the gospel, but in judgement and power, as in the world-kingdom of our Lord and His Christ. There are common grounds of mercy and exceptional hints, which were fulfilled in part, and justify the gospel meanwhile, as the New Testament shows. But prophecy cannot be fulfilled as a whole till Christ be glorified in Israel and their land, the centre of earth's promised blessing, of which it speaks abundantly. Incredulity avails itself, not only of extravagant spiritualizing on the part of erring Christians, but of fulfilment not yet complete, to deny what has been really accomplished. Let us search and see how that part was accomplished, and thus learn what to expect for the future. That there were great

moral principles, that there was a manifestation of God's ways and glory, is most true; but these are actual facts before all eyes. All this we shall find in the light of the New Testament; not less, but far more, we may surely expect for the day when every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him, whatever the peace, joy, and blessing, and glory that follow.

But it is pleaded by the allegorists of the Old Testament, that the apostle Paul in particular sanctions their principle of interpretation; and they cite in proof Rom. 2:28, 29; Gal. 4:26; Gal. 6:16; and Heb. 12:22. these scriptures, however, do not touch the question, and are therefore invalid for their purpose. Let us review them in their order.

In the first, the apostle is expressly arguing with the Jew from ver. 17, and charging home his guilt notwithstanding his privileges; as he had dealt with the Gentile in the latter half of Rom. 1, and in the first half of Rom. 2 with the speculative moralist, who might pique himself on being no longer an idolater. In order to afford any show of reason, the text in question should have been an address to Gentiles treating them now as Jews; whereas it is to the Jew strictly and exclusively, to show that his privileges can in no way screen him if ungodly, and that he only is an accepted Jew who is so inwardly. There is not a thought accordingly of calling believing Gentiles, Jews.

Nor is there any satisfactory ground in Gal.4:26; and this is the more in point because the apostle does say that Abraham's two sons, and their mothers, contain an allegory; not the language of the prophets, but the

persons and facts in Genesis. “Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to the Jerusalem that now is; for she is in bondage with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother,” the critical text rejecting the word “all.” The truth is that this scripture disproves the hypothesis, instead of giving the least warrant to construe Jerusalem of the church. Our mother, says the apostle, is “the Jerusalem that is above.” The note to p. 32 <search for Gal. 6:16> has shown “the Israel of God” to mean those Israelites who now believe the gospel, and so to give no licence to call Christians, Israel, or to read Israel in the Old Testament into Christians. The general body of believers are distinguished from this special class, “the Israel of God,” in the verse itself.

In the last passage, Heb. 12:22, the apostle contrasts with Sinai (the mountain of the nation’s responsibility under law, with its associations of judicial terror and gloom) Mount Zion to which the Christians had come, no less conspicuous as the seat of royal grace, which was won for the true king of God’s choice in the past, after man’s choice had fallen by Philistine hands instead of working deliverance; Jehovah’s resting place for ever, for there He will surely set His King, upon His holy hill of Zion. But the Epistle proceeds in the next clause to distinguish it from the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem, as well as from myriads of angels, a general assembly, and from the church of firstborn ones, with which last the hypothesis identifies Zion. Any intelligent Christian has only to weigh the passage in order to be satisfied that those addressed are here said to have come (of course by faith) to the entire circle of what is to be blessed in the coming day, rising up from Zion to

God, Judge of all, and thence coming again to the blood-sprinkling, that speaketh better than Abel for the earth, when curse shall yield to peace and glory. No disproof of the traditionary confusion can be conceived more complete or decided.

There is another consideration which must strike every unbiased mind. The restoration of Israel is so plainly intimated in the very scriptures which declare their ruin and scattering that some of the allegorizing school admit cordially, not their conversion only, but their return nationally, though truly renewed and for such peace and glory in their land as they never had of old. Now this is to give up their false principle. For were it to stand logically, it is hard to conceive how on that principle God could predict His gracious purpose of restoring, in the latter day, Israel for blessing in their land under the Messiah and the new covenant. Taken in their plain and uniform meaning, the prophets are full of that blessed expectation for Israel in divine mercy, but not without hints here and there of grace toward the Gentile, sometimes during their eclipse, as in Isa. 65:1, 2, and Hosea 1:10. Yet these texts afford no pretence for the identification, but the contrary.

It is full of interest to observe the spiritual skill which was given to the apostles Paul and Peter in quoting from Hosea. The former, in writing (Rom. 9:25, 26) to the saints in Rome — chiefly Gentiles — applies, not only Hosea 2:23, which predicts the future recall of Israel, but also Hosea 1:10, which reveals the actual call of Gentiles, not to be His people as Israel shall be by-and-by, but to have the blessed title of Christians now, “sons of the living God.” Mark the singularity of the phrase “in the place where it was said unto them Lo-ammi, there it

shall be said unto them, 'sons'". It was among the nations while the Jews are not recognised as such. The latter, in writing (1 Peter 2:10) to the Christian Jews scattered in Asia Minor, applies only Hosea 2:23. The mass of their unbelieving brethren forfeits any such privilege now, however surely to be made good to those that repent at the last, as God declares it will when the prophets are to be fully accomplished. Those who now believe anticipate that blessing (with much more peculiar to Christianity), "who were once not a people, but now God's people; who were not objects of mercy, but now obtained mercy." Only in the verses following it is carefully shown that, instead of being sown in the earth, never more to be rooted up, but to flourish for ever in the bright kingdom of Messiah here below, they are called to follow Him in present rejection and reproach and long-suffering, "as pilgrims and strangers" till His appearing in glory. This is the present calling of the Christian.

6. Some Old Testament Prophecies Referred To In The New Testament

In Matt. 1:23 we have Isa. 7:14 cited, and applied to the birth of the Messiah. The facts stated prove its literal fulfilment. Now there are symbols and figures, as well as simple language, in Isa. 7 — Isa. 9:7; but this does not hinder the Holy Spirit stamping the prophecy of the Incarnation, not as an "idea" or general principle, but as an objective fact. There were other children for signs and for wonders in Israel — Shear-jashub already born, and Maher-shalal-hash-baz about to be, sons of the prophet; but they are as distinct from the virgin's Son Immanuel, as Hezekiah, already a dozen years old at

least and born before Ahaz came to the throne. Neither he, nor Isaiah's children, were born of the virgin; nor could even Hezekiah, still less a future unknown son of Ahaz, call it his land, as Immanuel can, Whose name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, the Destroyer of the last Assyrian, and the Deliverer and King on David's throne for ever. Alas! there is the secret root of unbelief. He is the Great Unknown, not the writer of Isa. 40-66, though Isaiah's was indeed the pen that indited them, but Isaiah's theme, the virgin's Son, in the striking parenthesis of his introductory chapters. Had men but seen as God reveals Him at the beginning, they had not doubted the voice of God through Isaiah at the end.

Even the chief priests and scribes (Matt. 2:4-6) could answer unhesitatingly as to the place where Messiah should be born. It was none other than Bethlehem of Judæa according to Micah 5:2. The Holy Spirit in no way discountenances, but accepts the light they saw from the lamp of prophecy. Luke 2 adds the providential ordering by which Joseph went from the north of the land to this particular spot in the south. God was taking care, we may boldly say, that the word should be fulfilled to the letter. And the true-hearted believer may see how full of instruction is the context; for the words immediately preceding declare that the Judge of Israel should be smitten upon the cheek. Then comes in the parenthetical ver. 2, which reveals not only His birth as David's Son, but an everlasting kinship (for indeed He is Immanuel, God with us). And because of the Jews thus contemning their Ruler in Israel, they are themselves given up (says verse 3) till she which travaileth hath brought-forth — till the birth of the divine purpose for

the restitution of all things. “Then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel,” or, in the figure of the apostle, the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree. Then will the glorious hopes that follow be punctually fulfilled. Neither Satan nor the Lord will have any difficulty in finding the Assyrian who in that day, is to perish in the land. There the Assyrian stands on the page of prophecy, as he will on the stage of the future to perish for ever. So false is it that neither the restoration itself of Israel, nor the events growing out of it, can be understood according to the letter. So true is it that those who reason thus maintain that, in this sense, considerable portions of the prophetic scriptures can have no proper fulfilment. “And why, then,” they boldly ask, “should any be supposed to have?” It is systematic dishonour of God’s mind through ignorance of the scriptures and of His power.

The next quotation (Matt. 2:15 from Hosea 11:1) is full of interest. The prophet was inspired to blend, as it were, Israel of old and Christ called out of Egypt. He, before God, was the true Israel, and their history recommenced in that blessed Person for Whose sake God had led out the ancient people at their beginning. Theirs is a sad tale of self-will, rebellion, idolatry, yet to be repented and forgiven, when the generation to come shall say, Blessed be He that cometh in the name of Jehovah. The observant reader may see in Isa. 49 a similar transfer and identification of Israel and Christ. This is not merely literal, but spiritual in the true sense, not the vague spiritualising which fritters all away, forgets the glory and relationship of Christ, blots out Israel as such from God’s mercy in the future, and lowers the church from heaven to earth.

Matt. 2:17 exhibits a difference in the form of citing: “Then was fulfilled” Jer. 31:15. What can more strikingly testify how Christ is ever before the Holy Spirit than the application here by our inspired evangelist? A heathen, or certainly a Jew, might admire the beauty, and boldness, and elevation of the impersonation; who but God would have thought now of the mourning prophet’s words, which brought His Son before Him in the Edomite’s slaughter of the babes of Bethlehem? Matthew does not say that it was the object of the prophecy, as in other cases. If the evil one prompted the savage jealousy of Herod, God felt for Rachel’s children afresh when shielding the Messiah, Who will yet reward her work, give hope for her latter end, and bring the children again to their own border.

The last verse of Matt. 2. gives another variety, that differs not only in the form, but in the general reference: so that (ὅπως, not ἵνα) it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets. It was their scope. He was to be despised of men. So His residence accorded. “Can any good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). There Joseph took Mary and the Heir of all the promises of God. Such was the scope of the prophets.

“Isaiah the prophet” is said, in Matthew 3, to have predicted John as “the voice of one crying in the wilderness” (Isa. 40:3). This would be decisive if higher criticism consisted with the fear of God — if it trembled at His word. How came men to set themselves above apostolic authority? Because they must otherwise, accepting prophecy, give up their scepticism and bow to God’s revelation. If Isaiah wrote this wondrous moral pleading to the end, he clearly predicts Cyrus by name and character, by mission and work, and graphically

foretells Babylon's fall, and the return to Jerusalem; nor this only, but the rejection of the Messiah, and His atoning death, by the faith of Whom the people, no longer impenitent, become God's servants through Jehovah's Righteous Servant, Who appears at length for their final deliverance and everlasting joy, and the destruction of enemies within and without. As to the bearing of the words quoted by the Baptist, they must be childish indeed who fail to see that they describe the service of John as Messiah's herald, a moral work set out in material figures, as is common in the New Testament. Never have I heard a whisper of future "engineering" intended, save by believers in human progress, and in a millennium brought about by man's instrumentality rather than by Christ's advent. But there may be souls no less simple and rash on the other side.

"Isaiah the prophet" is cited again (Isa. 9:1, 2) in Matt. 4:14-16, and with marked propriety. Just so much of the prophecy is used as bears on the first advent of Christ, the great light that shone on her that was distressed, "the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles," etc. The figurative language of the former quotation in no way forbade its literal accomplishment in John the Baptist, without a vague series of heralds to bring in the Lord. So equally bold figures here only render vivid testimony to that True Light which Christ was, not to His forerunner who bore Him witness. They are both definite and accomplished prophecies. Only the very next words in Isaiah 9 open the unfulfilled coming glory of Messiah here below: "Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast increased their joy. They joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil": words alien from gospel

blessing and from heavenly glory, but perfectly expressive of the world kingdom of our Lord at the end of the age. Hence the flash which shines next, lighting up the judgement which brings it in. “For the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, thou hast broken, as in the day of Midian. For all the armour of the armed man in the tumult, and the garments rolled in blood shall even be for burning, for fuel of fire. For unto us a child is born,” etc. (R.V) This ought surely to be unmistakable. It is the Second Advent, not the first. In the perspective of the prophet the one is followed by the other. Christ’s death separated them; the New Testament, and its special work and heavenly relationships with the exalted Head of the body, come between. But the one is as literal and distinct as the other though figures cluster round both to enlighten faith, not to wrap in mist and cloud as men wish.

The next quotation of prophecy is from “Isaiah the prophet” (Isa. 53:4): “Himself took our infirmities and bare our diseases” (Matt. 8:17). The evangelist applies it to Messiah’s removal of disease. Atoning work is distinguished, and even contrasted, with the latter half of verse 4, in verses 5, 6, 8 (last clause), 10, 11, 12, though there is more than atonement. And so the New Testament cites these, not verse 4, for atonement. Thus all is precise and definite in the prophecy, as well as in apostolic citation. It is scientific theology which produces darkness, of which it is equally unconscious and vain, with which it would, if it could, envelope the divine word. It really deceives itself. The prophecy is luminous throughout, opening and closing with Messiah’s exaltation in His kingdom to come; but almost

all between is the inimitable portrait of His humiliation and death in man's rejection and God's atonement. It is not surprising that those who love to regard the prophets as dwelling in their own fog are shy of a chapter which is not more sharply defined than it is momentous and humbling. Nor is it that figures are lacking, but that simple language pervades it from first to last. Symbol is wholly absent, and all excuse for allegorizing; and the rather, as there is most needed yet spiritual food already prepared of God for the spiritual.

The Lord, in Matt. 11:10, warrants our personal application of Mal. 3:1 to the Baptist, stopping short of the verses that follow, which await His coming again. And though Luke 1:17 clearly refers to Mal. 4:5, 6, it is even there only applied morally, or to faith, not historically; as our Lord Himself puts the case in Matt. 11:14, and Mark 9:13: "And if ye are willing to receive it, this is Elijah which is to come." Nothing is farther from His mind than to set aside a future action of Elijah (compare Mark 9:12; John 1:21) before the great and terrible day of Jehovah come, a description in no way suiting His first advent in grace, even though moral judgement accompany that grace.

The only other quotation that need be noticed here is in Matt. 12:17-21, from Isa. 42:14. The folly of a great unknown prophet is cut off here also by anticipation. "Isaiah the prophet" spoke it: a distinct prediction applicable at that time to the Messiah's presence in lowly meekness, and with tender care for the crushed or the dim, waiting for ultimate triumph. Never can it apply again as then, though it looks to the end from that beginning. The poor of the flock would, and did, appreciate His unpretending grace, whatever the

disappointment of His brethren after the flesh, and however the wise and prudent find excuse for unbelief and a plea for stumbling. But divine wisdom is justified by all her children.

7. General Remarks

Summarily then it may be said that the New Testament affords proof, ample and clear, that the prophecies of the Old Testament are so much the more strikingly accomplished, because they are selected from all its three parts — Law, Psalms, and Prophets — written by many hands, scattered over many centuries, yet all meeting as in a common centre in Christ. His lineage in general and in particular, culminating in His unique birth, with its time and place; His despised position, His meek and lowly life, the gracious character of His ministry, and His miracles distinct from all others before Him; His disciples with the law sealed among them, while Jehovah hides His face from the house of Jacob, yet the mass not neglected, but instructed in righteousness by His knowledge. And what can surpass the minute care with which the Holy Spirit treasures up incidents of no value in the eyes of small or great who despise? but how momentous and precious for such as love Him, even where His infinite work of dying in atonement for our sins might seem calculated to overshadow all else! If God embalmed all in prophecy, His children do not explain away the literal fulfilment of His riding into Jerusalem, the predicted King on an ass, and a colt, the foal of an ass, or the Hosannas of the multitude, the cleansing of the temple, the children’s cry in the temple; or, again, His sale by Judas, or the traitor’s dreadful death and end, or the purchase of the

field of blood, any more than the buffeting and scourging and spitting that befell Himself, or the piercing of His hands and feet, the insults and scorn of His enemies, the vinegar and gall, the parting of His garments, and the lots cast for His venture.

It is not only that every sacrifice before and since the law pointed to His death; but Isa. 53. is the matchless clue, the prophetic comment, and is so applied by the apostles. Even the manner of His death was predicted in His singular exemption from a broken bone, and the peculiarity of a pierced side, both in contrast with the two crucified along with Him. His burial, so different from His life, was not omitted; and His resurrection as the path to heaven, and to the right hand of God's throne, all are as positively foretold as they were punctually fulfilled. Assuredly we have the fulfilment of these scenes so expressly set out in scripture, that God's children need not hesitate who do, or who do not, teach according to God — those who regard the words as hyperbole and essentially unhistorical, or those who take them all in the simplicity and fullness and precision of their meaning, without presuming to think that our faith has exhausted all that God wrote in the scriptures.

How wrong, then, for any man to say that the passage about "the virgin conceiving," etc., has a manifest historical meaning as applied to Isaiah's wife! though in unexaggerated strictness to our Lord only. What can one think of the judgement that Isaiah 53 seems to refer to events more closely connected with the return of the Jews from captivity! Everyone at all versed in Isaiah's prophecy must know that this has not the least justification in the contents, and supposes ignorance of the very structure, of the book. Isa. 49 begins the

prophetic dealing, not with idols judged in Babylon, and the deliverance wrought by Cyrus (for this closes at the end of Isa. 48), but with the deeper question of the more remote future, the rejection of Messiah and His atoning death and the glorious consequences for Israel, the nations, and kings, to which only Isaiah 53 refers, and not in the remotest way to the Jews' return from the captivity. This is here said in Christian plainness of speech for the truth's sake, and in no disparagement, but with all respect and love. The sentiments show how deadly is unbelief, even as to prophecy, and in a most estimable man.

Another remark may close this section. Christ has been made an exception, and prophecy allowed in His case to be not hyperbolical, though assumed to be everywhere else. We have just seen how grudgingly its application even to Him is allowed. But where is the warrant for considering prophecy in His case valid; in every other, precarious and exaggerated? Scripture draws no such line; and man's unauthorised rule to this effect is as capricious as absurd and irreverent. It is forgotten in effect, as always, that every scripture is inspired of God, and that the prophetic word is His, no less than the Law or the Psalms, the Gospels or the Epistles. Even in human testimony, if we could not receive the witness of men about the least things, how trust it about the highest? Truthfulness we want, and have, nor this only, but divine character and purpose everywhere. If we believe it all to be God's word, such questions are decided. Impossible that God could lie anywhere, or as to anything. If we can trust Him when promising life eternal in His Son, assuredly no less if He speaks of Edom or Egypt, of Jerusalem or Judah.

The current interpretations of Christendom are here altogether at fault; and the consequence is the scanty interest in the prophets, of which people are conscious that they understand little and enjoy less. Men of learning owe much directly, and more indirectly, to Origen and Eusebius among the Greeks, and to Jerome and Augustine, for that perverse ingenuity which has darkened this large department of holy scripture. The earlier Christian writers, such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus with Lactantius, were at least simpler, and avoided that allegorizing to which those already named gave so large an impulse. But they were utterly wrong in confounding the Christian hope with the expectations of Israel. By this error was provoked the vague reaction which followed, in which Jerusalem or Zion, Judah or Israel, were regarded as no longer applicable as of old, but to be henceforth realized exclusively in the church. Thus by a different route the same evil result ensued: on the one hand, denying the faithfulness of God to His promises, and hence casting off Israel from that mercy which awaits the people in the day that is rapidly approaching, and on the other, levelling down the church to the plane of Israel, in ignorance of her proper and heavenly relationship to Christ as His body and bride.

Error, as it injures and darkens the good, lends ready and effective aid to the evil and corrupt. Hence the Romish harlot greedily adopted and perpetuated a system of interpretation exactly suited to earthly aggrandisement and intolerant pride and unrelenting persecution of all that stood aloof from its unscriptural aims. The commentary of Cornelius à Lapide may be seen as by one of its ablest exponents. Take as an

instance his observations on Isa. 60:12-14, though any other of less renown might suffice. Rome's faith and kingdom, he says, stand from Christ's coming through 1600 years, and will stand till His return at the end of the world. For it is needless to say that, like theologians generally, this learned man wholly confounded "the age" with the world, and did not know of "the age to come," introduced by the unsparing judgement of Rome, as well as of the quick everywhere, long before the world passes away. He adds that the bending unto Zion of their sons that afflicted her, and the bowing down of all that despised her at the soles of her feet, is plainly fulfilled in the Roman Pontiff, who is the church's head. What a contrast with Christ's beatitudes for His own (Matt. 5:3-12)! and especially for His chief servants (Luke 22:24-30)! The vain Corinthians began what Popery consummated (compare 1 Cor. 4:8-13), but God is not mocked. "Ye have reigned without us," said the blessed apostle, content in present suffering to await the coming and reign of Christ.

Let us now hear Calvin, who is no less a representative man among the Reformed. He says (Calvin, Tr. Series, in loco) that Zion denotes here, as in other passages, captives and exiles; for however far they had been banished from their country, still they must have carried the temple in their hearts. Can anything be more vague and vapid? He adds that Paul justly concludes from Isa. 49:20 (the passage cited in Rom. 11), "that it is impossible that there shall not be some remnant that come to Christ." This is quite a misconception, for the apostle had already shown that this is true now, but contrasts with the remnant at present the day when "a nation" shall be brought in at once, and all Israel shall

be saved. Calvin, like others, ignores this through his mistaken principle. So on Isa. 60:10-12, though heartily denouncing the Papists for their torturing the passage to uphold the tyranny of the Pope, he only modifies the same untenable ground, and deduces the submission of kings to the authority of God and of the church. He has not even a glimpse of Israel under Messiah's glorious sceptre, but swamps it all, saying that Isaiah "intends to speak of that obedience which kings and nobles and the common people render to the church when they promote, as far as they are able, sound doctrine." Vitringa, in his elaborate folios, sees in verse 15 the change brought to the Waldenses and the Bohemian brethren by the Reformation from affliction to an eternal excellency. The Papist and the Protestant are equally mistaken in principle: which of the two is the more abjectly poor, and distant from the mind of the Spirit, it may be hard to decide; but Rome is more consistently proud and oppressive.

There is another popular variety during the last century, which is, if possible, more ruinous; for it appropriates the earthly glory that restored Israel is to have under the Messiah as the portion of the church universal when it advances more and more on its race after perfection here below. The hoped-for conversion of Israel and of all nations, or at least their profession of the gospel, it claims to be the fulfilment of the prophecy.

These absurdities disappear when we believe the word as the Spirit wrote it; and, while holding fast the hope of Christ for the heavens, we can all the better rejoice in the ancient people blessed under the new covenant in Immanuel's land, and made a blessing to all nations of the earth: the grand, constant, and universal prospect,

which is found in all the prophets. The special Christian relationship, our calling, inheritance, and hope, are unfolded only in the New Testament. It is “the mystery concerning Christ and concerning the church,” founded on redemption, and formed by the Spirit sent from heaven to baptise us into the one body of the ascended Head. The effect of ignorance on this score is as disastrous for practice. For Christians have slipped from their rejected lot and the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings, as they await heavenly glory, and thus become earthly like Israel in desires and walk and worship. Whereas we are not of the world as He is not, and are not to think it strange if fiery trouble come for our trial, but, as we share in Christ’s sufferings, to rejoice that when His glory shall be revealed we may rejoice also with exceeding joy. It is a settled thing for the believer that the present age is an evil one, instead of the vain hope of man to make it a good age by education, science, moral suasion, or religious influence. The gospel, as God sends it, essays no such aim, but is the testimony of God to separate us from its evil in order to be with Christ on high. Him, therefore, we are continually to await, knowing that He will judge the habitable earth in that day, and thus bring in the new age of righteousness and peace.

In Rom. 11 the apostle lays down the true and only sound principle: the ultimate blessing of all Israel nationally. It is the more remarkable because in the first half of the Epistle he treats of the gospel which effaces the distinction between Jew and Greek, alike guilty, alike justified by faith in the indiscriminate grace of God. There is no distinction on the one hand, for all sinned and come short of the glory of God; as, on the other

there is no distinction between either, for the same Lord of all is rich toward all that call upon Him. The rejection and death of the Messiah left the Jews justly rejected, and gave the occasion for God to proclaim His grace to every creature under heaven, that all who believe in Christ should be saved. When this work of the gospel is done according to God's purpose, He will take up that government of the world of which Israel has the foremost place according to promise and prophecy, but on the ground of sovereign mercy in which He will also bless all the nations, and this by His Son returning in power and glory to reign in Zion, and possess the uttermost parts of the earth — indeed to be the Head of the universe in that day, as the New Testament clearly proves.

For the apostle in that chapter furnishes the most conclusive evidence that God has not cut off His people, as it might have appeared from the freeness of the gospel. First, there is a remnant of Israel (vv. 1-6) at this present time also, of which the apostle himself was an instance, the remnant according to the election of grace. Of no other people is this true. Its attaching to Jews only is the witness that God has not absolutely cast them off. Next, though the Jews have as a people stumbled at the stumbling-stone of Messiah's humiliation, it is not in order that they might fall, but by their trespass, salvation is to the Gentiles (or nations) to provoke Israel to jealousy, and not therefore to cast them off. Again, the figure of the olive-tree teaches the same lesson. For theirs is that line of promise and testimony; and the Gentile, only a wild olive, was but grafted in, on the breaking off some of the branches; and he is called not to be high-minded but fear, lest, failing to abide in God's

goodness, he be also cut off (vv. 7-12). As it is certain that the Gentile has not so abode but dishonoured the grace and truth of God in the gospel, at least as much as the Jew failed in his previous responsibility, the natural branches shall no less certainly be grafted in, when the Gentile is cut off (vv. 13-24). Lastly, direct and absolute proof is adduced from Isa. 49. to expose the fond delusion of conceited philosophy that the Gentiles have a lease of favoured place for ever. For when that complement or fullness of the Gentiles is come in, which God is taking, "All Israel shall be saved; even as it is written, the Deliverer shall come out of Zion; he shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. And this is the covenant from me to them when I shall take away their sins" (vv. 26, 27).

Not a word of this could apply to the so-called spiritual Israel, but only to the ancient people of Jehovah; nor could the language consist with Gentiles either. Taken in their ordinary import of the terms the reasoning is as sound as the meaning is important. For we are thereby taught to read Israel in its literal force throughout the prophets as the apostle did; and so Zion, Jerusalem, Judah, Ephraim, and all other names. Figurative language there is abundantly in both the Old Testament and the New. It is so in every-day life, and yet more on occasions when we are more than ordinarily concerned. But the names designate facts, even the well-known objects as they occur, and are never themselves figures. Symbols also are employed, which differ from figures as being a composite of ideas which the prophet saw and describes for the more graphic delineation of the object. There is no uncertainty in the employment of either symbol or figurative expression, but rather to give

objects all the more force. The objects are real, not ideal, in every case. As plain language is constantly intermingled with figures, there need never be any great difficulty. So when symbols are employed, there is often an interpretation added: only we have to bear in mind that divine interpretations may and do frequently give more than the statement under explanation. The Holy Spirit gives all requisite guidance in comparing scripture with scripture; and He is needed for profitable understanding of Genesis and John as truly as He is for using Ezekiel and the Revelation aright. The true difficulty is quite independent of figures or symbols, and lies in employing the same object now and then as the vehicle of a lesser primary application, while it also looks onward to a larger and more complete fulfilment in due time; the right apprehension of which is at least occasionally a matter of delicacy.

The Jews therefore did not stumble because they understood the scriptures in their plain literal import. On the contrary they shut their eyes and ears against all the prophecies which dwelt on Messiah's sufferings, and warned them of unbelief and every other sin. They were wholly insensible to His moral perfection and His testimony of God as light and love, which should have led them to repentance. They clutched at the gorgeous visions of power and glory, and overlooked that they are as full of holiness and righteousness and peace. They ignored the plainest predictions, as much as if they never were written, of their own hatred and loathing of the Messiah, as well as of His being wounded for their transgressions, and being bruised for their iniquities. They never pondered the words that Jehovah laid on

Him the iniquity of us all; that the chastisement of our peace was on Him; that by His stripes we are healed.

Part 2: Isaiah And His Prophecies

1. Isaiah As A Prophet

As Isaiah stands out from all the other prophets by the sublimity of his conception, the elevation of his sentiments, and the grandeur of his style, so is he also by fullness and variety of subject matter. He was the suited vessel for the gift of inspiration which set him in the front rank, but in the highest place of those eminent servants of God.

Even a rationalist (Ewald) says — it is true, a man of profound scholarship, and of the most cultivated taste — that “in Isaiah we see prophetic authorship reaching its culminating point. Everything conspired to raise him to an elevation to which no prophet, either before or after, could attain as a writer. Among the other prophets, each of the more important ones is distinguished by some one particular excellence, and by some peculiar ability. In Isaiah all kinds of ability and all beauties of prophetic discourse meet together so as mutually to temper and qualify each other; it is not so much any single feature that distinguishes him as the symmetry and perfection of the whole.

“We cannot fail to assume, as the first condition of Isaiah’s peculiar historical greatness, a native power and a vivacity of spirit, which even among prophets is seldom to be met with. It is but rarely that we see combined, in one and the same spirit, the three several characteristics of — first, the most profound prophetic excitement, and the purest sentiment; next, the most

indefatigable and successful practical activity amidst all perplexities and changes of outward life; and, thirdly, that facility and beauty in representing thought which is the prerogative of the genuine poet. But this threefold combination we find realized in Isaiah as in no other prophet; and from the traces which we can perceive of the unceasing joint-working of these three powers we must draw our conclusions as to the original greatness of his genius. Both as prophet and as author Isaiah stands upon that calm sunny height, which in each several branch of ancient literature one eminently favoured spirit at the right time takes possession of; which seems, as it were, to have been waiting for him; and which, when he has come and mounted the ascent, seems to keep and guard him to the last as its own right man In the sentiments which he expresses, in the topics of his discourses, and in the manner of expression, Isaiah uniformly reveals himself as the kingly prophet.

“In reference to the last-named point, it cannot be said that his manner of representing thought is elaborate and artificial. It rather shows a lofty simplicity and an unconcern about external attractiveness, abandoning itself freely to the leading and requirement of each several thought; but nevertheless it always rolls itself along in a full stream which overpowers all resistance, and never fails at the right place to accomplish at every turn its object without toil or effort.

“The progress and development of the discourse is always majestic, achieving much with few words, which though short are yet clear and transparent; an overflowing swelling fullness of thought, which might readily lose itself in the vast and indefinite, but which always at the right time with tight rein collects and

tempers its exuberance; to the bottom exhausting the thought and completing the utterance, and yet never too diffuse. This severe self-control is most admirably seen in those shorter utterances, which, by briefly sketched images and thoughts, give us the vague apprehension of something infinite, whilst nevertheless they stand before us complete in themselves and clearly delineated, e.g., Isa. 8:6; Isa. 9:6; Isa. 14:29-32; Isa. 18:1-7; Isa. 21:11, 12; while in the long piece, 28, 32, if the composition here and there for a moment languishes, it is only to lift itself up again afresh with all the greater might. In this rich and thickly crowded fullness of thought and word, it is but seldom that the simile which is employed appears apart to set forth and complete itself (Isa. 31:4, 6); in general, it crowds into the delineation of the object which it is meant to illustrate, and is swallowed up in it, — by, and frequently simile after simile. And yet the many threads of the discourse which for a moment appeared ravelled together, soon disentangle themselves into perfect clearness — a characteristic which belongs to this prophet alone, a freedom of language in which no one else so easily succeeds.

“The verification, in like manner, is always full, and yet strongly marked; while, however, this prophet is little concerned about anxiously weighing out to each verse its proper number of words. Not infrequently he repeats the same word in two numbers (Isa. 31:8; Isa. 32:17; Isa. 11:5; Isa. 19:13), as if with so much power and beauty in the matter within, he did not so much require a painstaking finish on the outside. The structure of the strophe is always easy and beautifully rounded.

“Still the main point lies here — that we cannot in the case of Isaiah as in that of other prophets, specify any

particular peculiarity, or any favourite colour, as attaching to his general style. He is not the especially lyrical prophet, or the especially elegiacal prophet, or the especially oratorical and hortatory prophet, as we should describe a Joel, a Hosea a Micah, with whom there is a greater prevalence of some particular colour. But just as the subject requires, he has readily at command every several kind of style, and every several change of delineation and it is precisely this, that in point of language establishes his greatness as well as in general forms one of his most towering points of excellence. His only fundamental peculiarity is the lofty majestic calmness of his style, proceeding out of the perfect command which he feels he possesses over his subject-matter. This calmness, however, in no way demands that the strain shall not, when occasion requires, be more vehemently excited and assail the hearer with mightier blows. But even the extremest excitement, which does here and there intervene, is in the main bridled still by the same spirit of calmness, and, not overstepping the limits which that spirit assigns, it soon with lofty self-control returns back to its wonted tone of equability (Isa. 2:10; Isa. 3:1; Isa. 28:11-23; Isa. 29:9-14). Neither does this calmness in discourse require that the subject shall always be treated only in a plain level way, without any variation of form. Rather Isaiah shows himself master in just that variety of manner which suits the relation in which his hearers stand to the matter now in hand. If he wishes to bring home to their minds a distant truth which they like not to hear, and to judge them by a sentence pronounced by their own mouth, he retreats back into a popular statement of a case drawn from ordinary life (Isa. 5:1-6; Isa. 28:23-29). If he will draw the attention of

the overwise to some new truth, or to some future prospect, he surprises them by a brief oracle in an enigmatical dress, leaving it to their penetration to discover its solution (Isa. 7:14-16; Isa. 29:1-8). When the unhappy temper of people's minds, which nothing can amend, leads to loud lamentation, his speech becomes for a while the strain of elegy and lament (Isa. 1:21-23; Isa. 22:4, 5). Do the frivolous leaders of the people mock? He outdoes them at their own weapons, and crushes them under the fearful earnest of divine mockery (Isa. 28:10-13). Even a single ironical word in passing will drop from the lofty prophet (Isa. 17:3, glory). Thus his discourse varies into every complexion; it is tender and stern, didactic and threatening, mourning and again exulting in divine joy, mocking and earnest; but ever at the right time it returns back to its original elevation and repose, and never loses the clear ground-colour of its divine seriousness."

This estimate of Isaiah is rather of his style of treatment as an author, and hence is almost entirely occupied with the man. But it is cited as an able sketch of Isaiah from without, being written by an adversary of inspiration in any real sense. Hence it will be observed that Isa. 13. and most of 14, as well as 21. for the most part, are not referred to, and above all Isa. 40 - 66, though among the noblest and most characteristic strains of Isaiah; because if his, the predictions are self-evident, prophecy is a fact, and rationalism must be abandoned for faith in the unmistakable voice of God through His servant. It is cited as the homage of a mind far too free, yet a witness true here as far as form goes. Even while manifesting his incredulity as to the authorship of the twenty-seven chapters that close the prophecy, he cannot avoid

acknowledging the surpassing powers of him who uttered them.

“Creative as this prophet is in his views and thoughts, he is not less peculiar and new in his language, which at times is highly inspired and carries away the reader with a wonderful power. Although, after the manner of the later prophets, the discourse is apt to be too diffuse in delineation; yet on the other side it often moves confusedly and heavily, owing to the over-gushing fullness of fresh thoughts continually streaming in. But whenever it rises to a higher strain, as e.g., Isa. 40 — Isa. 42:14, it then attains to such a pure luminous sublimity, and carries the hearer away with such a wonderful charm of diction, that one might be ready to fancy he was listening to another prophet altogether, if other grounds did not convince us that it is one and the same prophet speaking, only in different moods of feeling. In no prophet does the mood in the composition of particular passages so much vary as throughout the three several Sections into which this part of the book is divided, while under vehement excitement the prophet pursues the most diverse object. It is his business at different times to comfort, to exhort, to shame, to chasten; to show, as out of heaven, the heavenly image of the servant of the Lord, and in contrast to scourge the folly and base grovelling of idol worship; to teach what conduct the times require, and to rebuke those who linger behind the occasion, and then also to draw them along by his own example — his prayers, confessions, and thanksgivings, thus smoothing for them the approach to the exalted object of the New Time. Thus the complexion of the style, although hardly anywhere passing into the representation of visions properly so-

called, varies in a constant interchange; and rightly to recognise these changes is the great problem of interpretation." [SMITH'S Dictionary, i.188-9 Is the source of these extracts from EWALD'S Propheten i. 166-79, ii.407-9.]

The Christian will feel that, whatever the critical taste thus displayed, it only plays on the surface. The key for entering in was unknown: only Christ opens Isaiah, as every other scripture. And the latter part of our prophet deals after a deeper sort than the former with Israel's sins, which gives it a more marked unity and a sustained moral pleading, as we shall see in its place, beyond the limits of any aesthetic plummet to sound. The truth is that the rejection of the Messiah is laid at the door of the Jews no less than their idolatry, both fully set out and at nearly equal length, and the former with yet more pathos and clearness withal; so that the writer, by the law of the higher criticism, must have lived after, not the captivity only, but the crucifixion! Nay more, the second advent is as distinctly predicted in the latest chapters, as the fall of Babylon and the Messiah a propitiation for sins. Therefore the only true result is the folly of unbelief and the sureness of the inspired prophecy, the partial accomplishment of which claims our assurance that all that remains will be not less literally fulfilled in "that day."

As to the scope of Isaiah's prophecy, it has a rich comprehensiveness and grandeur in keeping with his style. Beyond all others he takes in the vast range of divine plans for the glory of Christ, and a minute as well as a most extensive view of the necessary judgement of the nations. Jeremiah and Ezekiel, though speaking of the Gentile judgements, are not occupied as Isaiah was,

with the crisis of Jerusalem when God gave up His people, even the portion who still clung to the house of David and the sanctuary in Jerusalem, now alas! rebellious and idolatrous beyond remedy. Daniel, starting from the same crisis, fills up the gap they leave, and reveals the Gentile powers entrusted with the government of the world outwardly, whilst Jehovah no longer governs directly within His people on earth, before Israel is restored to more than pristine righteousness, peace, blessing, and glory. Hosea, Amos, and Micah variously traverse part of the ground occupied by Isaiah, as they also were more or less contemporary. Obadiah, Jonah, and Nahum testify judgement to the world in one form or another. Joel and Habakkuk concentrate their witness on the last days, one starting from the great northern army that ravaged Israel, the other with the faith that if the Chaldean is the needful chastiser of the guilty people, God will assuredly deal with his oppressive wickedness, and glorify Himself in His people whatever appearances may say. Zephaniah, in predicting this judgement of guilty Jerusalem and of the nations, proclaims their blessing when God converts and delights in the restored remnant of Judah. The three prophets of the return, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, only speak of the Jews as God's prophetically. Haggai encourages them to build Jehovah's house in view of His coming glory, when He will shake all nations. Zechariah, in noticing the Gentile powers, returns in a measure to symbol like Daniel, and does not abandon this mystic style even in depicting the Jews throughout the first prophecy (Zech. 1-6) In the next, to the end of the book (Zech. 7-14) Christ is brought in, both in His humiliation, and in the glory of His second advent, when the nations are judged,

Jerusalem sanctified, and Jehovah reigns. Malachi testifies to the hypocrisy and corruption of the returned Jews, but distinguishes a godly remnant, and recalls to the law in view of the speedy coming day of the Lord.

Connected with this, and most important in its bearing, is the difference between the prophets before the Babylonish captivity, and after that event, which expressed the solemn fact that God gave up that direct government which He had exercised while the people were owned as His. Lo-ruhamah marked Israel's removal from the land. Lo-ammi was incomparably more serious, and only pronounced when Nebuchadnezzar carried off Judah, and became the golden head of the world-powers which intervene till God again interferes and recognises the ancient people as His own, as He will when Christ returns. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel; Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah prophesied while God had not yet disowned His people. Daniel traces the times of the Gentiles. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi prophesy after the return of a remnant still in subjection to the Gentiles, in view of Christ's advent, whether first or second. In all, blessing and glory are predicted for Israel; but it is at the end of the age when the Lord appears in judgement of the quick. The church is completely passed over, as the great mystery which it was for the New Testament (the apostle Paul especially) to reveal after Christ's rejection and ascension. The church is the body of the heavenly Head. The prophets deal with the earth, Israel, and the nations, when Christ was then as Jehovah.

2. The Structure Of His Book

It seems desirable here to consider briefly the general plan, or, at any rate, the chief divisions of the great book of Isaiah. There is an appearance of disorder in the arrangement of the book as it now stands; and many of those who have commented on it have complained and suggested their rectifications. But there is no sufficient reason to doubt that, under the semblance of confusion here as elsewhere in scripture, we have a deeper system than one of time or circumstance. Thus, in the Book of Exodus, the ritual for the consecration of the priests comes in abruptly in Ex. 28. and 29, after the Spirit of God has given part of the account of the sanctuary and its vessels, and before He supplies the rest. And yet this seeming interruption subserves, as nothing else could, the moral object of the Spirit, which would have been frustrated by a merely obvious and mechanical arrangement, to which most minds are so prone. “The foolishness of God is wiser than men.”

So in the earliest division or section of our prophet, which embraces the first twelve chapters, we have the exordium of Isa. 1, followed by Isa. 2-4, which dwell on “the day of Jehovah.” Here we have what appears to be the earliest of the revelations given to the prophet: “The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz said concerning Judah and Jerusalem.” No date is attached; but not sufficient appears to make us doubt that it is in its just place, after the preface, the inscription of which well suits its composition ever so late. The three chapters open and close with the glory of the day of Jehovah. Then comes Isa. 5, “the song of my beloved touching his vineyard.” Now it is evident that the strain is followed by a cluster of woes showing that, for all yet done, Jehovah’s anger is

not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still; and is interrupted by Isa. 6-9:7. After this episode it is resumed till we have the close of man's day in the destruction of the Assyrian, the reign of Messiah, and Israel's joy and praise (Isa. 10-12) "in that day" once more, when Jah Jehovah is Israel's strength and song. We have no date to the "song of Isa. 5," but we have one both to Isa. 6 and also to Isa. 7-8. Many suppose Isa. 6 to have been revealed before the song, and, indeed, the first vision the prophet ever had. But there does not appear to be any sufficient evidence to warrant the inference. It is opposed to the natural force of the opening of the book. The apostle was called to his special work from his conversion, preached immediately beyond others (Acts 9:20), and was fetched by Barnabas from Tarsus to Antioch to teach, before he was formally separated for the work among the nations (Acts 15). So it may have been with the prophet.

But it seems plain that there is a moral order of divine beauty in the collocation as the chapters now stand. Isa. 5 is the case stated between Jehovah and His vineyard, and shows Israel tested by the painstaking care God had all through bestowed upon them. "What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?" He can only thenceforward lay it waste, though His vineyard be the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant. Worse woe follows woe; and God summons the nations from far to chasten His people, over whose land hung darkness and sorrow. Then, before the conclusion of these judgements on stricken Israel given in Isa. 10, we have Israel tested in a wholly different way in Isa. 6. For we have there the glory of Jehovah-Messiah manifested (compare John 12:38-41),

the people blinded judicially for their unbelief, and an elect remnant withal which did not appear in the preceding chapter. Thus, if Isa. 5 convicts Israel on the score of their ill-return to all God's past good and faithful care, Isa. 6 condemns them yet more, whatever grace may do, spite of all, by the manifestation of Jehovah's glory in the person of Christ. This accordingly leads to a lengthening out of the interruption, which shows us Immanuel, the virgin's Son, on the judgement of the Assyrian, spite of desolation inflicted by him for a time, and the complete deliverance of Israel and their establishment under the Messiah after the day when He was a stone of stumbling to them and the law was sealed among His disciples.

Then, as we have seen, the broken links of Isa. 5 are taken up again from Isa. 9:8, and the general history of the nation renews its course, after we have had from first to last the special account of the Messiah, His rejection by the Jews, and the final blessing under His reign. The resumption, after so complete and weighty an episode, is made most evident, because the Spirit of God goes back to the very struggles of the prophet's day and the judgement of Israel. In Isa. 10 the indignation of Jehovah against Israel ceases in the destruction of their last foe, the Assyrian. Lastly, in Isa. 11 we have the Messiah again shown, first in His moral ways, and then in His kingdom, followed by Israel's song of praise, in the millennial day (Isa. 12).

The second great division comprehends Isa. 13-27; but, like the first, it admits of various sub-divisions or separate subjects within itself. Thus in 13, 14 we have the fall of Babylon and the overthrow of the Assyrian, with Philistia dissolved, terminating in mercy to Israel

and the establishment of Zion. This clearly indicates that the last days are in question both for judgement and for deliverance, whatever preliminary accomplishment in the past may have borne witness to the truth of the prophecy. But that which has been falls so short of all that is involved, as to evince itself but the shadow which the coming events cast before them. Next follows “the burden of Moab,” in Isa. 15, 16. Then in Isa. 17 comes “the burden of Damascus”; but just as proud Moab must stoop before Him Who sits on the throne in the tabernacle of David, so the mighty rushing waters of the nations shall avail as little to sustain Damascus as to overwhelm Israel, though at the lowest ebb, when they look to their Jehovah God, and He rebukes the oppressor. Isa. 18. may be viewed in contrast with Isa. 17. Nevertheless it has its own special place, as showing us Israel restored, not by Jehovah at first, but by the influence and intervention of a maritime power. But this policy and its promising fruit come all to nothing, and the nations plunder and oppress as before, and Jehovah takes up Israel, working in His own grace and might. We have “burdens” after this, but they are not quite similarly presented after this great gathering of nations seen at the end of Isa. 17. But first in Isa. 19 and Isa. 20 Egypt is judged (the Assyrian being the instrument) before its final blessing. Again in Isa. 21, we have the “burden of the desert of the sea,” by which is set forth the capture of Babylon; “the burden of Dumah,” and that upon Arabia. Then in Isa. 22, “the burden of the valley of vision,” Jerusalem itself is taken; and Shebna is set aside for Eliakim, the type of Antichrist overthrown and the government of David’s house being transferred to the true Christ. In Isa. 23 Tyre’s burden comes before us. Then in Isa. 24 Jehovah is seen dealing with the earth,

and the world languishes before His mighty hand. There is more than this, for it is the hour of His visitation for the host of the high ones on high, as well as for the kings of the earth on the earth: indeed the day is come for His reign in Zion and Jerusalem. Can one wonder then that Isa. 25-27 are the sequel for Israel's songs of victory, celebrating God and His character, and their deliverance and its character also? A song of praise closed the first division, song upon song closes the second; and as we had in the first part the sorrowful song of the beloved to His vineyard, fruitful only in sin and shame, now all is changed; and "in that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine: I Jehovah do keep it; I will water it every moment, lest any hurt it; I will keep it night and day."

It is evident that, as compared with the first division (Isa. 1-12), the second (Isa. 13-27) embraces a sphere incomparably larger. The first is occupied mainly with Israel, assailed, however, more and more by hostile nations up to their last great enemy, the Assyrian. The second begins with the great power that ravaged and enslaved Judah, goes on with each of the kingdoms that had relations with Israel, and ends with the judgement of all nations, when the world is dealt with and the very powers of the heavens are shaken too, but when Israel, sifted and chastened, shall be gathered in at the great trumpet's summons to worship Jehovah of hosts in Jerusalem.

The third division is occupied with the details of that which happens to Israel at the end of the age. Isa. 28. and Isa. 29 give us the two final assaults on Jerusalem: the first of these, coming from the north and overwhelming Ephraim in its course, is successful

against the guilty city, spite (or rather because) of its covenant with death; the second, when all seems lost, suddenly brings Jehovah of hosts to their rescue, and the multitude of the hostile strangers of all nations pass away as a dream. In Isa. 30 and Isa. 31 the unbelief that sought unto Egypt is judged, and the Assyrian, its scourge, the mighty leader of the coalition against Israel, falls under God's hand. Then in Isa. 32. Messiah is seen reigning in righteousness, and the last pre-millennial effort of the enemy (Isa. 33) is turned to his own destruction, and divine vengeance takes its course in Edom on all the other haters of Israel (Isa. 34). Thereon the blessing is now so rich and all-pervading, that the wilderness itself rejoices for Israel, and blossoms as the rose: sorrow and sighing flee away. God is present with a recompense, and His ransomed ones are come to Zion with songs, everlasting joy upon their heads. Such is the fitting conclusion in Isa. 35.

The fourth division consists of the historical matter intercalated between what may be called the first and second volumes of our prophecy. These are their main facts: the historical Assyrian rebuked of God before Jerusalem (Isa. 36-37); the raising up again of the then son of David, who was sick unto death (Isa. 38); and the solemn intimation of the Babylonish captivity (Isa. 39).

After this transitional series of events, and founded on their weighty moral import, we have the remainder of the book (Isa. 40-66) parting into the fifth, sixth, and seventh divisions, but with more of a consecutive bond than in the earlier half of the prophecy. The two great controversies of God with His people are here brought to issue with a conclusion to the entire book.

The first is idolatry (Isa. 40-48), which Cyprus avenged in the overthrow of Babylon, whither the guilty Jews had been carried, alas! because of their desertion of Jehovah for idols of the Gentiles. But, providentially raised up as Cyrus might be and was, God points to His Servant Who shall bring forth judgement to the Gentiles (Isa. 42:14). After this. however, the promised Messiah is dropped for the present. Israel meanwhile had the responsibility of being Jehovah's servant, but Israel was blind who gave Jehovah's praise to graven images. Therefore had He given them up for a prey; but now they are delivered, the fall of Babylon being the pledge of a still mightier deliverance yet to come. This closes with Isa. 48.

In Isaiah 49 the second and still graver controversy opens — the rejection of the true Servant, even the Messiah, Who supersedes Israel as servant of Jehovah. This makes way for blessing to the Gentiles in the wisdom and grace of God, the raising up of Jacob being now counted a light thing: "I will also give thee for light to the Gentiles." Zion however shall never be forgotten, but be restored. It comes out with increasing evidence in ch. 1, with the added truth that the Creator is none other than the humbled Man Who hid not His face from shame and spitting. After striking calls to "hearken" and "awake," the fullest witness to Christ's suffering in atonement follows in Isa. 52:13-53. Then the results appear in Isa. 54-55, with solemn appeals afterwards. This again closes with Isa. 57. (Compare its last verse with the last verse of the preceding part, namely Isa. 48:22)

Isaiah 58-66 are the conclusion. This, and indeed the whole of what we have called the second volume, are inferior, to say the least, to no other part in

magnificence, interest, and practical profit. The contents of the last portion may be thus summed up. The Holy Spirit directs Himself (in Isa. 58-59) to the conscience of Israel, reasoning, if one may so say, of righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come. Their hypocrisy was the hindrance to their blessing, and their sins would bring on their punishment. Yet when all hope of salvation might justly be taken away, the Redeemer would come to Zion in His own sovereign mercy, and His Spirit and His word abide with Israel and their seed for ever. Isa. 60 most appropriately reveals their consequent glory and righteous condition. Next, Isa. 61 - Isa. 63:1-6 form a section in which the character of Jehovah Messiah is traced from His first advent in grace (with the blessing and glory He was ready and able to bestow on the people and their land), till He returns from the scene of the judgement executed in Edom, “the day of vengeance of our God.” Then from Isa. 63:7 to the end of Isa. 64 the prophet goes out to Jehovah in earnest intercession for His people, finding the only hope in His mercy and faithfulness. The last two chapters (Isa. 65-66) are the answer of Jehovah, Who explains His dealings throughout: His grace to the Gentiles, His long-suffering toward Israel (rebellious and yet to return to their old idolatry and worse) His sure rejection and judgement of the mass, but with an elect remnant spared; the introduction of His glory in the new creation, of which Jerusalem is the destined earthly centre; a reiteration of His sympathy with the elect and of the vengeance He must take on the abominations of the latter day, when, if He suddenly bless Zion, He will as suddenly come and plead by fire and sword with all flesh. After this judgement of the quick, the spared shall go forth and declare (not His grace but) His glory, and

all the dispersed of Israel shall be brought back; and all flesh too shall worship before Jehovah, with the solemn permanent witness before their eyes of the doom of apostates. Such is the general scope, such the special divisional structure, of Isaiah's prophecy.

As some may wish, and even claim it as fair, to know what one of the ablest of the neo-critics has proposed for the arrangement of the book, the reader is here given Ewald's view, who was second to none of his fellows in learning and in aesthetic insight, if we can say nothing of reverential faith, or of the Spirit-taught intelligence of the word, which is its fruit: Isa. 6; Isa. 2.-4; Isa. 5:1-25; Isa. 9:8-21; Isa. 10:1-4; Isa. 5:26-30; Isa. 17:1-11; Isa. 7.-8; Isa. 9:1-7; Isa. 14:28-32; Isa. 15-16; Isa. 21:11-17; Isa. 23; Isa. 1; Isa. 22; Isa. 28-32; Isa. 20; Isa. 10:5-34; Isa. 11; Isa. 17:12-14; Isa. 18; Isa. 14:24-27; Isa. 33; Isa. 37:21-35; Isa. 19; Isa. 21:1-10; Isa. 13; Isa. 14:1-23; Isa. 40-66; Isa. 34-35; Isa. 24; Isa. 25:6-11; Isa. 25:1-5; Isa. 25:12; Isa. 26-27. Isaiah 12. he says cannot be Isaiah's, but is of later origin. As for Isaiah 40-66. they are handed over to the Grosse Ungenanete (Great Unnamed). Yet Ewald differed from Rosenmüller and Gesenius, to say nothing of others more audacious still, in attributing to Isaiah inspiration, though we must bear in mind that this is, in German lips, far short of unerring certainty in scripture, or of distinct and divinely given foresight of the future, however distant. This topsy-turvy shuffle of our prophet's book comes from one as eminent for taste as for philology (oriental especially) and for chronological tact, who laid down as his judgement that "the learned follies of Tubingen have justly aroused in all foreign countries a dislike of German-knowledge!" (query,

dreams?) Havernick and Drechsler are among the honourable exceptions. Of the new school of critics generally, we may say without exaggeration, what was said of others more openly profane in science, that their principle consists in believing everything but the truth, and exactly in proportion to want of evidence; or, to use the words of a poet, “In making windows that shut out the light, and passages that lead to nothing.”

3. Neo-Criticism Of Isaiah Briefly Weighed

“Let us then for the time forget” (says the Camb. R. Prof. of Hebrew, Divine Library of the O.T., 26), “that this writing — or rather, whether it is the work of one writer, or of several, this group of writings — is attached to the book of Isaiah. Let us simply interrogate the document itself, and collect the evidence which it offers concerning its author, and the time and place and circumstances of its writing. Direct statement there is none. Very rarely does the author let his own personality appear at all. But of indirect evidence, indicating the circumstances under which he wrote, there is no lack.” This would be reasonable if a merely human book were in debate; it is an absurd and unbelieving begging of the question in an avowed prophecy. “The circumstances” predicted are assumed to be evidence of the time when it was written. Rationalism takes for granted that of real prophecy there is none. The picture, on the one hand, of Jerusalem in ruins, the temple in ashes, the cities of Judah deserted, the land desolate; and, on the other, of Babylon the scene of captivity, and the tyrant that holds Zion’s sons in thrall, is proof “entirely convincing”! of the time when the book was composed. For “the prophecy does not profess to predict the destruction of

Jerusalem, the Babylonian exile, and the mission of Cyrus. These things are described, or assumed, as existing facts. What is foretold is the speedy deliverance of the exiles from their captivity. All these data point unmistakably to the last ten years of the Babylonian exile as the time at which the prophecy was delivered."

Such is Prof. Kirkpatrick's argument. But it is the weakest of fallacies; for it starts with assuming what ought to be proved, what never has been even approached, and what, we may safely aver, can be disproved. It overlooks one of the most beautiful and striking modes of conveying prediction, the scenes presented to our eyes and ears; so the Holy Spirit brought them before the prophet as if already realized, but with such an intermingling of the future with the past or present, as to dispel the transparent deception of the critics, and convict them of spiritual ignorance. Take the very early witness of scriptural style resuscitated late in the New Testament. "And to them also Enoch the seventh from Adam prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord came with His holy myriads to execute judgement upon all." What is this but a transfer of his position into the remote future, but taking account of present evil to testify? More boldly even than Isaiah did Enoch speak of the great event for all the world, the Lord's judicial advent, as if accomplished; and so it is frequently in the prophets. Take a disproof which no believer can dispute from Isaiah. 52:13-53. It is not to be supposed that Prof. K. rejects the inspired interpretation of this prophecy. He will not deny the predicted basis of his own salvation. It is no question to him if the prophet wrote of himself or of another such man. He believes that the prophet wrote of One only, the Righteous Servant, the

rejected but exalted Messiah, and of the great atonement wrought in His humiliation and suffering for sins. These things are described, or assumed, as existing facts, no less than the ruins of Jerusalem, the Babylonian captivity, and the mission of Cyrus. All such representations of the future, as though present or fulfilled, are as easy to the Spirit of prophecy as they are frequent in both Old Testament and New. How applicable the Lord's word to similar sceptics of old, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God! The grand and touching strain in Isaiah 52, 53. is filled with Christ crucified, and looks onward till His portion shall be with the great, and His spoil with the strong at His second coming, when He shall sprinkle many nations, and kings shall shut their mouths at Him, Lord of lords and King of kings.

Not before the revelation of the glorified Jesus Christ will be fully achieved that deliverance which God announced from of old. So utterly untrue is it that prophecy only bears on the horizon of the prophet's day, and never rises above contemporary interests. The apostle had told the Jews in Solomon's porch that Christ must be sent again from heaven to bring in times of restoring all things whereof God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets since time began (Acts 3). Such is the universal prophetic testimony. They all converge on the kingdom; whereas the gospel meanwhile is saving those who believe to reign with Christ when that day comes.

The spirit of neo-criticism betrays its hostility to God, and its blindness to His goodness, in assailing all the more bitterly whatever is most bright and blessed. So in the first division the episode of the virgin's Son (Isa. 7) must be got rid of at all costs, though foreshadowed

from Gen. 3:15; Gen. 22:18! To reduce so glorious a Person to the child of the king or of the prophet is worthy of man's pride and Satan's guile. The word here only casts somewhat more light on the constant expectation of faith. In its accession of another nature and a higher dignity it was the complement of the woman's Seed, and Abraham's; and it already went far to explain how He could crush the serpent's head. Was it not within the compass of Immanuel, before Whom should be broken all the peoples and far countries, whatever be their counsel or conspiracy (Isa. 8)? And how fail to see that, after His service with the children given Him during Israel's eclipse, shall the light which once shone in Galilee burst upon the multiplied nation in the joy of the true harvest, and the spoil they are yet to divide! Then Messiah, with His titles as true as they are lofty, shall take the throne of David (quite distinct from sitting as now on the throne of God), to establish and uphold it with judgement and with righteousness from henceforth and for ever (Isa. 9).

Again, "the burden of Babylon" (Isa. 13, 14) must be denied to Isaiah, because it exposes men's incredulity, and proves him a true prophet, speaking of the things to come as present to his vision, and of the destruction of the power that was to enslave them. How vain is their petty lowering of the time to anyone capable of estimating the scripture! For, though Cyrus captured Babylon, many centuries elapsed before the ruin here foreshown was verified. Alexander the Great proposed to make it the metropolis of his world-wide empire, but was cut off before he could essay to carry out what God had ruled otherwise. Then rival cities built near, sometimes from its material, kept dwindling it, till it fell gradually

into utter desolation — here set out at its worst. With similar ill-will Isa. 21 has been attacked. It must not be Isaiah's: else he is a true prophet; and they are false teachers!

They will have the "burden of Moab" older than Isaiah for the flimsiest reasons. But Isa. 21:1-10 must be much later, and from the same author as Isa. 13; Isa. 14:1-23. They are alike and evidently predictive long beforehand; and this is intolerable. Their doubts of Isa. 24-27. we may leave to be noticed in their place. According to 1 Cor. 15:54, the strain of Isa. 25:8 awaits its accomplishment still, but will be verified when the first resurrection comes to pass, and divine indignation against Israel ceases, when all peoples have the veil destroyed that overspreads all nations, and Satan is punished, and Jehovah of hosts reigns in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before His ancients in glory.

The "woes" (Isa. 28-34. ending with the joyous Isa. 35) will also come before us duly, when the sceptical objections can be noticed, as well as the historical chapters (Isa. 36-39) expounded.

Over no portion is neologian criticism more jubilant than the closing series (Isa. 40-66) in its three sections, nor with less reason. It is infatuation to object to Isaiah's writings from the mention of Cyrus, when the prediction of Messiah's humiliation, atonement, and ultimate glory in the kingdom subverts their groundwork completely. Who can say that the sufferings of Christ, and the glories after these, belonged to the historical horizon of "the great unknown" any more than to the friend of Hezekiah? The Babylonish exile was the portion of Judah judged by Jehovah for idolatry; but it is left behind in the

second and deeper arraignment, which begins with Isa. 49, the rejection of their own Messiah. Vainly do men deny the distinct prediction of the distant future. It is thoroughly within the analogy and scope of prophecy to predict the far-distant and personal Messiah. Far from being unknown, scripture shows such visions of the future to be frequent and certain. Both advents of Christ are clearly revealed, and their glorious consequences for time and eternity.

In prophetic vision Isaiah predicts the dispersion of the people, the desolation of the land, city, and temple, and their return, in such terms as wholly transcend the days of Zerubbabel and Joshua, or of Ezra and Nehemiah. Then the redeemed of Jehovah shall come to Zion with singing, and everlasting joy shall be on their head; then they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away. The prophet had, in the most distinct terms, predicted the exile just before to the king (Isa. 39). Therefore it was highly congruous to make known the comfort that God desires for His people, after (not the captivity alone but) their dispersion and national ruin, because of sin still more profound, and the solemn dealings of grace as well as of judgement at the end of the age, when they shall bow before their long-rejected King, Who shall come as Redeemer to Zion, and to those that turn from transgression in Jacob. Thereby their blessing shall be from henceforth and for ever, and the glory of Jehovah arise as never before even in David’s days or Solomon’s, and through saved Israel to all the nations and kings of the earth. Is this the ideal of a poet, or the real of a prophet? Do these critics fancy that their speculations outweigh the authoritative comment and application of the apostle in Rom. 11:26,

27? The future is contrasted with the gospel as now in the verses (Isa. 28-32) that follow, and refers to the kingdom in which Christ will surely come and reign over all the earth. The prophet Isaiah, like the rest, spoke of that kingdom, as Moses in the law (Gen. 49; Num. 23-24) had done; so do the Psalms. It is Christ suffering our judgement on the cross, which introduces Christianity and the church for heaven; it is Christ coming again to execute judgement on the ungodly quick which introduces His kingdom in manifested power and glory for the earth. Both are revealed, and one therefore is as true as the other; but they are wholly distinct ways of God for His glory, each centring in Christ.

1 The reader In weighing Gal. 6:16 may satisfy himself how little the phrase sanctions the use commonly made of it. For the apostle distinguishes “as many as walk by this rule” i.e., of the new creation, from “the Israel of God,” Instead of confounding them as tie popular error does. He means by the phrase such Jews as were so in deed and in truth. This indicates the propriety of his language. The error assumes that the apostle wrote incorrectly.

Section 1: Isaiah 1 - 12

Isaiah 1

The opening appeal of the prophet is to the conscience. No reader can avoid seeing that through Isaiah Jehovah charges His people with ungrateful, enormous, and persistent rebellion. It is the more terrible, because it is expressly general. There were marked differences between Uzziah and Jotham, between Ahaz and Hezekiah yet more and deeper. But the state of His people before the Holy One of Israel all through could not be truly described in terms less scathing. in themselves they were hopelessly evil; and one of the most pious of Judah's kings, prompt beyond all (2 Chr. 29:3) to care for Jehovah's honour and will, and large-hearted enough to embrace of all the tribes those who humbled themselves before Him Whom they had long despised, gave the occasion for most solemn appeal. Granted that no one can fix a special epoch, or an outbreak of iniquity of peculiar malignity. Even this, however deplorable, is not so desperate as a continuous state of alienation, where their corruption was the companion of despite done to Him Who had ever watched over them with a patience and tender mercy as perfect as His righteousness; His chastenings only preceded revolt more and more. Not even intense misery drew out groans to Him. Israel was utterly insensible to their loathsome wounds and mortal disease at His hands Who loved them, Whose readiness to heal was set at naught by their callous indifference. The body politic, civic and rural, was a disastrous ruin and desolation; and Zion's daughter left as a temporary

booth, instead of sitting for ever in royal grace above all rivals as became the favoured of Jehovah. In short, but for Him Whose title is to rule heaven and earth, and Who was pleased to reserve a very small residue, they had been as the doomed cities of the Plain.

But is this the gospel? or is such a national appeal in the least degree according to its spirit, or the revealed examples of those who preached it? Is it not evident from the Epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, etc., as well as the Acts of the Apostles, that the gospel is sent forth by God's grace, on the proved ruin of Jew no less than of Greek, to proclaim God's righteousness in Christ (now that man's unrighteousness is beyond dispute) unto all, and upon all that believe? Here probation still goes on under the law, as the rule of Jehovah's government of His people. Their sins and their sufferings are urgently pressed home, and that mercy which is mingled with His law, as declared in Ex. 32-34, is before the prophet in pleading with the people perseveringly. Yet was he well aware that the mass would still stumble at the word, being disobedient, madly rushing to destruction, and that a very small residue would hear and in the end be blessed and triumph, when Jehovah would intervene for that double issue. This, however, is in no way what the gospel now makes known to the believer, but the display of Him Who is coming to bring in together the acceptable year of Jehovah, and the day of vengeance of our God: not the mysteries, but the manifestation, of the kingdom of the heavens. The judgement of the wicked, and the restoration of the righteous remnant are here joined, which is a state of things wholly foreign to the gospel, as every Christian knows. And our hopes are as different

from theirs, as heaven is higher than the earth. They will look for the Messiah to restore the kingdom to Israel in that day of the earth's glory, as He surely will, and from Zion to rule all the nations; but we hope to be with Him in the Father's house, though we shall also reign over the earth. Those who merge both in one, not only defraud the Lord of His earthly reign, and Israel of the promises for them and the land, but lower and lose the heavenly glory of Christ and the church, which is our proper position. And this loss is Satan's aim and success, ever since the apostles were succeeded by men who corrupted the truth.

Here, as elsewhere, we find grave and precious instruction, humbling lessons for the heart of man, and on God's part unfailing pity and long-suffering, but withal solemn and sure judgement of all evil. Everywhere and at all times God's character shines out to the eye of faith, as His glory will to "every eye" in a day which hastens fast. But the only wise God has been pleased to bring out His mind and display His ways in a variety of forms, which create no small perplexity to the narrow mind and unready heart of man. Some are apt to forget the past, as if the revelation of present privilege were all; many more would merge the actual calling of God in a vague amalgam, a truly unintelligent monotony, which confounds Israel and the church, law and gospel, earth and heaven, grace and glory. Here it is national dealing throughout: national apostasy with vain religious self-complacency; as it will be national judgement, and national restoration for a remnant, by Jehovah Himself in the day of the Lord's return.

Doubtless, now that the Son of God has appeared, it is meet that we should hear Him; and it is vain to talk of

honouring the law and prophets, Moses or Elias, if He have not the central and supreme place in our hearts. And it is to hear Him, if we believe that the Spirit of truth is come to guide into all truth; much of which even apostles could not bear, till redemption was accomplished and the Son of man ascended where He was before. It is due, therefore, to the New Testament that we should look for our special portion there, the revelation of that mystery which was hid from ages and from generations. But we cannot forget, without dishonour to God and loss to our souls, that there are certain moral principles which never change, any more than God can act or speak beneath Himself, whatever may be His condescension to the creature.

Thus obedience is always the right pathway for the faithful, and holiness is inseparable from the new nature; but then the character of the obedience and the depth of the holiness necessarily depend on the measure of light given of God and the power of the motives He reveals for working on the heart. What was allowed in Levitical time and order is largely out of place now, if we heed the Saviour’s authority. And this is at least as strikingly true of the public worship and service of God as of private life and duty. In many measures and in many modes He spoke in the prophets to the fathers; now He has spoken in the person of His Son. Hence unbelief assumes the character of resistance to the fullest love, light, authority, and wisdom, revealed in Him Who is the image of the invisible God - Himself God over all, blessed for ever; while the faith, which has bowed to Him thus displayed, loves to hear the earlier oracles and to reflect the true light which now shines, along with the fainter but equally divine luminaries

which pierced through the darkness of man's night; for all the blessed promises of God are now verified in Christ.

The title is, "The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (ver. 1). This gives unity to the entire collection, as distinguished from particular dates, as in Isa. 6:1; Isa. 7:1; Isa. 14:28; Isa. 20:1. In strict accordance with all, the first chapter then has a more general character than any other in the book. It most pathetically accuses the people and the capital and the sanctuary of the grossest ingratitude.

By the prophet before us God is still dealing with His people as a body; and therefore He pleads with them because of their iniquities, setting forth a full, searching, and even minute portraiture of their evil ways. For if prophecy encourages the faithful by the sure word of coming blessing from the Lord, it casts a steady and convicting light on the actual state of those who bear His name; its hopes strengthen those who bow to its holy sentences. Hence, if handled in a godly and reverent manner, it never can be popular, though notions drawn from it and used excitingly may be so. But the Spirit addresses it to the conscience in God's presence, and there is nothing man as such shrinks from more.

If it grieved Jehovah at His heart to behold man's wickedness great in the earth and to blot him out from the face of the ground, what was it now for Him thus to despair of the chosen people full of disease and wounds? For though He smote, they were but hardened, and revolted more and more. And outward disasters

completely failed, though He had allowed it so far that only His mercy hindered destruction as unsparing as that which befell the doomed cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. How very small the residue! Compared with the days of David and Solomon, how evil and fallen even now!

Need the details be pointed out in further proof of these remarks? “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for Jehovah hath spoken: I have nourished and brought up children; and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah! sinful nation; a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children corrupting themselves. They have forsaken Jehovah; they have despised the Holy One of Israel; they are estranged backward. Why be smitten any more? Ye will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it (or him): wounds, and weals, and open sores - they have not been closed, nor bound up, nor mollified with oil. Your country [is] desolate; your cities [are] burned with fire; your ground, strangers devour it in your presence, and [it is] desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a lodge in a melon-field, as a besieged city. Unless Jehovah of hosts had left us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, we should have resembled Gomorrah” (vv 2-9).

So the law-giver in his song (Deut. 32:1) called the heavens and the earth to give ear, as he proclaimed the name of Jehovah, and set before the people that searching glance into the future which, through divine

power, took in the failure and ruin of Israel. Moses sees Jehovah judging Israel's idolatry, and hiding His face from them, also the call of the Gentiles, but to provoke them to jealousy, not to give them up for ever; and at length His glorious intervention, both to deliver them and the land, and to execute judgement on their adversaries, while in the end causing the nations to rejoice with His people. Isaiah was given to fill up that magnificent outline, bringing in Messiah and His work and His reign in the clearest and richest way for all that have eyes to see. Here it is the dark picture of their sins. What an expostulation from God and for God! Heaven and earth are summoned to hear the complaint against His people. The dullest of their own beasts of burden put them to shame. God's chastenings were as vain as His gracious training. The body politic was utterly diseased and loathsome from head to foot; medicine and remedial measures quite neglected. Country and town a waste and scene of devastation; the ground eaten up by strangers; the daughter of Zion no longer enjoying that holy fortress, but left in distress and isolation like a city besieged. But that Jehovah had left a very little residue, we (says the prophet) had been as Sodom and like Gomorrah. Sudden and complete destruction was their deserved doom. The last chapters of the prophecy, like others throughout, attest the judgement executed by fire on the mass, the remnant also delivered and blessed as Jehovah's servants under His righteous Servant.

It is the Jew, not the church, throughout that is in question. Zion measures the privilege and the guilt of Judah. Nowhere in scripture is it applied to the church, which is Christ's body. In Heb. 12:22 this is distinguished from Zion; and Rev. 14. sets Zion forth

quite distinctly from those already glorified above as the church then is. In Matt. 20:15; John 12:15; Rom. 9:33; 1 Peter 2:6, the word has its historical sense. And so it is with Rom. 11:26. To read the church in any of these instances would yield no right meaning. And these are all the occurrences in the New Testament.

But has not such an appeal to Judah a voice for us? It is not only that the church of God began to be called out and formed when all was a failure: man, Israel, the world, were judged morally in the cross. But besides for us, too, the house of God is in disorder. The last time of many antichrists is long since come. The Christian witness has more deeply and widely departed from God than the Jewish one, notwithstanding immensely greater privileges. What remains but judgement for the mass, with the reserve of grace for those who humble themselves under God's mighty hand? Does this produce hardness of feeling? On the contrary a spirit of intercession is the invariable companion of a holy heed to prophecy, both of them the offspring of communion with God. He loves His people too well to look with indifference on their sins, of all men's; He must vindicate His outraged majesty, and those who are in the secret of His mind cannot but go forth in importunate desire for the good of souls and the glory of the Lord. But real love has no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness; rather does it reprove them. Neither does that love which is of God measure sin as nature does, but feels first and most that which slights Himself, His character, and His word As to Israel, they were more guilty than the heathen, as bad as the worst. Hence it is no longer the doom, but the abominations of Sodom and Gomorrah. "Hear the word of Jehovah, ye rulers of

Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith Jehovah: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to trample my courts? Bring no more vain oblations: incense is an abomination unto me; new moon and Sabbath, the calling of assemblies, - I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear [them]. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes. Cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith Jehovah: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of Jehovah hath spoken" (vv. 10-20).

There was no lack of zeal in religion, nor did they fail to seek a remedy for the evident gravities of their day; but their remedies were worse than useless. Divine privileges only rendered their moral state more portentous and intolerable. If they approached the doom of Sodom but for Jehovah's mercy, morally they were already Sodom, and, therefore, their sacrifices, feasts, and assemblies all the more odious to Jehovah, Who felt

His courts to be profaned by their tread, and refused to hear their multiplied prayers. There was no real repentance, no trembling at His word, but a religious veil over utter and shameless iniquity.

Yet Jehovah deigns to call them to repentance and the fruits suited to it. The language is clearly founded on the ceremonial washings so familiar to the Jews; but moral reality is the point, as is immediately after made plain. God can tolerate iniquity nowhere, least of all in His people. They must therefore cease from evil and learn to do well, proving it in ways of ordinary life. But He adds withal a gracious invitation that He and they should reason together. Soon would they then find where the fault lay, and with Whom is the grace that is willing to wash the foulest clean. The call ends with His promise to help them if they were broken down and obedient, and the threat to devour them by the sword if they refused. In the earlier of these verses there is much which we can freely take to ourselves now, for the immutable principle of God is to ally repentance to faith, and to insist on suitable works and ways in all whom He draws to Himself. Particularly do the words apply to saints who shirk responsibility and trifle with a pure conscience; and we may fairly encourage timid souls by the words “Come now, and let us reason together, saith Jehovah: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” But we necessarily stop there. Vers. 19 and 20 cannot be torn away from the Jewish stock. Christians have ample appeals, and more direct in the later volume of inspiration. For God’s moral government as Father follows His grace.

The universal corruption of Jerusalem, and of its rulers especially, is then laid bare. “How is the faithful city become a harlot! she that was full of judgement, righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water. Thy princes [are] rebellious, and companions of thieves; every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them” (vv. 21-23). Finally Jehovah shows He must deal with His adversaries, as well as Himself restore Zion, when idols and their makers perish together under His mighty hand. Their present state of ruin is contrasted with what it was and what it is to be. “Therefore saith the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies. And I will turn my hand on thee and thoroughly purge away thy dross, and take away all thine alloy. And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: after that shalt thou be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful town. Zion shall be redeemed with judgement, and her converts with righteousness. But the destruction of the transgressors and the sinners [shall be] together; and those that forsake Jehovah shall be consumed. For they shall be ashamed of the terebinths which ye desired, and ye shall blush for the gardens that ye have chosen. For ye shall be as a terebinth whose leaf fadeth, and as a garden that hath no water. And the strong shall be as tow and his work as a spark; and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench [them]” (vv. 24-31).

The promise and judgement go far beyond the circumstances before and after the Babylonish captivity.

The last fiery trial of Israel is in view, which grace will use for spiritual refining; after which will follow the times of restitution of all things, when the former rule shall come to Zion (Micah 4), the kingdom to the daughter of Jerusalem. It is a comprehensive preface of the prophet to his entire prophecy. But it is in no way the gospel as now, which is grace reigning through righteousness unto life eternal by Jesus Christ our Lord. Here it is destructive judgement executed on the evil, when the repentant remnant of the Jews enjoy God's mercy. This is beyond cavil the bearing of the address, and the only just inference from its terms. What God has thus joined, let not man sunder to suit the present dealing of God in Christianity. Only "in that day" will Jehovah restore the judges and the counsellors of Jerusalem as at the beginning, and the city itself be one of righteousness and fidelity. In that day shall Zion be redeemed with judgement and her converts with righteousness, coincidentally with the execution of Vengeance on the wicked and her idols. It is a victory reserved for Christ's appearing in the consummation of the age. Jerusalem must be purged before God can make her a centre of the nations. It is Christ there in power which accounts for all.

All believers thankfully acknowledge how much is shared by the faithful on earth from the beginning to the end of time. There is but one object of faith for all, though made known in very different measures before and since redemption, and in ways so distinct as the day of the displayed kingdom must be from preceding time and especially from the present. Hence none need cavil at Jerome's calling our prophet evangelical, as compared with his fellows, or wonder at the countless gospel

discourses preached from this chapter and many more. But the important thing exegetically is to observe the essential differences which prove that not the gospel but God's ways with His ancient people, strictly speaking, are intended. Thus in the first paragraph (vv. 2-9) the appeal is national, whereas the gospel is strictly individual, though the house may be joined in a spirit of grace to its head. In the second (vv. 10-20) Jehovah declares He will hide in anger from their hypocritical worship. Now, since the grace of redemption, this is never said of the Christian. God did hide His face from, yea forsake, Him Who is our propitiation, and for this very reason when God made Him sin for us; but it was that we might never be thus abandoned. But He did abandon guilty Israel. In the third (vv. 21-31) He promises that "Zion shall be redeemed with judgement, and they that return of her with righteousness." This characterises the redemption which will be, not only as a witness by the blood of the Saviour Who rose again, but with the mighty execution of God's judgement of His adversaries when He with lye purges away Israel's dross. So confirms all the context to the last verse. It is the distinctions, not of course the resemblances, which mark off the varying dispensations or ages one from another.

But no Christian ought to need proof how different is the ground of the gospel from such an intervention of Jehovah as the prophet describes here, and almost everywhere else. For moral probation is closed; law can only condemn those under it. All alike are lost; every mouth is stopped, and all the world under judgement to God. The Lord Jesus, the Son of God, sent as Man in the infinite love of God, has been by all rejected and

crucified. Yet the judgement of sins and sinners was then and there laid on Him; and God is so glorified in His sacrificial death that He can and does proclaim to everyone that believes life eternal in His name, remission of sins, justification, and salvation as everlasting as glory. Such is the new state of things under the gospel and for the church, which meanwhile suffers with Christ, and waits for His coming to take us on high; whence He will appear in due time to judge the habitable earth, and introduce His kingdom before every eye here below, and over all nations and lands.

But our prophet, like the rest, predicts that day of His appearing to judge living man on earth, and deliver a remnant, here of Jews, as elsewhere of Gentiles also, for His manifested reign, when no evil will be tolerated but righteousness is exalted under His dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. Divine judgement will not be on Him, as the gospel we know is based on; but then at length, as the new and predominant fact in God's ways, He will judge His people in a way beyond all past experience, and put down the wicked both there and outside them throughout the world, as He alone can, and thus establish His kingdom not only in Zion but over all the earth. It is this of which the chapter speaks, though in the general way which characterises every part of it, each divine communication having that perfect consistency with itself, which is proper to revelation, and in strong contrast with the gospel and the church, whatever be the efforts of popular theology in all ages to identify them, thus losing the distinctive power of both truths.

Isaiah 2

We have seen that though the people if repentant are assured of God's blessing, they are shown that governmental punishment must first be executed on the wicked by Him Who alone is capable of righteousness; then, and not before, shall Zion be redeemed in deed and truth. This redemption in power and with judgement is manifestly distinct from redemption by blood only, as we know it in Christ by the gospel of salvation. Judah's deliverance is accompanied by divine judgement. Jerusalem's heart is at length reached, her time of hardness accomplished, her iniquity pardoned.

"The word that Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the end of days,2 [that] the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established on the top (head) of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples will go and say, Come and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and Jehovah's word from Jerusalem. And he will judge between the nations, and will reprove many peoples; and they will forge their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning knives: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (vv. 1-4). "He" Who thus reigns is Jehovah, but, having become man, is withal the Messiah, and the Son of man with rights universal given Him.

Apply this to Zion and the nations in the future day, and all is clear, sure, and consistent; accommodate it to the

church, either now or in that day, and what contradiction ensues! The Lord Jesus, when here, announced that “the hour cometh when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, ye shall worship the Father,” and that “the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such the Father also seeketh as his worshippers” (John 4:21-23). The Saviour Who alone leads by the Spirit into true worship is now in heaven. There is our centre, not Jerusalem nor any other place on earth, save as He is in the midst. And we are exhorted to approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having boldness for entering into the holiest by the blood of Jesus: such is the new and living way which He dedicated for us; as we have also a great priest over the house of God. Nor is this all. For it is of the essence of the church that we are no longer what we were after the flesh: “For by (ἐν) one Spirit were we all baptised into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free, and were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). When Christ comes again, the glorified will have manifestly their heavenly blessedness as they have the title even now (1 Cor. 15:48, 49). Thus they are in quite a different position and relationship from either the nations, or even Jerusalem. They are members of His body Who will reign over both Israel and the nations in that day. But He is sitting now, rejected by both and glorified on His Father’s throne; and we who believe are united to Him, one new man, both reconciled to God in one body by the cross. All for us is merged in heavenly glory; whilst on earth we are told to go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. For we are not of the world as He is not; and if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.

Undoubtedly to apply these terms to the feeble remnant's return from the Babylonish captivity refutes itself. But will the language seem hyperbolical when Christ appears in the glory of His kingdom? Nor are other allegories more tenable. What for instance can exceed the poverty of Theodoret's scheme (Opera 2., i. 183, ed. J. L. Schulze)? He tries to find the accomplishment in the flourishing unity of the Roman empire when our Lord first appeared, in the conquered races that composed it being no longer at war but engaged in agriculture, and in the unhindered diffusion of the gospel far and wide. Cyril of Alexandria (in his Commentary on our prophet) and Eusebius of Caesarea (Dem. Evang. 8:3), and Latin Fathers like Jerome (in loco) follow in the same wake. Yet one knows nothing better in the attempts of men since, unless the Popish interpretation be thought more homogeneous, inasmuch as it is all supposed to be verified in the Catholic church. Certainly the interpretation of others cannot be preferred, which makes it all mystical, and imagines its accomplishment in the unbroken oneness and peace of all believers, in their perfect holiness, and their entire subjection to the scriptures. As on earth the actual state is far different, some seek more consistency with truth by transferring the scene to heaven when every conflict is over; and these views have prevailed amongst Protestants.

It is apparent that we have here the similar, if not same, prediction which Micah gives in his prophecy (Micah 4:1-3). The two prophets were contemporaries. The question arises, who first communicated it from God? Three opinions are conceivable, and, as a fact, the commentators range themselves respectively under

each of them: (1) Micah adopted it from Isaiah (Vitringa, Calmet, Lowth, Beckhaus, Umbreit). (2) Isaiah from Micah (Michaelis, Gesenius, Hengstenberg, Hoffmann, Drechsler, Pusey). (3) Both from an older source (Koppe, Rosenmller, Maurer, De Wette, Knobel, Vogel, and Hitzig, Ewald specializing Joel). The certain fact is, that one prophet uses another prophet's words, only with such variations as the inspiring Spirit was pleased to sanction, as we find Daniel gathering light from the then to be accomplished word of Jehovah to Jeremiah (Daniel 9:2). The hypothesis of an older source seems wanton and unworthy of serious discussion. Certainly the great apostle, in writing his first pastoral to Timothy (1 Tim. 5:18) adopts as scripture the language of his beloved companion Luke (Luke 10:7), and not that of the apostle Matthew (Matt. 10:10). And some have argued that this passage in Isaiah was originally Micah's, from the context in each. For in Micah we have the desolation of Zion and of the mountain of the house, at the end of his Micah 3, followed immediately in the beginning of Micah 4 by this promise of glory, where the connecting particle (rendered "and," or "but," according to the exigency of the discourse) is fully in place, "But in the latter days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow unto it. And many nations shall go and say, Come ye, 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 out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem." Isaiah has the same initiatory particle, as if cited just as it stood, though in his case sounding strangely. But Dr. Kay has shown that the particle is

used more freely than this admits, and that the time favours Isaiah as the original rather than Micah (Speaker's Comm. in loco).

However this may have been, these opening verses of Isa. 2 constitute a noble frontispiece of lofty expectation for the earth's blessing. The previous preface of Isa. 1 proved the necessity of fiery judgement to consume the transgressors, and leave room for Jehovah thereby to purify a remnant for His purpose of blessing. Whatever intervene through creatures, His goodwill shall assuredly triumph in the end. And in the answering vision of glory, which winds up the strain (Isa. 4:2), we see the Branch of Jehovah, often to reappear, on Whose agency all depends. Here it is the establishment, beyond all rivalry, of what had been hitherto feeble and fluctuating and fallen, the place which Jehovah chose of old to cause His name to dwell in, now at length cleared of every mark of evil, dishonour, ruin, and exalted in holy and indisputable supremacy. Then will all the nations flow unto it in undivided and peaceful stream. They need no compulsion then, nor yet inducements any more than emulation. They have seen Jehovah's uplifted hand; they have beheld His arm laid bare. His judgements have been in the earth, and the inhabitants of the world are now learning righteousness. Nor need we wonder, since fire will have devoured His adversaries, who were many, strong, and high. And thus it is not merely that Israel has the heart enlarged to invite them in the sense of that mercy which endures for ever, and alone sufficient to save themselves, but the Gentiles also join together in holy zeal and earnestness. "And many peoples will go and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God

of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem."

Never has it been thus under the gospel for a single nation. At no time hitherto has one people thus acted and exhorted others as a whole, no, not for a day; whereas here with Micah we have a double witness of it in the divine forecast of "that day" for all the earth. "Today" on the contrary, even for His chosen people, the word is, "Oh, that ye would hear His voice. Harden not your heart, as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness." But then the wilderness and the dry land shall be gladdened, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. For then Jehovah reigns in the person of His Image and Anointed; and Satan will have been hurled from his bad eminence as the prince of the world and god of this age, which he is still. Then the latter rain of the Spirit will have fallen on all flesh with fertilising power. "And he will judge among the nations, and will reprove many peoples; and they will forge their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning knives: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war any more." Can terms more explicitly or exclusively describe when God shall judge in the sense of reigning over the quick? It is humbling to think that Christian men could persuade themselves that these magnificent and delightful changes for mankind have ever been verified. They are reserved exclusively to the praise of Jehovah and His Christ in the latter day. Should we not rejoice that so it is to be?

Nor is it without interest or importance to notice that the later words of Isaiah render just the same testimony in Isa. 60; Isa. 61; Isa. 62 and Isa. 66. Throughout the

exaltation of Zion is still more fully developed, as it is involved plainly enough in Isa. 42 and Isa. 49. As Jehovah will introduce that day, pleading in word and fire with “all flesh,” which mankind has never yet seen, so will He gather all nations and tongues, and they will come and see His glory after an unparalleled sort. “And it shall come to pass that from new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh [not all Israel only] will come to worship before me, saith Jehovah” (Isa. 66:23). In Zech. 14 it is declared that the spared of all the nations that came against Jerusalem will go up year by year to worship the King, Jehovah of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. Mal. 1:11 provides for the constant and universal recognition of Jehovah’s name among the Gentiles, and due worship in every place. More copious testimony assures us that they will regularly and solemnly come up, as is only right and due, to that earthly centre where He has set His name as nowhere else; a fact and principle entirely incompatible with “the hour that now is” as the Lord Himself clearly laid down in John 4. If this distinction be not firmly kept, if this age be confounded with that which is to come the mind of God is lost and darkness ensues as to the preset and future. Zeph. 3:8-10 is most explicit that the judgement of the Gentiles, and the restoration of the Jews then converted, precede the blessedness here described: “Therefore, wait ye for 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.”

The Vision contemplates a wholly unprecedented panorama to be seen by every eye in that day. Christ will have been manifested, instead of being, as now, hidden on High; and we also shall be then manifested with Him in Glory. But no word here reveals our association with Him. As He will have the earth as well as the heaven put under Him, in fact as now in title the holy hill of Zion will be His seat as Jehovah's anointed King; and the nations will be given Him, and the uttermost parts of the earth. Jerusalem will be purged, and the people restored, not merely in virtue of an interior work, but through searching and solemn judgements. His enemies and adversaries must fall under His hand. As the mountain of Jehovah's house is established above every rival whatever they material vastness, or the loftiest associations of the creature, thither flock the humbled yet happy and obedient nations to pay homage and worship, and to learn that they may walk in His paths, owning Himself King of kings and Lord of lords, and Israel as His peculiar people here below. Jehovah reigns, and the earth rejoices as never before. universal peace accordingly in subjection to the God of Jacob characterises the nation hitherto self willed and ambitious, jealous and cruel, but now under His firm and righteous sceptre, Who from His earthly centre of divine light and resistless power judges among them, and reproves many peoples. As these are the regular designations of the Gentiles, so with the same literality are Israel and Judah, Jerusalem the capital and Zion the citadel of the chosen people. Quite as little is Jehovah, the God of Jacob, to be taken vaguely; for this definite name will then shine and be known, when His mighty acts have made good unmistakably His purpose from of old that Israel shall be the chief people on earth (Deut.

32:8, 9), restored from all halting and affliction and evil, and Jehovah reigning over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever.

Rev. 21:9-27 presents the heavenly glory in that day, but it is wholly different from that of Jerusalem and the temple as show in Isaiah. The bride, the Lamb's wife, is seen under the symbol of the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, but not on the earth till the eternal day (v. 3). Instead of Jehovah's house being the centre of attraction, no temple is seen therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple thereof. There is thus complete contrast with the Jerusalem of that day in which the temple with its ordinances and officials occupies much the largest part of Ezekiels last great vision (Ezek. 40 - 47). The utmost care is thus taken that should not confound the earthly city with the heavenly one. The difference turns on relationship to Christ. The new Jerusalem is His heavenly bride, and reigns with Him; the earthly Jerusalem is the city of the great King, and is reigned over by Him. Whilst it is grace now to suffer with Him on earth, it is to fit us for heaven. Israel will have deliverance by judgement on the earth, as scripture shows. The Christian, the church, makes its way by faith while evil is in power till the Lord comes; for Israel, or Jerusalem, the evil is crushed, and righteousness reigns over the earth in Christ's person from first to last. No contrast can be more decided.

This is plain if we be simple. It is not only Shiloh come provisionally, as at the first advent; but when "that day" arrives the link with Him, now broken by Judah's ruinous unbelief, is riveted for ever; and as God's repentant people welcome in Jehovah's name their once

rejected Messiah, to Him shall be the obedience of the peoples (Gen. 49:10). The early oracle of dying Jacob will be at length fulfilled by the living God of Jacob, not in part, but in its entire and unforced meaning. It has no reference to the intermediate Christian system; when Christ's flock compared with the world is "little," having tribulation assured in the world; despised, hated, and persecuted for righteousness' sake, and yet more for Christ's. They have the kingdom in mystery, not in manifestation as it will be in that day; and hence are we called to the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, waiting for heavenly glory with Him. The vision sets nothing of this before us, but the kingdom not in patience but in power, when the Lord sits on His Own throne and reigns in righteousness. It is no longer the Gospel of God's grace calling believers to Christ in heaven, doing well, suffering for it, and taking it patiently, in accordance with grace reigning through righteousness unto life eternal by Jesus Christ our Lord, but out of Zion shall go forth the law, and Jehovah's word from Jerusalem; for He shall then be King over all the earth, in that day one Jehovah, His name one. Thus He is both Messiah reigning in Zion, and Son of man, to Whom was given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him; an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and a kingdom which shall not be destroyed. This new age characterises our vision, in evident contradistinction to what we now experience in the gospel, which separates from the world, and gathers together God's children in one for heaven. Such is the church of God.

Thus then is the divine government of this world, of which all the prophets bear witness as Christ's reign

over the earth. Isa. 4:2-6 describes its application to Jerusalem, as Isa. 11 - Isa. 12 to the earth and the creatures on it, with Israel's joy. Compare also Isa. 24:21-23; Isa. 25; Isa. 27; Isa. 22; Isa. 33:20-24; Isa. 35; Isa. 60; Isa. 66. Two differences of the utmost importance mark the new age from the present evil one - the displayed presence of the Lord in the power of His kingdom, and the enforced absence of Satan. So immense a change bespeaks the intervention of God in the person of Christ, Whose action will then have smitten the great image of Daniel 2, and replaced it by God's kingdom, which became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. When such judgements are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.

We know from scripture that the gospel was to be preached for a testimony to all the nations; and so it has been; as it will yet be in a special form when the heavenly saints are taken on high (Rev. 14:6, 7). But according to the apostles Peter and James the Just, God has now visited the Gentiles, not to fill the earth with the knowledge of Jehovah, which awaits the Messiah in the day of His power, but to take out of them a people for His name; and with this eclectic condition, both the name and nature of the church fall in; and therefore it suffers now to reign with Him in that day. Whereas these words of the prophet contemplate the wondrous change on earth, when judgement has delivered Zion, and Jehovah makes it His earthly capital for all the nations, no longer rebellious, but waiting for His law. In no sense is the vision yet accomplished. It is for the glory of the returning Jehovah-Messiah. He only will judge between the nations, and will reprove many peoples. Then, and

not till then, will they abandon sword and spear for the implements of peace, and learn war no more.

To attribute all or any of this to the church now dislocates all scripture, and dissolves the special teaching of the apostles and prophets in the New Testament. For we are not of the world, as Christ is not and are now called to suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. “Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). When that day comes, there is peace on earth, and no tribulation more, but righteousness reigns in manifest triumph. Our calling of God in Christ Jesus is upward, bearing Christ’s reproach. But when the world-kingdom of our Lord and His Christ is come (Rev. 11:15), the destroyers of the earth are destroyed, and Israel and the nations repose under the sceptre of a King reigning in righteousness, and princes ruling in judgement (Isa. 32:1).

Ignorance of the kingdom of the heavens, whether in its manifest form according to the prophets, when the Lord returns to reign in power and glory, or in its mysteries as now running their course while the Lord is seated on the Father’s throne and Christendom is the result - in either way ignorance of the kingdom is the common and fatal fault of most commentators. Hence they fall into the further error of confounding the kingdom with the church or assembly of God, which is fraught with evil consequences, both doctrinal and practical. Of this fanatics took advantage, or perhaps by it fell into a snare on the other side; for it is hard to say which were most astray, persecutors or persecuted. In fact, to take an instance from Protestants, whether one thinks of the wild Anabaptists who tried to set up a Zion of their own

by force of arms, or of their more sensible, if not more spiritual, antagonists who put them down by fire and sword, both went on the mistaken ground of the servants in the parable of the wheat-field, who would root up the tares spite of the Saviour's interdict, instead of leaving that work of judgement to the angels at the end of the age. The powers that be are responsible and competent to maintain order and punish evil-doers. Popery, as is notorious, has always acted, ecclesiastically, on the same error. Others, shocked by the evident mistake of Papists and Protestants alike, fell into the opposite extreme of denying to the king and the magistrates the title and duty of using the sword. All these serious aberrations of men are due to confounding what ought to be held simply but firmly, and without confusion - God's external authority in civil government, which holds good everywhere, and His spiritual power in His assembly, the church, where alone the Spirit is present to maintain the rights of the Lord according to the written word.

Where these truths are seen, it is not merely that one stands amazed at those Calvin [Calvin Translation Society Series Isaiah 1 p101, 102] calls "madmen," who torture this passage to promote anarchy, but at the Genevese chief who chides them for thinking that "it took away from the church entirely the right to use the sword," and bringing it forward for condemning with great severity every kind of war. Certainly those Christians were inexcusably wrong who dictated to the powers that be, and interfered with their policy, either domestic or foreign. But not less in error was Calvin, who claimed for the church the right to use the sword. Mischievous idea! which denies in principle the pattern

of Christ, the place of suffering holiness and love in this present evil world (1 Peter 2:20, 21). So the citation by Calvin of Luke 22:36 in this connection is just of a piece with that which we see in Romish controversialist They are equally mistaken, from not seeing the true nature and calling of the Christian, they are equally mistaken in thinking that it is a question of acknowledging the kingly power of Christ (for He has not yet taken His own throne); they are equally mistaken in fancying we must always think of making progress, and so gradually bring in the perfection of that peaceful reign. Calvin charges it on the revolutionaries as excessive folly to imagine Christ's kingdom in the sense of Isa. 2 consummated. But was it wise in himself to think that it was even beginning? Not less unintelligent and false is his conclusion that "the fulfilment of this prophecy in its full extent must not be looked for on earth"; for it is plain and certain that its terms refer to Christ's future kingdom on earth exclusively, and not to heaven. How important to distinguish difference of dispensation and relationship!

Take all now in its natural import,3 and difficulties vanish. When judgement has done its work, "in the end of days," the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established at the head of the mountains, and shall be lifted above the hills, and all the nations will flow unto it. Zion shall be the fountain of divine blessing in the word for all the world, and the centre to which the peoples shall gather when universal peace prevails, and Jehovah will administer justice as king over all the earth. "As is the Heavenly [Christ], such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy [Adam], we shall also bear the image of the Heavenly" (1

Cor. 15:48, 49) Such is our relationship and our privilege: our responsibility is inalienable and clearly laid down in the New Testament. We are not of the world, as Christ is not, and are crucified to the world, as it is to us. The contrast of this glorious scene, the Lord predicted, should go on till the end of the age. “For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.” Such too are the evident facts now. By-and-by, when the new age dawns under Messiah’s earthly reign (Rev. 11:15)! “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” It will be an order of things of which the world has had no experience; and if the casting away of Israel were the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead? (Rom. 11:15). The flowing of all nations unto Zion is the great change in that day, and cannot mean the gathering out of them, which grace is doing now, and scripture speaks of as the church of God.

“First, Therefore the Messiah is not come, because the prophecies have not been accomplished.”

“Secondly, ‘Therefore the prophecies cannot be understood as they speak but in another better sense - allegorical or spiritual, in which sense they have been and are being verified in the present church’.....

“But is it very difficult to discover another conclusion conformed to Scripture? That is, “Thirdly, ‘Therefore the prophecies of which we speak, and many others like them, which have not been verified, nor could possibly have been in the first time of the Messiah, may very well be verified in the second, which time is not less of divine faith than the first.”

After meeting the Jewish objections, as well as the traditional opposition of Christendom, the author replies to the last, which only sees in the day of His second coming a universal judgement of the dead. “But whence was this idea taken? From the holy scriptures? Certainly not, for they oppose and contradict it at every step.…Therefore we may well hope without any fear that the prophecies spoken of, with countless others like them, will be fully verified according to the letter in the second time of Messiah, since in the first they could not be. When then the second time, which we all religiously believe and expect, is arrived, there shall be, among other things, primary or principal, the elevation of Mount Zion above all the mountains and hills: a manifestly figurative expression, yet admirably proper to explain, according to the scriptures, the dignity, honour and glory to which the city of David shall be lifted up… in which time consequently shall the nations and peoples flow toward the top of Mount Zion. What nations and peoples? Without doubt those who shall be left alive after the coming of the Lord, as it seems most clear there shall be such.….How is He to judge the quick if there be none? What nations and peoples? Without doubt those who remain alive after the utter ruin of the Antichrist.……What nations and peoples? Without doubt those who remain alive after the stone falls on the statue; and, this being reduced to powder, another kingdom shall be formed on its ruins, incorruptible and everlasting embracing all under the whole heavens. How ominous that a Romish priest, spite of all the hindrances around him should have had an insight into the prophetic word so much beyond most Protestants.

[Note, the name of the author of the preceding quotation is Manuel Lacunza who signed himself Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra. The translator was the Rev. Edward Irving, 1792-1894. W. J. H.

Besides, according to our chapter and all prophecy, there will be a divine judgement executed on all (the Jews especially) before that. And this era of peace and blessing and Messianic rule is to be coincident with the supremacy of Israel, which is transparent in the predicted facts, and supposes a condition wholly distinct from that of the church, wherein there is neither Jew nor Gentile, but Christ is all and in all. But in that day Jehovah will make Zion His seat and centre. From that day the name of the city is Jehovah-Shammah (Ezek. 48:35). It is no longer, as now, the call of sovereign indiscriminating grace to heaven, but the establishment and display of divine government in Messiah over all the earth.

The prophet on the contrary sees in the vision the religious supremacy of Israel under Messiah and the new covenant, when they shall call Jerusalem the throne of Jehovah, and all the nations shall be gathered to it. For, needless to say, the voices of the prophets agree in one, whatever the several tones of Isaiah or Micah, of Jeremiah or Zechariah (Zech. 14). And the latter is important in this respect, as a prediction of the new Messianic age after Christ's return. The Lord in view of His rejection prepared the Twelve for war, not for peace meanwhile. "Think not that I came to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). Those who claim to be their successors in this wholly misrepresent the Master confound the church's place with Israel's, shirk the fellowship of His sufferings,

antedate the time of earthly peace, and deny the restoration of the kingdom to the people to whom God promised it.

It is unfounded and undiscriminating to treat this as accomplished in, or even applying to, the mission of the gospel or the calling of the church. For the gospel is the proclamation of God's sovereign grace in Christ to save lost sinners, who thenceforth as saints suffer with Christ on earth, and wait for heavenly glory, and to reign with Him. And the church is built on the rejected but risen and glorified Christ, when the Jews disclaimed their own Messiah, and have lost meanwhile all recognition on God's part. In the Christian accordingly there cannot be either Jew or Greek, but the new man. Christ is what all put on. By one Spirit were we all baptized into one body whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free. It is in principle a heavenly corporation, though for the present on earth; not a mere idea, but a living body.

That which follows in Isa. 2 falls in with the reference to the future blessing and glory of Israel under the new covenant, and the King Who shall reign in righteousness. For, says the prophet (v. 5), after that happy picture of the new age, "O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of Jehovah." The vision of glory when the Gentiles would bow and bless Jehovah, how should it shame Judah now! Then, speaking directly to Him, he owns why Jehovah had forsaken His people, instead of setting them on high, even because they were replenished "from (or, more than) the east" with all that man covets and worships. "For thou hast forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they are replenished from the east, and [full of] soothsayers like the Philistines, and they strike hands with the children of

strangers. Their land is also full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots. Their land is also full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made" (vv. 6-8). Their sin was quite unpardonable, that Judah, with such glorious prospects from God's sure word, should seek heathen superstitions, not only Gentile wealth and power, but alas! their idols also.

If their land was full of silver and gold, and no end of treasures; if it was full of horses and chariots, it was also full of idols! Oh what sin and shame! "And the mean man is bowed down, and the great man is brought low: therefore forgive them not" (v. 9), cries the indignant prophet.

Lastly, he calls on them to hide in the dust because of the day of Jehovah, which undoubtedly has not yet fallen on the pride and idolatry of man. "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, from before the terror of Jehovah, and from the glory of His majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be brought low, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day" (vv. 10, 11). The passage needs only to be read in a believing spirit, in order to convince a fair mind, that neither on the one hand Nebuchadnezzar or Titus, nor on the other the gospel, has anything to do with the Lord's advent in accomplishing the all-embracing judgement of man which is here portrayed. The true God would break down those who idolatrously bowed down. The hand of the Highest should be on all that is high and lifted up. The idols shall utterly pass away, and men go into caves and holes from before the terror of Jehovah and from the glory of His majesty

when He arises to shake mightily the earth. All will be verified when Christ appears, not before. How can Christians flatter themselves that the gospel has done or can do this work, with the great majority of mankind openly idolaters, and the great majority of the baptized really so? For what is it to bow down to the mass or the crucifix, to the virgin and saints or angels?

“For there shall be a day of Jehovah of hosts upon all that is proud and haughty, and upon all that is lifted up, and it shall be brought low; and upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan and upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up; and upon every lofty tower, and upon every fenced wall; and upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant imagery. And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be brought low: and Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols shall utterly pass away. And men shall go into the caves of the rocks and into the holes of the earth, from before the terror of Jehovah and from the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake mightily the earth. In that day a man shall cast away his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made for him to worship, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the caverns of the rocks, and into the clefts of the ragged rocks, from before the terror of Jehovah, and from the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake mightily the earth” (vv. 12-21). Vain then would it be to invoke the aid of man: his day will then have ended. Jehovah in that day arises to shake terribly the earth.

How confound this with the gospel! It is not yet eternity but the age to come when the idols shall utterly pass

away and Jehovah alone shall be exalted. The word, therefore, is “Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of?” (v. 22). Man4 as such is not able to retain his own life-breath, still less to keep others in that day. All must manifestly hang on the sovereign pleasure of Him Whose glory will be no longer hidden, and Whose will is then to be displayed in righteousness. “That day” is the day of Jehovah. Whatever the gospel may effect for believers and it makes them meet for God’s light and heavenly glory), there can be no real deliverance for the earth and the nations, till Messiah comes again in glory, executing judgement on the quick and reigning in peace. Thus, as we see in Isa. 1 that divine judgement is the revealed way in which God will restore Zion or the Jews, so does Isa. 2 make it equally plain that it is at least as needful for man universally. The judgement of him and his pride and his idols will be in the day of Jehovah, in order that all the nations may flow to Zion in heart-homage, as the beginning of Isa. 2 describes. The world-kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ will then have come (Rev. 11:15).

The Lord, according to Heb. 12:25, is now speaking from heaven, and those who heed His voice He deigns to call holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. In the church of God national distinctions vanish even now. If we are Christ’s at all, we are members of His body, and in that day we shall reign with Him over the earth, where now we suffer with Him. Then shall go forth (not the gospel as we have it in the New Testament but) the law out of Zion and Jehovah’s word from Jerusalem: no longer will it be on earth that “through Him (Christ) we both (Jew and

Gentile) have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. 2:18).

Isaiah 3 - Isaiah 4.1

But universal as the prostration of human pride must be, this chapter indicates that most crushingly shall the blow fall on Jerusalem and Judah, and this not only in their public political life, but minutely and searchingly on the daughters of Zion in all their haughty littleness of vain show. Here we have this double ground for divine intervention. But is it not pertinent to ask, What has all this to do with the gospel as we have it now? Does not the prophet look at the ancient people of God as nationally on the road to ruin? Does he not here entirely pass over the present ways of grace in the gospel to tell in the next chapter the deliverance which the Messiah will effect for the escaped of Israel? Does he not here omit all reference to the call of the Gentiles to-day and the church of God, that he may hold out the hope of Israel in the Branch of Jehovah for beauty and glory? For then everyone left in Jerusalem shall be called holy, when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of Zion's daughters. "For behold the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water; the mighty man, and the man of war; the judge, and the prophet, and the diviner, and the elder; the captain of fifty, and the honourable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the skilful enchanter. And I will give youths to be their princes, and children shall rule over them. And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour: the child shall behave himself proudly

against the elder, and the base against the honourable. When a man shall take hold of his brother, of the house of his father, [saying,] Thou hast clothing, be thou our ruler and let this ruin be under thy hand: in that day shall he swear, saying, I will not be a healer; for in my house is neither bread nor clothing; ye shall not make me a ruler of the people" (vv. 1-7).

What surer sign of decay and of imminent dissolution than the absence of all power among those who are in the place of authority, when those who should be the props of the state are children - not in fact, but in mind and purpose! Respect for what is officially exalted must then give place to universal contempt, and oppression and shameless malpractices flaunt without check, with anarchy the result. "For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen: because their tongue and their doings are against Jehovah, to provoke the eyes of his glory. The show of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves" (vv. 8, 9) There is no ruin without sin; and here it was frightful and shameless.

Nevertheless the evil day only brings out the faithful care of God over the righteous, as surely as the wicked meet with the due reward of their deeds. It is, however, a humiliating, as well as a sifting, time for God's people; though the prophet declares in the most animated terms, how Jehovah espouses the cause of the poor against those who grind down their faces. "Say ye of the righteous, that [it shall be] well [with him], for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! [it shall be] ill [with him]; for the desert of his hands shall be given him" (vv. 10, 11). God holds in a day of

confusion to His righteous government, and warns. “[As for] my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. My people! they that lead thee mislead [thee], and destroy the way of thy paths. Jehovah setteth himself to plead, and standeth to judge the peoples. Jehovah will enter into judgement with the elders of his people, and the princes thereof, [saying,] It is ye that have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor [is] in your houses. What mean ye [that] ye crush my people and grind the faces of the afflicted? saith the Lord, Jehovah of hosts” (vv. 12-15). Thus far the rulers and princes. Others might plunder their enemies and enrich their followers at the expense of their neighbours; but the civil and religious chiefs of Israel were so degraded and depraved as to prey on the flesh and blood of their brethren for their own greed and gain, the defenceless poor faring worst in this scene of alternate flattery and oppression. How true that the corruption of the best thing is the worst corruption!

Quite as sorrowful is the picture of domestic life. When women live for display in apparel, no further proof is needed to bring to their door the charge that the sanctity of the home is tainted, and that there is no real heart for the relations God has set up. Such finery is assuredly not for a husband or the family, but, small as it is, it escapes not the withering notice of the Judge of all. Dress, gait, glances, are all noticed by the Spirit of God. “And Jehovah saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with outstretched necks, and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and Jehovah will discover their secret parts. In

that day the Lord will take away the ornament of anklets, and the networks, and the crescents, the pendants, and the bracelets, and the mufflers, the head-tires, and the ankle-chains, and the sashes, and the perfume-boxes, and the amulets, the rings, and the nose-jewels, the festival-robes and the mantles, and the shawls, and the bags (or purses), the mirrors, and the fine linen, and the turbans, and the flowing veils. And it shall come to pass, instead of sweet spices there shall be rottenness; and instead of a girdle, a rope; and instead of well-set hair, baldness; and instead of a stomacher, a girding of sackcloth; branding instead of beauty. Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war. And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she, stripped (or desolate), shall sit upon the ground" (vv. 16-26).

How in the face of such a prolonged strain of detail as this can any one theorist as we all know has been done, on the essential contrast of history as particular facts with prophecy as general principles? Nowhere in the Bible or out of it does any historian so copiously and minutely expose that luxury which internally ruins a people in their homes as does Isaiah here, after dealing a deadly blow at their dishonour of the true God and hankering after false. It were more true to say that along with the infinitely great, the inspired prophecy penetrates and lays bare the smallest things as alike coming under God's eyes. History in man's hand would be ashamed to go down so low. Poor, proud, deceived man! Not only is there a change, and an exposure most humiliating to pride, but so complete would be the desolation, that the dearth of men is described as tempting women to a boldness contrary to female modesty. "And in that day seven women shall take hold

of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name. Take away our reproach" (Isa. 4:1). Sober men will be surprised to hear it was an ancient notion of the spiritualizing school that the "one man" is Christ, and the "seven women" believers! Possibly this absurd result of departing from its obvious and real meaning may account for the severance of the verse from Isa. 3. and transferring it to Isa. 4, where the Branch at once follows.

Isaiah 4:2-6

But this time of tribulation, everywhere in scripture connected with the Jews in the last days, before they are delivered, is followed by an outshining of beauty and glory, and abundant mercy for the saved and holy remnant. "In that day shall the Branch of Jehovah be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel" (v. 2). The Branch is a favourite and frequent figure for the Messiah, as the reader of Jeremiah and Zechariah will recognize. He will be there in His beauty and glory, and all will be in unison for the escaped of Israel. However many the slain, this one Man will be the restorer of all breaches, and holiness will be a reality, and not a mere name, in Jerusalem. Yet it is not by the gospel of grace as now, but expressly "by the spirit of judgement and by the spirit of burning." "And it shall come to pass, [that] he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, [even] every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem; when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of

Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgement, and by the spirit of burning" (vv. 3, 4). The translation of J. D. Michaelis is "by the righteous zeal of the tribunals and by a destructive wind." Rationalism sinks yet lower than superstition. The truth alone preserves the dignity of the divine word. It is not the church but Israel which is in question, and her purification by judgement, when the manifested presence of Jehovah will follow, and be her security no less than her glory.

Vitringa's application of the spirit of judgement and that of destruction to the Holy Spirit guiding the ruler and ministers of the church in discrimination, is the old source of endless error - the turning aside of Jewish scripture to an essentially Christian object. It is manifestly the day of righteous judgement on earth, and especially in its metropolis, Jerusalem, though one deny not for a moment the action of the Spirit to be here meant, but in judicial power. First purity is effected, then glory shines brightly on Zion. "And Jehovah will create over every dwelling place of mount Zion, and over her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flame of fire by night; for over all the glory [shall be] a canopy. And there shall be a booth (or tabernacle) for a shadow in the day-time from the heat, and for a refuge and for a covert from storm and from rain" (vv. 6, 6). Even as the cloudy pillar once covered the tabernacle of the divine presence, so Jehovah will create on every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, and on her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flame of fire by night; for upon all the glory shall be a canopy.

The attempt to refer to the gospel these revelations of coming glory for Israel, after purging trial, involves in the highest degree a distortion of scripture. During the present dispensation they are enemies for our sakes, as regards the gospel; while, as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of the fathers (Rom. 11:28). When that day comes, the fullness of the Gentiles shall have come in, and so all Israel shall be saved. It is a total change from this day of grace to judgement-day for the living when Christ reigns, whatever the mercy of God to the rescued out of Israel and the nations. “In that day shall there be one Jehovah and His name one.” Then shall be the deliverance, not the destruction, of the still groaning creation. “All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem: and it shall be lifted up and inhabited in her place, from Benjamin’s gate unto the place of the first gate, unto the corner gate, and from the tower of Hananeel unto the king’s winepresses” (Zech. 14:9, 10). It is not the past nor the present neither is it the eternal state, but the millennium. It is an epoch of glory when Jehovah 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. Divine judgement shall have washed away the guilt of Zion, and the glory shall return both more blessedly than at the first and for ever. What can contrast more with our day of suffering grace, absent as we are from the Lord?

Manifestly the figures employed do not suit heaven but the earth, especially the land and people of Israel; which again demonstrates that it is no question here of eternity when all distinctions of land and race are passed away. To apply so bright a description to the

refuge provided for some in Pella, when the storm of wrath overtook the guilty people, is wholly misleading, as well as beneath the language used. So it is wide of the mark to look at the history of the apostolic church as the fulfilment of the prophecy in the gifts of the Spirit, and in the judgements on open persecutors. It is really a vision of future divine glory for Israel on the earth, after judgements, under the Messiah, when we shall reign (not on, but) "over" it, as it should be in Rev. 5:10. Thus only does all scripture fall into its due place without violence to any. Eph. 1:10-12 and Col. 1:20 lay the dogmatic foundation for this immense and blessed expectation, as Rev. 21:9 et seqq. give us the glorious vision prophetically.

Let us now listen to one of the best of the so-called spiritualising, but really allegorising, school on this chapter. "It is commonly agreed that this prediction has been only partially fulfilled, and that its complete fulfilment is to be expected, not in the literal Mount Zion, or Jerusalem, but in those various assemblies or societies of true believers, which now possess in common the privileges once exclusively enjoyed by the Holy City and the chosen race of which it was the centre and metropolis" (Dr. J. A. Alexander's Comm. on Isaiah, i. 122).

One essential contrast overthrows this assumption. Israel was divinely severed from the Gentiles by the partition-wall. For the church it is gone absolutely: we are one body in Christ. In that day Israel is a blessing to the nations; yet are they distinct, and never joined in one body but the contrary. We are now united to Christ in heaven, where such distinctions are unsuited. On the earth, even when Christ reigns over it, they reappear. It

is the kingdom, in the beginning of Isa. 2, with the undisguised exaltation of the chosen people, yet the nations blessed and subject to Jehovah's reign in Zion. So Isa. 4. shows the Branch Who alone produces in Israel such excellent fruit, after His judgement has purged the guilty. The intervening part of Isa. 2 and all Isa. 3 unveils the evil and ruin of Zion publicly and privately. Judgement begins at God's house. What will it be for Christendom still more favoured? The New Testament answers definitely without confounding the professing church with Israel, though we may and ought to use the principle in every case possible. The most ordinary creeds acknowledge that the Lord Jesus will come to judge the quick, as well as the dead. None but open infidels would deny the judgement of the dead. Few alas! really believe in the judgement of the living. Yet it is of this the Lord so often warned, as in Matt. 24, 25, Mark 13, Luke 17 as well as 21, which Christendom relegates to the end of the world; whereas it will be at the end of this age, after which will come the future good age, the blessed era on which the Psalms and the Prophets dwell with delight and joyful anticipation. Of this our chapter is a witness, as also is the beginning of Isa. 2, while its latter part speaks of the humiliation of man and the overthrow of evil under Jehovah's hand when ushering in His day.

Isaiah 5

The comparison of Isa. 5 with Isa. 6 illustrates most strikingly the ways of God in the judgement of His people. They are quite distinct. Indeed Isa. 6. comes in abruptly in outward form, itself distinct from what follows down to Isa. 9:7 inclusively. All this intervening

portion (Isa. 6:1-13) forms a strikingly peculiar parenthesis, but a parenthesis of profound interest and instruction; after which the strain of woe, begun in Isa. 5, is resumed in the thickening disasters of Israel and of the land up to their mighty and everlasting deliverance, which yet awaits its accomplishment in the latter day.

But if these chapters were distinct in time as they certainly are in character, the Spirit of God has been pleased to set them in immediate juxtaposition with a view to our better admonition. In fact they are the two-fold principle or standard of judgement which God is wont to apply to His people. In the one He would have us to look back, in the other to look forward; in the former by all He has done for them He measures what they should have been toward Him; in the latter He judges them by His own glory manifested in their midst. The one answers to the law by which is the knowledge of sin; the other to the glory of God, from which every soul comes short (Rom. 3:20, 23)

In Isa. 5 the prophet sings a song of Jehovah, his well beloved, about His vineyard. Moses had already (Deut. 32) spoken in the ears of Israel a song which celebrates in magnificent language the sovereign choice and blessing of God, the sins and punishment of the people, but withal His final mercy to His land and people, with whom the spared nations are to rejoice. Our chapter takes in a narrower field of view.

“I will sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well beloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill; and he dug it up, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine; and he built a tower in the midst of it, and also hewed a

winepress therein; and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes" (vv. 1, 2). There was no failure on God's part. He had established Israel in the most favourable position, separated them to Himself, removed stumbling-blocks, crowned them with favours, vouchsafed not only protection but every means of blessing. "And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?" was His appeal to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah (vv. 3, 4). Yet was all in vain. The result was only bad fruit. "Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" They, like Adam, transgressed the covenant. It was the old story over again. Human responsibility ends in total ruin. Man departs from God and corrupts his way on the earth. "And now let me tell you what I am about to do to my vineyard; I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down; and I will lay it waste - it shall not be pruned nor hoed; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of Jehovah of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgement, but behold bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold a cry" (vv. 5-7 Such is His own application of the parable. Thus the nation, as a whole, is weighed in the divine balances, and found wanting. So manifest and grievous is the case, that God challenges the men of Judah to judge between Him and His vineyard, though they themselves are the degenerate trees in question. There was no more doubt of the goodness shown to Israel than of their obligation

to yield fruit for God. But obligation produces no fruit meet for Him. What was the consequence on such a ground as this? Nothing but woe after woe. Their doom would be according to their guilt.

The truth is that, on the footing of responsibility, every creature has failed save One, Who was the Creator, whatever might be His lowly condescension in appearing within the ranks of men. And what is the secret of victory for the believer now or of old? We must be above mere humanity in order to walk as saints; yea, in a sense, be above our duty in order rightly to accomplish it. As of old, those only walked blamelessly according to the law, who looked to the Messiah in living faith; so saints now can glorify God in a holy righteous walk, only as they are under grace, not law. The sense of deliverance and perfect favour in the sight of God frees and strengthens the soul where there is the new life; the written word illustrated in Christ is the Christian rule. Therein, not in the law, is the true transcript of God.

It will be observed, accordingly, that there is nothing of Christ here as the means and channel of grace. Consequently all is unrelieved darkness and death; and the prophet presses home the evidence of overwhelming constant evil in the people of God. Not a ray of comfort or even hope breaks through, but only their sins and His judgements chime continually. It is the severity of God, Who did not spare the natural branches, as the apostle says in Rom. 11:21. Detailed sin is retributively dealt with, as under the government of God in His people. A sixfold series of bold and open sins then follows with their punishments from Jehovah.

“Woe unto them that join house to house, [that] lay field to field, till [there be] no room, and ye be made to dwell alone in the midst of the land! In mine ears [saith] Jehovah of hosts, Of a truth many houses shall be desolate, [even] great and fair, without inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield [but] an ephah. Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, [that] they may follow strong drink; that tarry late into the night, [till] wine inflame them! And the harp and the lute, the tabret and the pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of Jehovah, neither have they considered the operation of his hands. Therefore my people are gone into captivity, for lack of knowledge; and their honourable men [are] famished, and their multitude [are] parched with thirst. Therefore Sheol hath enlarged her desire, and opened her mouth without measure; and their glory, and their multitude, and their tumult, and he that rejoiceth among them, descend [into it]. And the mean man is bowed down, and the great man is humbled, and the eyes of the lofty are humbled: but Jehovah of hosts is exalted in judgement, and God the Holy One is sanctified in righteousness. Then shall the lambs feed as in their pasture, and the waste places of the fat ones shall wanderers eat. Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope; that say, Let him make speed, let him hasten his work, that we may see [it]; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know [it]! Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto [them that are] wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! Woe unto [them

that are] mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink; who justify the wicked for a reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him! Therefore as the tongue of fire devoureth the stubble, and as the dry grass sinketh down in the flame, [so] their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have rejected the law of Jehovah of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel" (vv. 8-24).

There is a woe to such as joined house to house and field to field, reckless of all but their own aggrandizement: Jehovah shall desolate so that their coveted vineyards and lands shall yield but a tithe of what they put in (vv. 8-10). There is a woe to the luxurious hunters of social pleasure: captivity shall drain them, and Hades itself shall swallow up the mean and the mighty - multitudes without measure (vv. 11-17). And as for the bold sinners who scoffingly invited Jehovah to make speed that they might see His work (vv. 18, 19); and for the moral corrupters, who broke down all moral distinction, and the wise in their own eyes, who could do without God, and the unjust friends of the wicked, whose heroism was in wine and strong drink, being foes of the righteous, there is woe upon woe with utter destruction; "because they have cast away the law of Jehovah of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel" (vv. 20-24).

"Therefore is the anger of Jehovah kindled against his people and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them, and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses [were] as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand [is] stretched out still. And he will lift up an ensign to the nations afar off, and will hiss for them from the

end of the earth: and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly: none shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken: their arrows [are] sharp, and all their bows bent; their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind. Their roaring [shall be] like a lioness, they shall roar like young lions: yea, they shall growl, and lay hold of the prey, and carry [it] away safe, and there shall be none to deliver. And they shall roar against them in that day like the roaring of the sea. And if [one] look unto the land, behold darkness [and] distress, and the light is darkened in the clouds thereof" (vv. 25-30).

He had dealt with them already, but the strokes are not exhausted. "For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand [is] stretched out still." Such is the sad and recurring burden, as may be seen in chapters 9, 10. The avenging nations may be far away; but He would give the signal to them and the hiss (as for one far off), and "behold, they shall come with speed lightly." A most graphic picture follows of their vigour and promptness, their equipment and fierce determination from which none can shield or escape. Against Israel shall these foes roar. But they are not yet defined by name. "And if one look unto the land, behold darkness [and] distress, and the light is darkened in the heavens (or clouds) thereof." Such is the lot of man, or rather here of Israel, where Christ is not. There is no deliverance, only judgement after judgement on the people and the land. Unrelieved darkness rests there. Such is the issue of Israel in their land, of Judah and Jerusalem tried under law, no matter what the favours of Jehovah on His vineyard and the

plant of His pleasures. If He waited for judgement, behold bloodshed; if for righteousness, behold a cry. What on this ground could follow but woe upon woe?

Isaiah 6

This chapter opens a very different scene. It is not the law, but Jehovah revealed. Not that the people are one whit better; in fact it was only when Christ appeared seven centuries afterward, that man fully disclosed what he was and is. The law proved that man is not only sinful but loves sin; Christ's presence proved that he hates good - hates God Himself manifested in all the purity and lowliness, in the grace and truth, of Jesus. It was not only, then, that man was himself failing and guilty; but when an object was there in every way worthy of love and homage and worship, the perfect display of man to God and of God to man, He was a light so odious and intolerable to man, that he could not rest till it was extinguished as far as he could effect it. Still we are on ground sensibly and strikingly distinct; and this because the manifestation of Jehovah is in question, not the responsibility of Israel merely. Both chapters show the people judged, but the principles of judgement are wholly different.

It was not in Uzziah's palmy days that the prophet received this vision of glory and this solemn commission, but in the year when the once prosperous and now leprosy-smitten son of David breathed his last. Nevertheless "the year that king Uzziah died" looked very different from "the year that king Ahaz died" (Isa. 14:28). Yet in the former came the vision which fully disclosed to the prophet the universal uncleanness of God's people; as in the latter a burden came on that

enemy which vexed their south-western flank. In the former year, too, came Pekah to the throne of Israel, who laid the deadliest scheme with the Gentiles to destroy the line and hope of Messiah. Then, however, Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on a throne high and lifted up, and the mere skirts of His glory filled the temple.

“In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, [is] Jehovah of hosts: the whole earth [is] full of his glory. And the foundations of the thresholds were moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke” (vv. 14). No vision more glorious had ever burst on human eyes: but if the attendant burning spirits embraced the fullness of the earth as the scene of His glory, His holiness was their first care and chiefest cry. Activity even in the winged seraphim is not all nor most. Not all six wings did each need for flight, but two only. “With twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet,” in awe toward God and shame as to himself, in both the reverence that befits them in His presence.

The effect was immediate on the prophet. It is no longer woe unto these or those, but “woe to me.” He is profoundly touched with a sense of sin and ruin - his own and the people’s. But it is uttered in His presence Whose grace is no less than His glory and His holiness, and the remedy is at once applied. “Then said I, Woe to me! for I am undone; for I [am] a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts. And

there flew one of the seraphim to me, having a live coal in his hand, [which] he had taken with tongs from off the altar; and he laid [it] upon my mouth and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is expiated" (vv. 5-7). Nor this only: for thus set free in His presence, he becomes the ready servant of His will. Before this there was no haste to act, but deep self-judgement, and true sense of the defiled state of His people, in the light of His glory. "Also I heard the voice of Jehovah, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here [am] I; send me. And he said, Go and tell this people, Hear indeed, but understand not; and see indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make its ears heavy, and smear its eyes: lest it see with its eyes, and hear with its ears, and its heart understand, and it be converted, and be healed" (vv. 8-10).

Grace thus gives confidence to do God's bidding; and though the sentence on the guilty people of God is an awful one, not only is it most righteous, but a remnant of grace is assured in the face of consuming judgement on judgement. This is not the way of the gospel which reveals Christ bearing divine judgement, but the believer saved in sovereign grace, made meet for sharing the inheritance of the saints in light at any moment, and waiting for Christ's coming as the chief joy. Judgement must be before the kingdom come for the remnant of Israel. Such is the charge, and we know how surely it was fulfilled in the judicial blindness which fell on the nation, when they confessed not their uncleanness and beheld no glory nor beauty in Christ present in their midst, and refused the testimony of the

Holy Ghost to Him risen and exalted by the right hand of God.

But the Spirit of prophecy, if it pronounce the sentence of God on the people's unbelief, is none the less a spirit of intercession. "Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted for want of an inhabitant, and the houses for want of man, and the land be utter desolation; and Jehovah have removed men far away, and have multiplied forsakings in the midst of the land. But yet in it [shall be] a tenth, and it shall return and be for consuming; as the terebinth and the oak, whose stock [remaineth] when cut down: the holy seed [shall be] the stock (or trunk) thereof" (vv 11-13). That is, a vital principle survives, the nucleus of what will sprout again.

Nor is there a more surprising moral fact than the accomplishment of this divine sentence on the Jews to this day. Thousands of years have elapsed. The Messiah came, and confirmed it (John 12:40); the Holy Spirit followed, sent of Him and the Father, and He has fully ratified it (Acts 28:26, 27). No recondite arguments are needed, no evidence from Nineveh or Babylon, from Egypt or Palestine. There the Jews are before all eyes, dead while they live, the standing witnesses of judicial blindness indicted, after incomparable patience with their unbelief, by their own aggrieved and thrice Holy God, Jehovah of hosts. And the mark is proved all the more indelible, because they were not permitted to abide in the land they defiled, which was to become utterly waste, and themselves removed far away.

Yet dispersed as they are everywhere, and really amalgamating nowhere, no changing circumstances

change the Jews any more than lapse of ages: a fact which staggered the incredulous Hegel as inexplicable, but failed to convince; for unbelief is invincible to nature. And what adds to the wonder is that they outwardly honour the Old Testament, which we Christians believe as fully as our own scriptures. But like the philosopher, though staggered by Law and Psalms and Prophets that teach the sufferings of Messiah and the glories to follow, as well as their own scattering for unbelief, and the call of Gentiles during that sad interval, the Jews believe no more than the philosopher. But this prophecy, with others, makes it plain and accounts for all; and He Who smote with blindness has made it known here to them as to us; and, blessed be His name, He has set a limit to the sentence of woe. For the prophet that knew His grace said not in vain, “Lord, how long?” They are kept for His blessing and glory in the end. But oh, what tribulation and sifting and consuming yet! Burning judgement is to be their means of purifying in a way wholly distinct from what ushered the church into its place, a still more solemn and unique judgement having been borne by Him, Who died, rose, and ascended to be its Head. The Jews must pass through the tribulation which has no parallel (Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:24) before their deliverance comes. “Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it; it is even the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it” (Jer. 30:7).

Thus, if the departure from God is to be punished with outward and inward visitation, a remnant is clearly indicated here, mercy rejoicing against judgement, and God making good His own glory in both respects. But that returned remnant must be thinned under the

pruning hand of Jehovah. Still the holy seed shall be there, the stock or rooted stump5 of the nation, when judgement has done its work over and over again. There is ever a remnant according to the election of grace.

We may also observe that, while Isa. 5 begins the impeachment of Israel's guilt as responsible under the law, Isa. 6 first and briefly presents their sin in despising Christ's glory or disbelieving it, as John 12:40 applies this prophecy. So far is the earlier half of the book from being heterogeneous with the later, that these are just the twofold Indictment which we had there, expanded and applied with mature and touching beauty.

Isaiah 7

In the last chapter we saw the glory of Christ revealed, and the assurance of a holy seed after the judgement of the land and people. We have now a weighty sequel recounting facts which occurred, not in the year king Uzziah died, nor even in the days of his successor, but strange as it might seem, in those of Ahaz. "This is that king Ahaz," who without faith in Jehovah sent to the kings of Assyria for help. Sacrilegious he and at last apostate, Jehovah brought Judah low because of Ahaz, of David's line; for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against Jehovah. Even in the midst of his distress he trespassed yet more. Hence the occasion for a fresh outburst of prophetic light. It could not otherwise have been clearly gathered how the glory of Christ was actually to appear. Our chapter solves this question, and connects His incarnation (for indeed He is God, yea, Jehovah) with His rejection and His final and everlasting triumph (Isa. 8; Isa. 9:1-7). The first part alone comes before us now.

The occasion was the offensive and profane alliance of Rezin, king of Syria, with Pekah, Remaliah's son and king of Israel, against Judah and Ahaz. "And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, [that] Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it. And it was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart shook, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind" (vv. 1, 2). There were they in great fear, where no fear was, and this, alas! in Jerusalem and David's house; and no wonder, for the heir of David's throne walked not like David his father, but in the ways of the kings of Israel or worse, and drew Judah with him into sore transgression against Jehovah. Panic-stricken, yet in no way driven by his distress to God, on the self-same spot where Rabshakeh uttered his blasphemies against Jehovah at a later day, "the aqueduct of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field," Ahaz is met by the prophet. "And Jehovah said to Isaiah, Go out now to meet Ahaz, thou and Shear-jashub thy son, at the end of the aqueduct of the upper pool, on the highway of the fuller's field. And thou shalt say unto him, Take heed and be quiet; fear not, and let not thy heart faint before these two ends (tails) of smoking firebrands, because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria, and of the son of Remaliah. Inasmuch as Syria hath taken evil counsel against thee, Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, saying, Let us go up against Judah, and harass it, and make a breach therein for us, and set up a king therein, the son of Tabeal" (vv 3-6)

How foolish, as well as base, is unbelief! It is joyous and confident when a labouring volcano is about to burst; it is filled with anguish, when God is going to deal with the evils it dreads. In this case, how could He behold in peace a compact between apostate Israel and heathen Syria? It was not merely that their enterprise, if successful, must vex Judah, but set aside David's line. It was a blow at the Messiah, little as they might have thought of this; and the oath and honour of God were thus at stake. But "thus saith the Lord Jehovah, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass. For the head of Syria [is] Damascus, and the head of Damascus [is] Rezin; and within sixty-five years shall Ephraim be broken, so as to be not a people. And the head of Ephraim [is] Samaria, and the head of Samaria [is] Remaliah's son. If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established" (vv. 7-9).

How blessed are the ways of God! The effort to destroy, which seemed so awful to its objects, especially as their conscience was bad, led at once to the revelation of the doom of the destroyers. The confederacy came to naught. The Syrian chief would not avail to shield more guilty Ephraim; for it was sentenced - yea, to be so broken as not to be a people, within sixty-five years; and so it fell out to the letter (2 Kings 17). The chief of Ephraim's capital is paraded before us like his ally in due form and title. Such would each remain, and no more. Who were they to dispute the counsels of God as to David's royal line, let Ahaz be personally faithless and false as he was? God at least is God, and His word shall stand for ever, though surely unbelief shall not be established, whether in Ephraim or in Judah. God's

people, God's king; how inexcusable, if such failed in faith!

One can understand why rationalists cavil at the sixty-five years, challenge its accuracy, and reason on its being no answer to the anxiety of Ahaz. It does prove how specific is prophecy, and this beyond the present moment; for it is the exact point when Ephraim, suffering repeated blows, was not only swept away but excluded from the land by Esarhaddon's importation of foreigners. It opens the way for the great prediction still farther off. For this was only the prelude to the weightier announcement that follows. "And Jehovah spoke again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask for thee a sign from Jehovah thy God: ask it in the depth or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt Jehovah" (vv 10-12). Alas! how often the hypocrisy of unbelief thus essays to hide its contempt of Jehovah; and through presumption, which really despises the word of His grace, assumes the garb of superior reverence and humility. The prophet, however, sees through the cheat put forward by an evil heart of unbelief, and calls now on the house of David to hear, not alone his reproof, but what the Lord Himself was to give. Ahaz shrank from God even in His goodness. Flesh never trusts God. It is bent on its own will and instinctively avoids grace, which must assert and give effect to the will of God.

Ahaz did not like God to draw too near. God answered it by Immanuel - God with us. "And he said, Hear then, house of David. [Is it] a small matter for you to weary men, that ye weary also my God? Therefore will Jehovah Himself give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel. Curds and honey shall he eat, that he may

know to refuse the evil and to choose the good" (vv. 13-15) Was it not the most marvellous grace so to promise to such a man? Yet in truth grace condemns unbelief and all other sin as the law never did or could. Had Ahaz asked any sign within his range of earth and heaven, how immeasurably short of God's! If man refuses to ask through unbelief, God fails not to give a sign for His own glory: the virgin's Son, the woman's Seed, Immanuel! What thoughts, feelings, and facts cluster here together! What grace and truth, God and man united in one person! The security of David's royal line and rights, how much more than the predicted ruin of plotting Ephraim, in the presence of the sign, the truth of truths - God with us! Yet was it the assurance, if its grandeur betokened other and higher glories, that no conspiracy could prosper which struck at the Root and Offspring of David.

It is well known that the Jews have made desperate efforts to evade this luminous testimony to the Incarnation in their own prophet. First they exaggerate the difference between "almah" and "bethulah". (confessedly the latter is the more common word for virgin, for the former occurs in not more than six passages beside the one before us. But it is certain that in Joel 1. 8 "b'thulah" is employed for a young married woman, which is never the case with "almah"; see also Deut. 22:19. For the argument on Prov. 30:19, 20 is quite invalid to prove it synonymous with an adulterous woman. In the present instance the context requires the sense of virgin with the utmost precision; for in a young married woman's bearing a son there is no sign or wonder. It was from the first known that the Deliverer of man from the serpent-enemy of the race must be born of

woman in some distinctive way; it was known that He must be also son of Abraham, in the line of Isaac and Jacob, of Judah and David. It is now narrowed to a virgin therefore, by necessary implication, of that royal house. The virgin should be pregnant and bear Him; a sign indeed! in one sense explained, in another enhanced, by the capital truth that He should be God - of divine nature as truly as the woman's Seed. The virgin's Son is Immanuel, the Lord Jehovah, Whose glory the prophet had seen in connection with the preservation of a holy seed, spite of their repeated desolations. Thus the person of the Messiah, and specifically the solution of the enigma of His divine being, yet in association with the family of David, is fully cleared up.

Hence the Septuagint (a version made before the dispute arose) very properly gives here (as in Gen. 24:43) ἡ παρθένος, whereas Aquila and Symmachus chose νεᾶνις. But it is plain that even the latter cannot get rid of the truth intended in the context; and the wild interpretations of some Jews and all Rationalists prove how hard set they are to evade its truth. In Solomon's Song (6:8), where the Septuagint translates the Hebrew term as νεάνιδες the strict meaning of virgins is certain; for it is distinguished from βασίλισσαι and παλλαχαί, and, like our word "maidens," can only be used as "virgins," as Rashi seems to allow in his comment on chapter 1. 3. Nor can there well be a more glaring instance of an offensive prejudice than Gesenius' abandonment of the evident source of the word in "alam", to "hide,"6 in order to justify a more vague origin from an Arabic source.

Again, the most recent Jewish version known to me, that of Isaac Leeser, renders the article by the

demonstrative. This is illegitimate. The object clearly is to refer the person in question to a young person then present. Nevertheless Mr. Leeser is more candid in his rendering of “harah” than some of his brethren and their rationalistic followers; for he, like Rashi before him, correctly renders it “shall conceive,” not “is with child.” Probably the latter considered the prophet’s wife to be in question, and the child to be the same as Maher-shalal-hashbaz. Here the Rabbis are in conflict. Thus Kimchi held that the young woman could not be Isaiah’s wife (for she must then have been designated the prophetess, as in chap. 8:3), and therefore conceived her to be the wife of Ahaz, and imagined for them an unknown son named Immanuel. Aben Ezra is at issue with both; for he held it to be a third son of the prophetess, and so rather approached Rashi; but with Kimchi he held the sign to be the child’s eating cream and honey as soon as born. No more words are needed to expose such views. Even Kimchi disposes of Isaiah and the prophetess by asking how then the land could be called Immanuel’s land.7 Manifestly the Jews do not agree, save in opposing the only interpretation which carries with it a clear and noble sense, yet to be the joy of repentant Israel. The notion that Hezekiah was the virgin’s son is wholly inadmissible; for as Ahaz reigned sixteen years, and he himself was twenty-five years of age when he began to reign, he must have been a boy at least eight years old before his father’s reign began; and hence no prediction of his birth could have been made by Isaiah to Ahaz already on the throne. There is not a hint in scripture of Ahaz taking another wife after his accession and the announcement; still less is there room for a personage so wonderful, to say the least, as the Immanuel to be born, Who should altogether eclipse

Hezekiah and break off the yoke of the Assyrian from the neck of Israel, the glorious person to bring in the glorious state promised in Isa. 9:6, 7.

It is as plain as can be on the face of these chapters that Shear-jashub (= the remnant shall return) was already born, and was the prophet's companion, as we see at the beginning of Isa. 7. Not less plain is it that Maher-shalal-hash-baz (= hasten prey, speed spoil, Isa. 8) was to be born of the prophetess. Both distinctly set forth the great events of undying interest to Israel, the one pledging the return of the remnant, the other intimating the Assyrian attack and its consequences. Why trust the Assyrian who should spoil the holy land? Why dread the kings who were so soon to be swept away? But between the two comes a wholly different promise, the virgin's Son, excluding in all fairness of exposition both the king and the prophet with their children. His name Immanuel (God with us) speaks incomparably better things; and it reappears after the prophet's second son, and even after the horrors represented by his name, when devastation had done its worst. But woe to those who meddle with Thy land, O Immanuel! Israel, and Judah, and David's house may too justly bring down the chastening, and "the king" in the land at the end be yet worse than the unworthy politician who then held the sceptre. The ruin may seem complete, deliverance hopeless; but Immanuel! that is, God is with us. Such is the general outline. Further details are yet to be given in their place. We shall see that the following chapters, both in the extent and nature of Israel's distress and evil, the changed relation of God to His people, and above all the glorious interposition of Immanuel, go far beyond any present or proximate encouragement to Israel (though

there was this of course), and look on to days still future and quite distinct from anything meanwhile accomplished by Christ for the Christian or the church.

Nothing can be more apposite than “the sign” Jehovah gave, little as the feeble and self-willed Ahaz might appreciate it. For the coalition of the king of Israel with him of Syria was to depose the house of David and set up Ben-Tabeal over Judah. Man would have counted it enough to promise that his son Hezekiah, and his son, and so on, should succeed; and this would have been much to comfort one who simply confided in a promise through a divinely sent prophet. But as howsoever many the promises of God, in Christ is the Yea, so through Him too is the Amen for glory to God by us. Hence for the Jew all is made to centre in the Messiah. Not merely shall a remnant return, but the Seed of promise, the virgin’s Son, be born. Put this birth as far off as you please from the time of Ahaz, only thereby do you render more conspicuous the voice of God in prophecy and the sure mercies of David. The righteous covenant of God would not fail to judge what an Ahaz and a Manasseh, a Jehoiakim, a Jehoiachin, and a Zedekiah would sow, spite of a faithful Hezekiah or a godly Josiah. But Immanuel was an indefectible assurance that no confederacy could put down David’s house finally. Messiah, Son of David, is the divine guarantee. The virgin must bear Him of that stock; the virgin’s Son must also be, in some true though mysterious way, God Himself. Immanuel ensures that God’s purpose of blessing shall stand and be established for ever.

It has been observed that the “son” Immanuel, in ver. 14 appears not to be “the youth” of ver. 16; which last refers rather to Shear-jashub, who for this reason seems

to have accompanied the prophet. And it is pertinent to observe that the Hebrew here is neither “son” nor “child” strictly, but “the youth” or “lad”. “For before the youth knoweth to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land, because of whose two kings thou art alarmed, shall be forsaken (Cf. Isa. 6:11). Jehovah will bring upon thee and upon thy father’s house days which have not come since the day when Ephraim turned away from Judah - the king of Assyria” (vv. 16, 17). Great as the disaster had been under Jeroboam, a greater was at hand, with triumph in the end. It will be noticed, accordingly, that here we have Isaiah turning from “the house of David,” “ye” and “you” to “thou” etc. that is Ahaz. Compare vers. 13, 14 with 16, 17. And it is certain that the prophet’s child Shear-jashub had the character of a “sign” (see Isa. 8:18), though and of course very distinct from God’s great sign, the virgin’s Son. From verse 16 the king was to learn, that before the youth (who appears almost certainly to be Shear-jashub) arrived at years of discretion, the allied kings must disappear from the scene. And so they did: for three years more scarce passed when the kings of Israel and Syria fell before the treachery or might of their enemies.

It is only fair to add that some Christians, who fully see the Incarnation here, understand all the verses (14-16) to refer to Immanuel. Some even go so far as to accept the notion of certain Rabbis that the prophet in spirit beholds the virgin already pregnant, on the principle of prophecy anticipating the fact sometimes as though present. Others again, by the youth or lad of v. 16, understand any youngling, not one in particular. but whatever be the shade of difference in detail, the unique fact stands indelible in its majestic outline.

The difficulty urged as to “the land” which should be forsaken, whose two kings were an object of abhorrence or alarm to Ahaz, is imaginary. The land or ground “adamah” is not at all restricted to the sense of a single country. It is a word susceptible of considerable variety of meaning, as the context may require, from land or ground in the narrowest sense, to an entire country or several countries, or even to the superficial world at large the habitable earth. Thus in “all the families of the earth” its force is extended comprehensively; and here the two kings define it as the land, not of one only, but of them both. compare as to this Isa. 8:4, “For before the child [Maher-shalalhash-baz] shall have knowledge to cry, My father and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria.” See also 2 Kings 15:29, 30; 2 Kings 16:9. The “two kings” would seem to be, therefore those of Syria and Samaria or Israel, and “the land,” that which pertained to each. The Messianic interpretation of ver. 14 rests on an irrefragable basis, whether or not it be continued to verses 15, 16, and the application of the two kings to those of Israel and Syria.

Should guilty Ahaz and Judah, then, go unpunished? In no wise, as the prophet proceeds to let him know. “And it shall come to pass in that day, [that] Jehovah will hiss for the fly that [is] in the uppermost part of the streams of Egypt, and for the bee that [is] in the land of Assyria; and they shall come and settle all of them in the desolate valleys, and in the holes of the rocks, and on all thorn-bushes, and on all the pastures” (vv. 18, 19). The faith of Hezekiah might stay the execution of Judah’s judgement, and the king of Assyria was rebuked for a season. But even Josiah, faithful as he was, suffered for his rash

opposition to “the fly that is at the end of the streams of Egypt”; and “the bee that is in the land of Assyria” stung yet more fiercely at the summons of Jehovah. “In that day will Jehovah with a razor hired beyond the river, with the king of Assyria, shave the head and the hair of the feet, yea, it will also consume the beard. And it shall come to pass in that day, [that] a man shall nourish a young cow, and two sheep. And it shall come to pass for the abundance of milk [that] they shall give, he shall eat curds: for curds and honey shall every one eat [that is] left in the land. And it shall come to pass in that day, [that] every place where were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings shall become briars and thorns. With arrows and with bow shall they come thither, because the whole land shall become briars and thorns. And all the hills that were hoed with the hoe, thither they will not come for fear of briars and thorns; but it shall be for the sending forth of oxen, and for the treading of sheep” (vv. 20-25). The character of Israel’s land should thus be wholly changed; and so complete is the desolation ensuing, that the owner of a young cow and two sheep would find the amplest range for his scanty flock in the wilderness that succeeded to the rich cornfields of Palestine, and himself be fed on the nourishment proper to wandering hordes, not on the food of cultivated land. What a picture! Yes, and the best of vineyards (compare Cant. 8:11) becomes a bed of briars and thorns; and men cannot pass unprotected by bows and arrows; and the carefully tended hills are turned into a place for oxen and lesser cattle. So dark as well as minute are the lines in which the sorrowful change in Juda is set before her king.

Thus the league Ahaz dreaded came to nothing; but the Assyrian on whom he leaned became the rod for the guilty king and people. God will be the refuge of His people, and turns the resource of unbelief into their scourge. Here the Assyrian pursues his sweeping ravages unchecked for a season. The figure of shaving as with a razor is expressive and obvious; but here it is carried out into striking details. It is not the head only that is thus stripped bare, but the least and lowest and scantiest parts of the body politic; as the beard represents that which in feelings then prevalent was most sensitive of dishonour. The closing verses set forth a vivid picture of the results of spoliation, where an agricultural people are reduced to a handful of stragglers living on pastoral produce that cost little or no labour. We must not confound a land flowing with milk and honey, the normal state of the land and people, and a man here or there keeping a young cow and two sheep, yet from that scanty stock finding such abundance of milk as to eat curds or butter. No corn, wine, or oil; no grapes or olives, figs or pomegranates; no exchange of harvest or stock produce for commodities amidst a numerous and thriving population; but thorns and briars where had been the richest vineyards, and one going thither with arrows and the bow; and what was once sedulously tilled consigned to cattle great or small.

Isaiah 8

We have already the two great parties of which the prophecy treats, Immanuel and the Assyrian. The virgin should conceive a Son - Messiah, Immanuel; Jehovah should bring upon the unworthy son of David the king of

Assyria, to whom alone he had looked for succour. The humblest Jew ought to have cried to Jehovah.

In the chapter before us now we have other and fuller information vouchsafed of Jehovah. “And Jehovah said unto me, Take thee a great tablet, and write upon it with the pen of man, for Maher-shalal-hash-baz. And I took (or will take) unto me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah. And I went unto the prophetess; and she conceived, and bare a son. Then said Jehovah unto me, Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz” (vv. 1-3). This is explained to Isaiah and by him, “For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and My mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria” (v. 4). And all this, as the inspired history proves, was fulfilled to the letter.

But there is more, “And Jehovah spoke again unto me, saying, Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that flow softly, even rejoicing in Rezin and in Remaliah’s son, therefore behold the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory. And he shall mount up over all his channels, and go over all his banks; and he shall sweep on into Judah; and he shall overflow and go farther, he shall reach [even] to the neck; and the out-stretching of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Emmanuel” (vv.5-8). We are here in the presence of the scenes of the latter day, whatever type in the measure of accomplishment near at hand. The water of Shiloah being despised, there must come the far different waters of the Assyrian and these all but overwhelmingly, when He (whose Incarnation had been announced to the unbelieving Ahaz as God’s sign in

mercy) shall at length appear to vindicate His land. The Assyrian proudly fills the land, reaching even “to the neck”; yet he is not merely checked and put to shame, but utterly and for ever broken in Immanuel’s land. Compare Micah 5:3-6; for the mind of the Spirit is one, and scripture cannot be in vain.

The people here had no faith, any more than the king in the preceding scene. Both of them despised the ways and the promises of God. Their confidence, as their fear, was man. If Ahaz cowered before the two tails of the smoking firebrands, as Jehovah contemptuously designated the fierce anger of the combined kings of Israel and Syria, the people refused the softly flowing streams of Shiloah. Just would be their retribution. The impetuous river, the Assyrian, should rise to overflowing and well-nigh overwhelm the land.

But is it not “Thy land, O Immanuel”? Assuredly; and whatever be the king, whatever the people, whatever the needed humbling of them both, will not God avenge the insult to Him Who, when reviled, reviled not again? He is not deaf to the cry of His elect: how does He feel for Immanuel and Immanuel’s land? Did the people associate themselves? They might spare themselves the trouble; they shall be broken. Did all they of far countries gird themselves? If they fear not, let them hear their sentence of Jehovah. “Rage, ye peoples, and ye shall be broken in pieces. And give ear, all ye distant parts of the earth. Gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, and it shall come to naught; speak a word, and it shall not stand; for God [is] with us [Immanuel]” (vv. 9, 10). Immanuel is far more and other than Shear-jashub.

This opens the door for pointing out the path of faith for the godly, Jehovah Himself the sole and sure resource, the one object of reverence and fear in a day of manifold evil and thickening danger. “For Jehovah spoke thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me not to walk in the way of this people, saying, Say ye not, Confederacy (or conspiracy), of everything of which this people shall say, Confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be in dread. Jehovah of hosts, him shall ye sanctify; and [let] him [be] your fear, and [let] him [be] your dread. And he will be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken and snared and taken. Bind thou up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait for Jehovah that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him. Behold, I and the children whom Jehovah hath given me [are] for signs and for wonders in Israel from Jehovah of hosts who dwelleth in mount Zion” (vv 11-18).

Now it is certain that those “disciples,” who had pre-trusted in the Christ (Eph. 1:12), while the mass of the Jews rejected Him, as alas! they do still, became at Pentecost the nucleus of Christianity, and were “added together daily” by the Lord, and formed “their own company” (Acts 4:23), distinctly called “the church” (Acts 5:11) thenceforward. But this heavenly transformation is quite omitted here, and left as a secret to be made known in the New Testament. The prophet looks onward to the accomplishment of their hopes as Israel for the earth under the Messiah in the latter day. In neither the Old Testament is it Israel transferred to

the church, nor in the New Testament the church incorporating Israel by-and-by. But the church itself, as Christ's body, is in no way revealed here. It is left as a heavenly secret to be revealed to the holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit in the New Testament. And we pass over from the godly remnant at our Lord's first advent to the troublous and dark scene which precedes the day of His appearing at the end of this age. This, which is the evident and simple truth of the passage, cuts up by the root the allegorizing fancy that Judah or Israel means the church. In fact, they never mean it but the ancient people of Jehovah reserved, through the just chastisement of their sins, to be His people blessed in sovereign mercy in His day of blessing for all the families of the earth. The church is called out of the world for heavenly glory. To identify two bodies so distinct and contrasted is to lose the definite truth of each and of both.

Meanwhile the prophet believes in what Jehovah made known, whether in judgement of the mass, or in mercy to the remnant. It is a Gentile thought, deserving of all reprobation, that prophecy was given only to be believed and understood when, being fulfilled, it then became history. There is a remnant always that believes; and they gather thereby present cheer in the midst of sorrow. In truth, to be thus in felt and confessed weakness, to be cast therefore on "Jehovah of hosts Himself," is really, spite of all appearance to the eyes and reasonings of men, to be master of the situation. Even in a still more blessed way the apostle could take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake. "Most gladly (as he had said before) will I rather glory in mine

infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me." But here we listen to the prophet, who assures us of the final triumphant deliverance of Israel. There is connection with present facts, and looking onward through the dreary circumstances of the desolate remnant, till Jehovah rises up and settles all for their deliverance in the destruction of every foe. The united strength of their enemies should be vain. What those who feared Jehovah needed was neither a confederacy nor alarm at such as trusted in it, but to sanctify Jehovah, and make Him their sanctuary. Yet He should be a stone of stumbling, even to both the houses of Israel, yea, a gin and snare to Jerusalem itself.

It is clear, then, that here we have not only the nations who would have swallowed up Israel doomed to a total overthrow, but the truth so strange and unpalatable (save to Gentile conceit) long after, of Israel too in all its extent stumbling at the stone of stumbling - their own Jehovah-Messiah. And withal, in the midst are seen a feeble few cleaving to His testimony, and owned as His disciples, while Jehovah hid His face from the people as a whole. They become a separate remnant, when the mass stumble, fall, and are broken, snared and taken. Hence, in Heb. 2:12, 13, the Holy Spirit does not hesitate to cite v. 18 with other scriptures (Ps. 16; Ps. 22), to prove the sanctified and the Sanctifier "all of one." For indeed He is not ashamed to call them brethren; and this, now in Christianity, while the nation is given over to blindness and unbelief.

Surely in presence of such a prophecy, more than seven centuries before it began to be fulfilled, men ought to be ashamed of their cavils. How overlook so plain a key to the light of God with Christ's disciples, while the Jews

have stumbled at the stumbling-stone, and Jehovah hides His face from the house of Jacob? Yet the Jews shall yet understand these signs and wonders when they bow their stiff neck to their rejected Messiah.

The closing verses show their exceeding iniquity and their impious recourse to the powers of darkness in their own evident want of light, as they despised and departed from the law and the testimony of Jehovah. The effect is intense misery, audacious rage, and blasphemy of their King and their God, in all the agony of despair. “And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits and unto the wizards, that chirp and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? on behalf of the living [should they seek] unto the dead? To the law and to the testimony! if they speak not according to this word, surely there is no morning for them. And they shall pass through it, hardly distressed and hungry: and it shall come to pass that, when they shall be hungry, they will fret themselves, and curse (or by) their king and their God, and turn their faces upward: and they will look unto the earth, and behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and into thick darkness they shall be driven away” (vv. 19-22).

Isaiah 9

“For the gloom [is] not [to be] to her that was in anguish. At first he degraded the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but later he honoured, the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the nations.8 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them the light hath shone” (vv. 1, 2). The citation of this in Matt. 4:14-16 gives much insight. There the fulfilment

applies to the presence and ministry of the Lord in that region so despised, as far as the people are concerned. Let the hand of oppression be yet more grievous than had ever pressed upon them; yet would there be this difference (and how verified during our Lord's first appearing in their midst!), that among the darkest and most despised in the land should spring up a great light. It was in Galilee, not Jerusalem, that the grace of Jesus shone. And so in the last days: the Galilean character attaches to the future remnant. Jerusalem will be the prey of the worst delusions and deadliest error. But the darkest and coldest night precedes a dawn of joy and glory. And so it will be for Israel when He Who was despised and their stumbling-block, but withal Jehovah the shield and sanctuary of the weak yet godly remnant, shall rise and shine in all His effulgence on His people.

"Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast9 increased their joy: they joy before thee as with the joy of harvest, as they rejoice when they divide the spoil. For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian. For every boot of him that is shod for the tumult, and the garment rolled in blood, shall be for burning, fuel for fire. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name is called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Father of eternity (or the coming age), Prince of Peace. To the increase of the government and to peace [there shall be] no end upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with judgement and with righteousness from henceforth even for ever. The jealousy of Jehovah of hosts will perform this" (vv. 3-7).

The efforts of Jews and rationalists to shake this striking prophecy of the Messiah are not violent merely but pitiable. Thus some of them turn it: He Whose name is Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,10 Father of eternity, shall call him (Hezekiah) Prince of peace. Even here the witnesses do not agree: for the Talmud, which applies it in the same way, boldly gives all eight titles to the son of Ahaz. But the construction is also, as Dr. McCaul pointed out, contrary to Hebrew idiom, which requires that "shemen(?)", referring to the person named, should be placed between the name and the person or thing named (see Gen. 16:15; Gen. 21:3; Gen. 22:14; Ex. 2:22; Ruth 4:17; 1 Sam. 1:20; 2 Sam. 12:25). The Talmudical application of all to Hezekiah is too exaggerated if not impious for some modern Jews who follow Rashi. But even their attribute of Prince of peace to that pious king is in the face of all the scriptural account of his troubled reign. Others, like Mr. Leeser, translate it "Counsellor of the mighty God, of the everlasting Father, prince of peace," and think it important to note that it alludes to a child already born, contrary to his own version of Isa. 7:14, and forgetful of the habit of the prophets to speak of things that are not as though they were (realising them in prophetic vision, but giving enough in the context to prove that they are future).

But the Targum supports the proper Messianic reference, and proves that among the ancient Jews no doubt was entertained that the prophet spoke only of the Messiah. The desolation of the land of old by the Assyrian will be renewed by the last representative of the great northern and eastern power, to whom the prophets really look onward. How vain then for Ahaz to seek confederacy with the Assyrian of his day!

Confederacies were of old, confederacies will be pre-eminently in the last days; but the people of God must not trust and need not fear them. Let Jehovah be their refuge and their sanctuary; the godly remnant, His disciples, will need it for the awful and unexampled troubles at the end of this age. Yet the light of Galilee will appear for them. Immanuel, because of Whose rejection Jehovah had so long hidden His face from the house of Jacob (what a comment on Jewish history since Titus took Jerusalem, yea, since the cross!), will cause light to spring up among the despised but godly ones of the people, as at Christ's first coming. In that day, when the climax of trial is reached, and the righteous seem hopelessly broken by the pride and blasphemy of the apostate mass of the Jews in confederacy with the apostate head of the western powers to hold off the Assyrian, Jehovah of Israel will display Himself their deliverer, but prove no other than their own crucified Messiah now to reign over them in power and glory and peace for ever. The reader will find abundant confirmation of all this in the context, and by a careful study of Isa. 10, Isa. 11, where he will find the Assyrian once more, and his destruction followed by the reign of the victorious Messiah. Many who love the truth are, grievous to say, to be censured for a too eager conversion of these scriptures to their own relationship with the Lord. Now the Old Testament gives us but common divine principles for all saints; in the New should we look for, as there only can we find, specific direction and instruction in what is properly Christian. Such an evident bias, and the plain perversion which results, do incalculable mischief to the Jews, as well as afford ready occasion of attack to unbelief where mind is exercised on scripture. In such interpretations they can

easily prove the popular views of Christendom erroneous, and hence harden themselves in their own deadly error against the truth which the least enlightened Christian knows he has from God.

Now the Messiah rejected by the Jews sits on the throne of God His Father, in contrast with His own throne, which He is to take another day. Neither David nor any other sat on the Father's throne. The very notion is not only ignorance but profanity. At His coming again He will sit upon the throne of David according to the prophecy before us and many more. Then will be fulfilled the latter part of Psalm 2. The nations will be shattered, not converted (whatever mercy may follow), and Zion rejoice with gladness everlasting. The transition here is plain and immediate from the first advent in grace and humiliation to the second in power and glory. The heavenly exaltation of Christ, and of the church in union with Him, is passed over.

The hour of freedom and victory for Israel is come; and Jehovah it is Who has done all. But it is not as in ordinary war: the noise of human conflict and bloodshed shall end, greave and war-cloak be for burning and fuel of fire. And no wonder, when He stands out their Kinsman-Redeemer, the true but once rejected Son of David, Who is their boast now, with every name of power and peace and blessing, with an endless reign before Him, established with righteousness and judgement from hence forth and for ever. Truly "the zeal (or jealousy) of Jehovah of hosts will perform this."

The prophet now resumes the dirge of judgement on the nation in general, begun in Isa. 5, and interrupted by the two-fold episode of Isa. 6, and of chaps. Isa. 7; Isa. 8;

Isa. 9:1-7. This last gave us the special development of Jehovah's ways with His people: the revelation of His glory in Christ, with its effects in judgement and mercy; the Incarnation, or Immanuel, the virgin's Son, the stay of David's house and hope of Israel, spite of the land desolated by the Assyrian; then the reappearance of the Assyrian, now that it is Immanuel's land, and the overthrow of all the Gentiles associated with him, whatever his great but temporary successes even in the pleasant land. Next, is an inner moral view of the people when (strange to say) Jehovah should be for a stone of stumbling to both the houses of Israel, but a sure sanctuary for a godly remnant, "My disciples," who would be for signs and wonders in Israel at the very time Jehovah hides His face, as He is clearly doing now, from the house of Jacob. All closes in darkness and trouble such as never was for the mass, and yet with light for the despised Galileans, as at the Lord's first advent. So just before the nation is multiplied, the oppression is broken, the victory won not by human sword but by burning and fuel of fire; and He Who is not more surely the virgin's Son, the woman's Seed, than the mighty God, the Prince of peace, establishes His blessed kingdom from henceforth even for ever.

Here we take up again (compare Isa. 5:25) the general strain, but with allusion to some of the instruction, as for instance to Rezin and the Assyrian, in the parenthetical part. Vers. 8-12 contain the renewed announcement of divine displeasure, which began with the sin of Jerusalem and Judah, as was fitting; now it passes to Ephraim and Samaria. "The Lord sent a word unto Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel. And all the people shall know, even Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria,

that say in pride and stoutness of heart, The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycamores are cut down, but we will replace [them] with cedars. And Jehovah will set up the adversaries of Rezin against him, and stir up his enemies, the Syrians before and the Philistines behind; and they shall devour Israel with open mouth." It is clear that as yet the ten rebellious tribes are the object of judgement, and emphatically their pride of heart in despising Jehovah's rebuke and confiding in their own powers. For this is their fond hope and vainglorious arrogance, turning their breach into an occasion of greater strength and display than ever. "The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycamores are cut down, but we will replace [them] with cedars." But here came the retributive dealing of God. Had Syria's king, Rezin, joined them in unholy league against Judah? "Therefore Jehovah shall set up the adversaries of Rezin against him, and join his enemies together; the Syrians before and the Philistines behind; and they shall devour Israel with open mouth." So it ever is. The unfaithful people seek the world's alliance against those with whom God's testimony is, but prove ere long that the friendship of the world is not only enmity against God but destruction to themselves. "For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand [is] stretched out still."

The next view of their judgement (vv. 13-17) is not so much judicial retribution from without, but, because His chastening was slighted, Jehovah's giving up Israel to utter internal demoralization. "But the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek Jehovah of hosts. And Jehovah will cut off from Israel head and tail, palm-branch and rush, in one day. The

elder and honourable, he [is] the head; and the prophet that teacheth lies, he [is] the tail. For the leaders of this people mislead [them]; and [they that are] led by them are swallowed up." The ruin is universal in one day on all classes, from the highest to the lowest of Israel, "palm-branch and rush": all plunged into common destruction, leaders and led. What a picture! and how much more dismal and hopeless, when the righteous Lord, indignant at the abounding falsehood and wrong under the highest pretensions to sanctity alike shuts up His affections, and even His compassion! "Therefore the Lord will not rejoice in their young men, neither will he have mercy on the fatherless and widows." Neither youth and vigour are pleasant to Him, nor can orphanage or widowhood touch His heart longer in a people so depraved. "For everyone [is] a hypocrite and an evil-doer, and every mouth speaketh folly. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand [is] stretched out still."

Then follows a most vivid picture of wickedness burning like fire; of Jehovah's wrath consuming the land; and of the reckless unsparing violence of brother against brother. "For wickedness burneth as the fire; it devoureth the briars and thorns: yea, it kindleth in the thickets of the forest, and they roll upward in thick clouds of smoke. Through the wrath of Jehovah of hosts is the land burnt up: the people also are as the fuel of fire; no man spareth his brother. And he shall snatch on the right hand, and be hungry; and he shall eat on the left hand, and they shall not be satisfied: they shall eat every man the flesh of his own arm: Manasseh, Ephraim; and Ephraim, Manasseh; [and] they together shall be against Judah. For all this his anger is not turned away,

but his hand [is] stretched out still" (vv. 18-21). The nearest of the ten should devour each other, and both Judah. Nevertheless, it is the earthly judgement of God. We must look elsewhere to find the still more awful eternal judgement which awaits the impenitent and unbelieving in the resurrection of judgement. For the full revelation of this, however, we must turn to the New Testament, where the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men that hold the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18); as indeed the Lord in Mark 9:43-48 had solemnly shown in giving an everlasting force to language drawn from the earthly judgement of Isa. 66:24.

Isaiah 10

The last of these disciplinary inflictions is given in Isa. 10. Here (vv. 1-4) it is the unrighteousness of the judges, who stood in the place of God Himself, and were called Elohim or gods (Ps. 82:6), but who most grievously misrepresented His character and wronged His people, specially the defenceless. "Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and unto the writers that prescribe oppression; to turn aside the needy from judgement, and to take away the right from the afflicted of my people, that widows may be their prey, and [that] they may rob the fatherless! And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation [which] shall come from far? to whom will ye flee for help! and where will ye leave your glory? "And this is His sentence on them: "Without me they shall bow down under the prisoners, and they shall fall under the slain." The most exalted shall be most abased; and those shall fare worst whom it least became to turn their high estate and large power

to God-dishonouring greed, and to oppression of the weak and wretched. “For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand [is] stretched out still.”

But now, from verse 5, we enter on a most weighty change. The Assyrian desolator comes up once more. It is his final working which is chiefly in the mind of the Holy Ghost; as indeed this is the grand catastrophe and last trouble of Jacob, and in contrast with the oft-repeated formula of still continuing unexhausted wrath. Now, on the contrary, in this proud enemy of Israel we have the end of Jehovah’s anger. “The day of visitation” is there, the “desolation from far” is come. The indignation ceases and Jehovah’s anger in their destruction. His anger now is turned away and His arm stretched out no more. The rod should be broken, the scourge destroyed, as the chastening work is done.

Again, it is of great moment to apprehend clearly that the Antichrist, or man of sin, is a totally distinct personage. The commentators from Eusebius to Horsley, to pass by a crowd of others who confound the two, are herein inexcusably careless of the Scriptures. For it is very clear that there will be a wilful king in the city and land who will set himself up as Messiah and Jehovah in His temple, received as such by the apostate Jews; and that, altogether opposed to this Antichrist in Jerusalem who is in league with the western power, will arise another chief, an external antagonist of the Jews, who is the Assyrian, or Daniel’s king of the north, so often occurring in the prophecies. Of him Sennacherib, to a certain extent, was a type.

The Assyrian then was first used as a rod to chastise Israel. “Ho, Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, the staff in

whose 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 seize the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. But he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but [it is] in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few." But he owned not God, "For he saith, [Are] not my princes all kings? [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 their graven images exceeded those of Jerusalem and of Samaria), shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her images?" (vv. 5-11). His own doom is therefore sealed.

"And it shall come to pass [that], when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon Mount Zion and upon 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, for I am prudent; and I have removed the bounds of the peoples, and have robbed their treasures, and like a valiant man I have put down them that sit [on thrones]; and my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the peoples; and as one gathereth forsaken eggs, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or chirped.

"Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? Shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake them that lift it up; as if the staff should lift up [him that is] not wood. Therefore shall the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire. And the light of

Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame; and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briars in one day; and it shall consume the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field, both soul and body; and they shall be as when a standard-bearer [or, a sick man] fainteth. And the rest of the trees of his forest shall be few, yea, a child may write them" (vv. 12-19). It is the closing scene. The Lord has not even yet performed His whole work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem. Nay, He will not have done it as long as the Antichrist will be in the land. He having been disposed of by His epiphany from heaven, the Assyrian still remains to be punished. The former is the enemy of the heavenly rights and divine glory of Christ (denying the Father and the Son), but will be destroyed by His sudden shining forth from heaven; the latter dares to oppose His earthly rights, and will be dealt with accordingly when He is come to reign over the earth.

"And it shall come to pass in that day [that] the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again rely upon him that smote them; but they shall rely upon Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. A remnant shall return, the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God. For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, [only] a remnant of them shall return: the consumption determined shall overflow in righteousness. For the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, will make a consumption even determined in the midst of all the land" (vv. 20-23). Then indeed Israel's unbelief shall for ever pass away: Israel will trust no more in an arm of flesh, be it Egyptian, Assyrian, or what not. The slaughter of Midian and the manner of Egypt give the characteristic patterns of the future deliverance.11

“Therefore thus saith the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian: though he smite thee with the rod, and lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt. For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall be accomplished, and mine anger, in their destruction. And Jehovah of hosts will stir up against him a scourge, as in the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb: and his rod [shall be] over the sea, and he will lift it up after the manner of Egypt. And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall depart from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing” (vv. 24-27). The sign of Shear-jashub is thus made good. The apostle in Rom. 9:27, 28, quotes this prophecy to justify from the Old Testament the fact which is assumed throughout the New Testament that only a remnant of the people had saving relations with God. So it is now under the gospel, as it was after Babylon; and so it will be when the last crisis comes, and the struggles of the Antichrist and the Assyrian, till the Messiah decides all and displays His kingdom in power here below. (Compare Dan. 8:19-25; Dan. 9:26, 27; Dan. 11:36-45; Dan. 12:11)

The chapter closes with a most animated description of the Assyrian’s march down from the north into the utmost nearness to Jerusalem. “He is come to Aiath, he is passed through Migron; at Michmash he layeth up his baggage. They are gone over the pass; they make their lodging at Geba: Ramah trembleth, Gibeah of Saul is fled. Lift up thy voice, daughter of Gallim. Hearken, Laishah. Poor Anathoth! Madmenah is a fugitive the inhabitants of Gebim gather themselves to flee. Yet today [is he] to halt at Nob: he shaketh his hand at the

mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem" (vv. 28-32). In vain, however: he shall come to his end, and none shall help him. "Behold the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, shall lop the boughs with terror; and the high ones of stature [shall be] hewn down, and the haughty [shall be] humbled. And he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one" (vv. 33, 34). The image here employed most appropriately prepares the way for the introduction (in the next and connected chapter) of Messiah, the shoot from the stump of Jesse, and the fruitful sprout to grow from his roots.

Isaiah 11

In contrast with the destruction of the high and haughty Assyrian under the stroke of Jehovah, we have in this chapter a remarkable and full description of the Messiah: first, in a moral point of view; and, next, in His kingdom, its character, and its accompaniments. It is no longer "the rod of His anger," the staff in Whose hand is Mine indignation, but a Branch from Jesse's roots, yet withal the Root of Jesse, Who will infallibly bless both Israel and the Gentiles in that day of the kingdom, though He will bring the lofty low, as well as smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips slay the wicked or lawless one, in order to that wondrous end.

The entire strain is closed with a suited song of praise (Isa. 12) in the lips of Israel, now indeed and for ever blessed of Jehovah, their Holy One in their midst.

"And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots shall bear fruit: and the spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon him, the spirit of

wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah; and his delight will be in the fear of Jehovah: and he will not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness will he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he will smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips will he slay the wicked [one]" (vv. 1-4).

To look and contend for a fulfilment of this prophecy in Hezekiah or Josiah would be idle, and only shows the straits to which the rationalistic enemies of revelation are reduced. No king, let him be ever so pious or glorious, that followed Ahaz, no, nor David nor Solomon in the past, even approached the terms of the prediction either personally or in the circumstances of their reign. Did the "Spirit of Jehovah" rest upon the better of the two when he said, "I shall now perish by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines?" Was it "the Spirit of wisdom and understanding," when he feigned himself mad, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard? Was it "the Spirit of counsel and might," when David amused his credulous host of Gath with his fictitious razzias against the south of Judah, when in truth he was invading the Geshurites, Amalekites, etc., without leaving a human being to tell the tale? Was it the "Spirit of knowledge" that dealt with Absalom? Was the numbering of Israel done in "the fear of Jehovah"? Was the matter of Uriah a proof that "righteousness" was "the girdle of his loins" or "faithfulness" "of his reins"? When was the earth smitten with the rod of any king's

mouth? Or whose lips ever breathed to the destruction of the wicked? And who has seen that wondrous change, depicted in verses 6-9, passing over the fierce beasts and the most timid; and man's lordship owned at length by all, subject and harmonious, even in the person of a babe? Equally impossible, at the least, is it to say that the latter part of the chapter was met by anything resembling its predictions in any era of Israel. The idea of Zerubbabel fulfilling it is preposterous. There was not a single resemblance in that day of small things.

Is it contended, on the other hand, that so glowing a picture of the great King and His kingdom is realised spiritually in the church and in the blessings of the gospel? Without descending so low as the gross pretensions of papal ambition, the spiritual or rather mystical interpretation which suits worldly-minded Christendom finds its expression in Theodoret, or earlier still. This writer sees the apostolic doctrine change earth into heaven, and the picture in verses 6-8 accomplished in kings, prefects, generals, soldiers, artizans, servants, and beggars partaking together of the same holy talk, and hearing the same discourses! Paul with the philosophers at Athens illustrates, according to him, the weaned child putting his hand on the cockatrice's den; as the promise to Peter (Matt. 16:18) answers to the predicted absence of any destructive thing! Jehovah's holy mountain he explains as the loftiness, strength, and immutability of His divine teaching Theodoret justly explodes the folly of applying such a prophecy to Zerubbabel, who was only governor of a few Jews, and in no way whatever of Gentiles; but he offers an alternative hardly preferable in the Acts of the Apostles, or specially in St. Paul's Epistles.

Such an interpretation as this is not only false in fact but injurious and corrupting in principle. It confounds the church with Israel; it lowers the character of our blessing in Christ from heaven to earth; it weakens the word of God by introducing a haziness needful to the existence of such applications; it undermines the mercy and the faithfulness of God, because it supposes that the richest and most unconditional of His promises to Israel are, notwithstanding, taken from them and turned into the wholly different channel of ourselves. If God could so speak and act towards Israel, where is the guarantee for the Christian or the church? The apostle can and does quote from the prophets, and from this very chapter of our prophet (Rom. 15:12), to vindicate the principle, so richly illustrated in the gospel, of God's blessing the Gentiles, and of their glorifying God for His mercy. But the self-same apostle maintains that there is now the revelation of a mystery which was hid from ages and generations, the mystery of Christ and the church, wherein there is neither Jew nor Gentile, in the fullest contrast with the great day when Israel and the nations shall be blessed as such, and in their respective places, under Messiah's reign openly displayed.

In this prophecy, however, as in the Old Testament generally, we see the distinctive blessing of Israel on earth, though there is bright hope for the nations, as well as judgement on all enemies, Jewish or Gentile. All this supposes a state of things essentially differing from God's ways with His church, during which Israel ceases to be the depository of His testimony and promise. For as the natural Jewish branches were broken off from the olive tree and the Gentile wild olive was grafted in, so because of non continuance in God's goodness the

Gentile will be broken off and the natural branches grafted in again; “And so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins” (Rom. 11:26, 27). Meanwhile blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. Then they will hail their rejected Messiah, and the universal blessing of the earth will follow His destruction of their foes as the initiatory act of His kingdom. Of this (not of the gospel, as regards which the Jews are enemies on our account) the chapters speak; and, thus viewed, all flows harmoniously onward both as a whole and in the smallest detail.

There is another decisive proof, furnished by the same apostle Paul in 2 Thess. 2:8, that the chapter applies to a future age as contrasted with the present where the rejected Christ is hid in God and glorified on high. It is beyond controversy that our verse 4 is authoritatively interpreted of the Lord Jesus destroying the lawless one with the breath of His mouth, and annulling him by the shining forth of His presence or coming. A wholly new age of triumphant power in righteous government will be introduced and maintained by the Lord’s appearing, and thus essentially distinguished from this day of grace, while Satan reigns, and those that are Christ’s suffer, yet overcome by faith. We wait for His coming as the close of our pilgrimage here below. They await His appearing as deliverance from imminent destruction, and as the beginning of their allotted place of honour and blessing under His reign, and of all the nations in their measure.

“And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots shall bear fruit.” One cannot but think with others that the allusion to the stem of Jesse is significant. Elsewhere Messiah is viewed as David’s son, or styled David himself. Here He is a Shoot or Rod from the stock of Jesse, and a Branch out of his roots for Israel, and the Root of Jesse for the peoples and nations. There would seem a purpose of drawing attention to the lowly condition into which the royal race should have sunk at the birth of the Christ. It was from that family, when of no account in Israel, that David was anointed for the throne. The prophet designates the rise of a greater than David, not from the glory that had been conferred on the house, but in a way readily suggestive of obscurity. From this stock, lowly of old, lowly once more, sprang the hope of Israel on Whom the Spirit rested without measure; or, as Peter preached, God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power. In Rev. 5 He is said to be the Root of David; in 22 his Root and Offspring.

“And the spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah.” Here, however, it is not in the activity of grace among the sorrows of men and the oppressions of the devil, that we see Jesus, but in view of His government. Thoroughly subject to Jehovah, He rules not according to appearance but righteously in His fear. Such is the effect of the power that rested on Him. And His delight [quick understanding or scent] will be “in the fear of Jehovah; and he will not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness will he judge the poor, and reprove with

equity for the meek of the earth." The Holy Spirit portrays the Messiah's moral fitness for His earthly reign; emphatically His earthly reign, for so it evidently is throughout for every reader who is free from human tradition or prepossession. The Lord Jesus will then do what He refused to do at His first coming. He will judge in equity, and put down oppression, and cause righteousness to flourish in peace. This was in no way His work the first time; and the Christian, as the church, is called not to judge the earth or rule here below, but to suffer with Him, waiting to be glorified and to reign with Him when He returns. We walk by faith, not by sight.

Again, this is confirmed by the latter part of verse 4 already referred to. We need no human comment here, because we have already divine light supplied in 2 Thess. 2:8. The inspired apostle applies it to the Lord's future destruction of the lawless one, the man of sin, the issue of the apostasy of Christendom. It is the same personage, doubtless, that the beloved disciple describes in 1 John 2:22: "Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is the antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son." This latter testimony helps to link all together. 2 Thess. 2 views him specially as the result yet to be manifested of that mystery of lawlessness which was even then working unseen. Isaiah shows, not only the great outside enemy, the Assyrian, judged in Isa. 10, but in Isa. 11:4 the internal enemy, "the wicked," whom the apostates will accept as their Messiah, destroyed by the true Messiah appearing in glory. He is "the lawless" one of Paul: such is the form of his iniquity. Again, 1 John 2. describes him, first, as the denier of the Messianic glory of Jesus; next, in his full character of the antichrist (not only the liar) as denying

the Father and the Son, in other words, the personal glory of Christ as revealed in Christianity.

What deplorable prejudice in men like Jerome, who avail themselves of figurative language (as in branch, rod of His mouth, and girdle) to mystify the vision of earthly change - the restitution of all things! Even such admit the reality of Messiah, as they ought to own that of His reign here below, for heaven is not at all in view; and in order to this the earth is to be smitten by Him Whose word is power, and the lawless one of that day punished finally. Calvin and Hengstenberg would include the hope of a future change by divine power in the material creation (as pledged in Rom. 8:11-22); but this presupposes glory revealed, and the sons of God no longer hidden as now, but manifested with Christ in glory (Col. 3). We have the liberty of grace now, as creation is to be delivered into the liberty of glory then, our own bodies being part of it.

But this proves the mistake of applying the language to spiritual effects now, still more of denying what awaits the earth and its denizens in “that day.” If conversion and the fruit of the Spirit in the heart and life were sought, the supposed figures would ill express the idea. For the wolf and the leopard and the lion are represented as still existing, and contrasted with the lamb and the kid and the calf and the more general “fatling,” but with instincts of prey quite vanished. Spiritually regarded, how strange to represent mankind as thus distinguished when the gospel pronounces all as lost and ungodly on the one hand, and all believers as alike saved, and God’s children on the other! One could understand the metaphor of the wolf becoming a lamb, and perhaps the leopard a kid, if hardly a lion turning

calf or fatling (though the shades become somewhat misty, even for the liveliest fancy). But the actual phraseology forbids all such flights; and as it speaks only of animals, once predaceous, dwelling in peace with the gentlest cattle, it cannot be duly interpreted, save as predictive of facts yet to be made good. Till then faith counts on the power God gives against a state of disorder, as when David saved the lamb, and slew both the lion and the bear, and as figuratively now one may be delivered out of the lion's mouth.

In "that day" will surely be "the regeneration," and the creature will be delivered into a state suited to Christ. An allegorical sense does not consist with the exactitude of the language; the simple grammatical or literal force is in unison with the Old Testament prophecy and New Testament doctrine. For as we were shown the setting aside of the antichrist at the end of this age, we have next a display of the reign of the true Christ and its beneficent effects. "And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the she-bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the adder, and the weaned child shall put forth his hand to the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea" (vv. 5-9).

It is the world or habitable earth to come "whereof we speak" (Heb. 2:5) - not heaven, but earth, and especially

the land of Israel under Him Whose right it is. What ground is there to doubt its plain and punctual accomplishment? Who has ever heard of any serious objection, save for Sadducean minds which know neither the scriptures nor the power of God? Why should it be thought a thing incredible that God should, in honour of the reign of Jesus, change not the face only but the habits and bent of all animated nature, delivering the creature from the bondage of corruption under which it now groans? When the days come, as Jehovah declares they surely must, that the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that sows seed, it is not only the earth that shall answer suitably to His beneficent power, but the animal kingdom also, with the one exception which seems good to Him that does not forget the subtle evil-doer. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all His holy mountain. Even now, when other and deeper questions are before Him, what pity for babes and even for cattle! (See Jonah 4:11)

The Psalms celebrate the great day with songs of joy; the prophets are plain-spoken about it; the apostle Paul distinctly treats it as a settled Christian expectation, as did Peter to the Jews in Acts 3:21, only awaiting the revelation of Christ and of the sons of God along with Him. There is a grievous gap in every scheme and in every heart which does not look for the world's jubilee; without it the earth would only seem made to be spoiled by Satan; whereas to one as to this taught of God, if there were a single creature not put manifestly under the feet of the exalted Son of man, the enemy would be allowed so far to defraud Him of His just reward and supreme rights. In "that day" we shall see (for now we see not yet) all things put under Him: divine judgement

on the quick, executed by Christ, brings it in, as we have gathered from verse 4 compared with 2 Thess. 2:8.

It is either forgotten or explained away, that God has purposed in Himself for the administration of the fullness of times (that is, in the millennial age, or the day of His manifested kingdom) to gather together in one all things in Christ, both those in heaven and those on earth (Eph. 1:9, 10); for the reconciliation will embrace not only those who believe, but all things whether on earth or in heaven (Col. 1:20, 21). Creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8:21). Let those who allegorise the prophets take note that this divine and as yet unfulfilled purpose is plainly laid down in these great Epistles in the New Testament, to which we might add 1 Cor. 15:28 and Heb. 2:9. They cannot deny the literal form of this dogmatic teaching of inspiration. The time spoken of is neither the present state, nor is it eternity, but a blessed period between them which is to last a thousand years. It is strange doctrine to deny truth so clearly revealed; it is strange logic to adduce passages from the Greek and Latin classics, from the so-called Sibylline Oracles, Ferdausi, Ibn Onein, and the Zend-Avesta, as rendering improbable the direct interpretation. For it is certain that among the heathen lingered traditions of a golden age of creation to return another day. The complimentary application of this by a courtly poet is in no way inconsistent with the believer’s hope of a full fruition of God’s word. If it were so, what matters heathen thought, since scripture is clear in holding out such glorious expectations for the earth under the Messiah?

Under Christianity there is according to our Lord (John 4:21-24) no such earthly centre as we see there will be in that day. Even Jerusalem has for this vanished. “Believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet in Jerusalem worship the Father.” The holy places made with hands are now abandoned for the true, even heaven itself, which Christ has entered. Further, it is the hour to worship the Father, of Whom we hear nothing at all as such, nor of worship in spirit and truth. Christianity is wherever the true worshippers adore the Father and the Son in the power of the Spirit. The place on earth is of no moment; only the true object, the true worshippers, and the true principle and power. This only is genuine catholicity.

But this is not all; Israel must be received back in order that the world may thus know life from the dead. “And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse standing as an ensign or banner of the peoples;12 it shall the nations seek: and his resting place shall be glory” (v. 10).

“And it shall come to pass in that day [that] the Lord will 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” (v. 11). Those do the enemy’s work who contend that these scriptures are fulfilled, or even in course of fulfilment. Save the general principle (which is, no doubt, conspicuous in the gospel) - that Gentiles seek and hope for and find eternal blessedness in Christ, it is a scene wholly future. We have the nations and the peoples blessed as such, no less than Israel, but not a syllable about that heavenly body which differs from both. The church of God is to be no longer on earth

but on high in that day when every creature will be in its true place according to divine purpose, because the Lord Christ will then have His rights everywhere incontestably displayed.

The person of the Messiah has been revealed: and we know how truly He was the vessel of the Spirit on earth, and that in Him was displayed every grace which became man toward God - or God toward man in Christ Jesus Himself man, withal God over all blessed for evermore. But He is not yet seated on His own throne nor exercising His public kingdom here below; nor is the remnant of His people yet recovered from north, south, east, and west. Are we therefore to suppose that His arm is shortened? or that He has abandoned His cherished purpose? and that His gifts and calling are subject to repentance? Such is not our God. Is He ours only and not also of the Jews? Yes, theirs also; “And he will set up an ensign for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and they that vex Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim” (vv. 12, 13).

On the one hand it is a pitifully poor fulfilment of this exceeding great and precious promise to suppose all fulfilled in the feeble return from Babylon, when a small part of the Jews went up to Jerusalem with a very few individuals of Ephraim; and their neighbours sank lower and lower under the various imperial powers till Rome ground all down to servitude. No, it is a bright day of great things, not for man only, but for the name of Jehovah on earth. On the other hand, it is not the heavenly mystery of Christ and the church, but the times

of restitution of all things according to prophecy. Nor is it the gospel calling souls out of the world for glory on high, but the earth delivered, Israel saved, and the Gentiles converted, under Messiah's reign, when His rest shall be glory. The moral history of Israel shall be reversed, as decidedly as natural history must be learnt anew for the lower creation. Their old jealousies and mutual enmities, too well known after Solomon, fade away for restored Israel. And as for their plotting neighbours,13 they may reappear, but it is to be put down for ever not less than their mightier foes. "And they shall fly upon the shoulder of the Philistines toward the sea [or westward]; together they shall spoil the sons of the east; they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them" (v. 14).

It is a favourite infidel argument against the literal accomplishment of the chapter, adopted (one grieves to say) by the late Dr. Fairbairn (Prophecy, 272), that the people mentioned in verse 14 have disappeared from the stage of history, and therefore that neither the restoration of Israel nor the events growing out of it can be so understood. But this is sheer unbelief of the power of God and of the reliability of scripture. The God Who will bring His hidden ones of Ephraim out of the darkness that still veils them will disclose the descendants of their old adversaries in due time, and among these of their neighbours, who were not less jealous because nearly related in blood. From the Assyrian, the towering king of the north, Edom and Moab and the chief of the children of Ammon contrive to escape (Dan. 11:41); but not so from the hands of Israel "out of weakness made strong." Jehovah shall be seen

over the sons of Zion, and His arrow shall go forth as the lightning; and the Lord Jehovah shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south (Zech. 9:14): figurative language undoubtedly, but expressive of the divine intervention for Christ's kingdom, which believers in the gospel should be the last to confound with their own mercies, still less to explain away.

Then, in verses 15, 16, we have Jehovah's supernatural dealing with external nature on behalf of His people, when He utterly destroys the tongue of the Egyptian sea, and smites the river into seven streams, so that men may pass dryshod, and there is a highway for the remnant from Assyria, as of old from Egypt. "And Jehovah will utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his scorching wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it into seven streams, and cause [men] to march over dryshod. And there shall be a highway for the remnant of his people, which will remain, from Assyria; like as there was for Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt." In all this latter portion the mystical reading is at utter fault; and greater wonders than in the destruction of Pharaoh's hosts await the final deliverance of Israel from Egypt and from Assyria in the face of a gainsaying and incredulous age.

Short of God's glory established and manifested on the earth, no saint of God should ever rest. It is excellent to serve the living God and our Lord Jesus; it is better still to worship in spirit and truth also, as we wait for His Son from heaven; but the best of all is when He comes and in due time sets up the displayed kingdom, Himself the Heir of all things, and we joint-heirs with Him. For this will be God's glory below as well as above. Even

Pentecostal blessedness, wondrous as it was though transient, did not meet all; and even then the apostle Peter looks for such a result through no action of the Spirit, but through the sending of our Lord Jesus from heaven. Preaching may win souls for heaven; but Christ must come thence to restore all things to God's glory; and this is the chorus which unites all the prophetic choir. Most of all should the Christian have it at heart: for many prophets and kings desired to see what we see, and saw it not; and to hear what we hear, and heard it not. What is it to be of His body, to be of His bride? Least of all should we rest satisfied with anything but Christ exalted over the universe to God's glory. In this chapter is the earthly side of it, as the next is Israel's appropriate song.

Isaiah 12

The song for "that day" concludes this section of our prophet, and is divided into two parts: the first of which (vv. 1-3) is Israel's praise for what God has been and is to itself; the second (vv.4-6) is the call to one another to spread His praise in all the earth, though Zion be still the centre where God dwells. Yet the defiling hand of neology has not spared the entire chapter, which it declares an expletive, added by another writer to the already complete series foregoing, and not even in the tone, style, or phraseology of Isaiah. Now it is plain to any spiritual mind how sensible the loss would be if this most worthy conclusion of praise were lopped off. Everyone ought to see that the change to such a song involves a tone and style and phrase quite different from the grave addresses and denunciations and the solemn

predictions which have preceded, but is the simple and suited sequel of Isa. 11.

“And in that day thou shalt say, I will praise thee, O Jehovah. Though thou hast been angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me. Behold, God [is] my salvation: I will trust and not be afraid; for Jah Jehovah [is] my strength and song, and he is become my salvation. And ye shall draw water with joy from the fountains of salvation.”14 “And in that day ye shall say, Give ye thanks to Jehovah; call upon his name; declare his doings among the peoples; make mention that his name is exalted. Sing psalms of Jehovah, for he hath done splendid things; this is [or, be it] known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, O inhabitress of Zion; for great in the midst of thee [is] the Holy One of Israel” (vv. 1-6).

Certainly it is not a temporal deliverance only, however astonishing and complete, but there are rich blessings for the soul also. Best of all, the Holy One of Israel dwells in their midst. This, however, in no way takes it from Israel, nor compels us to interpret it of the Gentiles, however surely we now profit even more deeply during the gospel by the grace of God still more profoundly known in Christ. But it is plain that as a whole the language strictly belongs to a body once forsaken by God, and long the object of divine displeasure. This is not true of the church, but is precisely applicable to the ancient people of God, in the day when Messiah shall be manifested to them, and they shall say with heart and mouth, Blessed He that cometh in the name of Jehovah.

We have the amplest ground, material, and pattern for our praise, as the church of God, in the New Testament.

And it differs essentially from Israel's, who do not speak of the Father and the Son, and know not what it is to draw near into the holiest through the rent veil, any more than it will be theirs to suffer with Christ; whereas we walk by faith, and wait for Him by virtue of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. This cannot be conceived to be their experience, who have Christ reigning over the earth, freed from the tempter and blessed with boundless favours here below.

It is sad to read the words of Bishop Lowth, a man of refined taste rather than of Biblical lore, that "this hymn seems, by its whole tenor, and by many expressions in it, much better calculated for the Christian church than for the Jewish, in any circumstances, at any time that can be assigned." The fact is that every word quite suits Jews when delivered and under the Messiah's reign, and that not a sentence is in harmony with the church of God. There is no God and Father of Christ before us; there is no Christ in heaven made known by the Holy Spirit's power in the saints; there is no consciousness of union in one body. His more intelligent father, W. Lowth, talked of "the triumphant state of the church"; but this will be in heavenly glory. Whereas it is earth only that is contemplated here.

The inhabitress of Zion has indeed the foremost place, and is called to cry aloud and shout, for great is the Holy One of Israel that dwells in its midst; but the Jews, blessed themselves to overflowing, are called, and will answer to the call, and declare Jehovah's deeds among the peoples, and announce that His name is exalted. In all the earth is known what sublime things He has done. Mercy so rich causes greed and jealousy, pride and vanity, to vanish.

We may observe that the usual notion of “Jah” as an abbreviated form of “Jehovah” can hardly consist with its usage here (v. 2) along with “Jehovah.” See also Isa. 26:4, where the same association occurs. As “Jehovah” is used for the name of God in relation with His people (Ex. 6), His name of moral government in general (Gen. 2. and throughout the Old Testament, with or without the name of Elohim), so “Jah” appears to express His intrinsic being. There is therefore great force in combining it with His name of relationship; while its own propriety remains where it stands alone, as in Ex. 15:2, Ex. 17:16; Ps. 118:14. Jah then is God in His absolute being, the Self-existent; Jehovah in His relative and continuous character, the God of ages especially in connection with the sons of Israel, Who fulfils at length the promises He made to the fathers as God Almighty. So in Ex. 15:2, “Jah is my strength and song”; and in Ex. 17:16, “The hand is on the throne of Jah” as the oath that “Jehovah will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” So in Ps. 68:4, “His name is Jah”; and in v. 18 we find “the dwelling of Jah Elohim” for “the rebellious.” “The Most High,” as in Isaiah 14:14, and often from Gen. 14:18, etc., abundantly in the Psalms, and also in the so-called Chaldee of Daniel, is His title to be displayed in the future kingdom, when all rivals vanish into their nothingness.

2 Compare the expression, “the last days” or its equivalent in Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14, Deut. 4:30, Deut. 31:29, Jer. 23:20; Jer. 30:24, Jer. 48:47, Jer. 49:39, Ezek. 38:16; Dan. 2:28; Dan. 10:14; Dan. 12:13; Hosea 3:5; Micah 4:1. All refer to the same time as Isaiah 2:2 the days when the power of the Second man supercedes the sinful weakness of the first. Joel 2:28 is “afterwards,” or

Thereupon," but Its full accomplishment also is in that day.

3 Those who have access to La venida del Mesias el gloria y Magestad en tres tomos, Londres, 1826, or the English translation in two vols. 1827, will read with pleasure the masterly investigation of the author, a pious Roman Catholic, in which he, by the scripture, sets aside the views which had so long reigned through the influence of Origen, Jerome, and others The reader is referred to vol. 2. P 174-190 for particular remarks on this very chapter of which a compressed sample must suffice here. "In the first place I sincerely agree with all the doctors, both Christian and Jewish, that the times of Messiah are manifestly the times spoken of in these prophecies. "It shall come to pass in the last days, that is in the time of Messiah, or of Christ. But this is very equivocal. That time according to all ancient and modern writers, and according to the fundamental principles of Christianity, is not one only, but two times infinitely distant from each other, one which is already past, but continues even until now, its effects assuredly great and admirable...another, which has not yet arrived, but which is believed, and hoped for with faith and a divine confidence...which second time would appear to be more great and admirable according to the scriptures which are manifestly directed toward this and terminate in it. This is the time of which the prophets have said so much, 'in that day,' 'at that time,' etc. This is the time of which S. Peter and S. Paul have said so much in their Epistles. And it is the time of which the Messiah Himself has said so much in parables and without them, as may be seen in the Gospels. The first time of Messiah, of which the Prophets speak, is

certainly verified already; and the world has enjoyed, does enjoy, and may to its satisfaction enjoy, its admirable effects. And yet the prophecies have not been fully verified; for they embrace not only the first time of Messiah, but likewise and still more the second time, which is yet waited for. This is so evident and clear that, according to the different principles or systems, there have been derived two different conclusions; and though the one be more deadly than the other, they are both none the less for that illegitimate and false.

4 The notion that Christ is here Intended is one of those freaks of notable men which Illustrate the passage they so strangely misapplied. The LXX, strange to say, leave out the verse altogether.

5 “Matstsebeth” is derived from a verbal root - to stand fast or establish - and thus in its primary sense means a pillar. Hence it can naturally express what sustains a tree when cut down. Some take it as the root, others as the trunk or stump; but the destruction seems to go farther than leaving the stump erect, so that the idea of the Targum that it means the gap, or that part of the substance which contains the spring of life, seems agreeable enough to the context.

6 Even Aquila confirms this, the only true derivation of the word, and its kindred form for the other sex, by giving ἀπόκρυφος in Gen. 24:43.

7 Gesenius, who thought so too, tried to escape the difficulty of “ho-almah”.

8 Dr. W. Kay thus translates it, “For no gloom is there to her that was distressed. At the former time He brought contempt on the land of Zebulun, and on the land of

Naphtali; but in the latter time He brought honour, the way of the sea.

9 It is plain that “not increased the joy” is erroneous, The margin is right, substantially, as the next clause might prove to any reader.

10 Gesenius would like to translate this title “the mighty hero,” In order to get rid of “God” here. But “el” is never used as an adjective; and even so, if it were here only, it should follow, not precede, “gibbor”, as has been noticed.

11 Dr. R. P Smith, the late Dean of Canterbury says well (in his Authenticity and Messianic Interpretation of Isaiah, 63): “Thus the Prophet at once marks the difference between the two kingdoms. The one has a definite place in the Divine economy; the other is used but for a temporary object. For the moment, therefore, it may triumph; but it has no mission of its own, no settled final purpose in the world, and therefore no special providence hems it around. But Jerusalem, however unworthy, was the actual centre of the world’s history; and in spite of her feebleness in spite of her comparative insignificance she must outlive the far mightier kingdoms of Nineveh and Babylon, of Persia and Macedon and Antioch; for on her existence depended the accomplishment of God’s unchanging counsels.” It would have added immensely to the convictions of the author and to the value of his book had he seen that the purposes of God as to the earth which roll round Israel as their centre, are only suspended for a season because of their rejection of Messiah and the gospel to be renewed by grace at the end of this age in order to bring in the new age, when God has completed His present

gathering out from the universe under His sway (and we with Him risen and glorified), and the nations then on earth will enjoy the blessing under His reign. The present age has quite another aim and character from that age to come, which again is distinct from the eternity that succeeds the great white throne or judgement of the dead.

12 It would appear that the reference is not to the tribes of the ancient people of God, but to such of the nations as shall be in relationship with Jehovah, as distinguished from other Gentiles who are not.

13 The remarks of Houbigant may be helpful to some on this head. He is objecting to the popular error of allegorising without limit: Sed enim occurrendum est difficultati quae ex eis quae mox diximus, nasci potest. Nam quaeritur, quomodo in ultimo reditu Judaeorum accidere possit ut Judaei excurrant in terminos Philistoeorum, Moabitarum, Ammonitarum, cum regna illa jamdudum perierint. Respondeo eadem regna jam periisse tum, cum Apostoli gentes Evangelio subdiderunt; itaque explicandum esse illis etiam, qui loc Isaiae caput XI. de conversione gentium per Apostolos facta intelligunt, quomodo Apostoli subdiderint gentes, quae eorum aetate jam interierant. Nos responsionem eorum nostram faciemus; quae quidem sic videtur fieri posse, ut credatur Isaias appellare Judaeorum vicinas gentes nominibus iis, quae tum cognita erant, et notari eas gentes quae illarum veterum regiones occupaturae olim sunt, forsan etiam idem nomen habiturae: quae responsio valere etiam potest in nominibus propriis, Assur, AElam, Sennaar, etc. Judicabit sapiens Lector an hoc sit in explicandis Prophetis aperte judaizare, non discedere a proprietate verborum, nisi adest magna

necessitas. Nos quidem eam necessitatem tantam esse credimus, quanta maxima esse potest, si Prophetarum verba explicare allegorice nequeas, nisi intervertas Prophetae sententiam, ut mox Grotium fecisse vidimus; vel, nisi, ut nunc Forerium videmus, mutes personas de quibus praedicitur, et pugnes, vel tecum, vel cum ipsa vaticinatione, quam susceperis explicandam," - Prolegomena ad Prophetas, p. cclxviii.

14 This verse 3 is no interruption of the song, but a connected and beautifully harmonious part of it, and transitional to what follows.

Section 2: Isaiah 13 - 27

Isaiah 13

Here begins a quite distinct section of our prophet, which is not occupied so much as before with Israel, though, of course, we find Israel therein. Still Israel cannot be said to be the immediate object of the new series, but rather the nations and their judgement, running down from circumstances that were then comparatively imminent to the very “completion of the age.” It is as general in its character throughout, as the first section is occupied with Israel. Yet naturally we therein heard of the nations in relation to Israel, either as subjected willingly to Zion, as they will be in “that day,” or as instruments of providential chastening to the guilty people in this day, even though they may have enticed them from their true allegiance by their idols or any of their other iniquities. But in the second series, from chapters 13 to 27, we shall see how the scope is enlarged in presenting the “Burdens” of the nations (as the various prophecies are here first called), until we open out into the whole world coming under judgement in order to blessing quite as wide, though Israel’s part is shown us in corresponding largeness at the close. And here too, as in the first, we have at the close songs in unison with the grand result.

As to the expression, “completion (end) of the age,” which occurs so often in the Gospel of Matthew, its application is to that condition of things during which Israel are found under the law and without their Messiah. The new age, on the contrary, will be characterized by their being under the new covenant.

Their Messiah will then reign over them in glory. The Old Testament gives us, not only these ages, but the times before them, as the New Testament unveils the eternity that is to follow them. Practically the New, like the Old, speaks of these two ages as connected with Israel: the age that was going on when Christ came and was rejected, and that which is to come when He returns in glory. “In this age” there is a mixture of good and evil, to be closed by an awful conflict in which the Beast and the false prophet will fall. The age to come will see Satan bound and the Lord Jesus governing the earth in displayed power and glory. “End of the world” is an unequivocal mistranslation, which has led astray not only the mass of men but their leaders, particularly in their false expectation of earthly progress and victory for the church, and along with this their unbelief of Israel’s restoration to favour and glory under the promised reign of the Messiah, and the universal blessing of the earth and the nation.

Thus the difference of the ages is of incalculable importance. If you do not distinguish the present age from that to come, all must be confused, not for truth only, but for practice also. For now it is a question of grace and faith, evil being allowed outwardly to triumph, as we see in the cross. In the age to come the evil will be externally judged and kept down, and the good will be exalted over all the earth, and fill the whole world with the knowledge of Jehovah and His glory. The completion of the age, therefore, is evidently future; and so scripture speaks. Thus for us it is “this present evil age,” from which Christ’s death has delivered us (Gal. 1:4); the new age will be good, not evil, as surely as it is a future time. Again, if we think not of the church, but of

Israel, it is to be supposed that the age began with their being under the law in the absence of the Messiah. The new age will be when Israel have their Messiah not only come, but come again and reigning; for the presence of the Messiah in humiliation did not interrupt the age; and still less did their rejection of Him bring in the new age.

Only let us not forget, there is now another mighty work of God in process, based on the heavenly glory of Christ and the personal presence of the Holy Ghost, and marked here below by the church of God. During this period mercy is flowing out to the Gentiles; so that we may call it the Gentile parenthesis of mercy. Before, and quite distinct from this, were the Gentile times when God in His providence gave certain nations to take the government of the world, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar, the golden head of the great image. This we may call the Gentile parenthesis of judgement. They are both of them within the limits of “this age,” and are going on still. The new age will be brought in by the Lord’s coming in the clouds of heaven.

This at once introduces a very important change, namely, that repentant Israel will be delivered, and the nations come up for the judgement of the quick when the Son of man shall have entered on His kingdom. (Compare Matt. 25:31-48; Rev. 11.-20) The first part of Isaiah we saw to be the judgement of Israel, and then their final blessing. It is always a principle in the dealings of God, that when He judges, He begins at His own house. Hence Peter says, “The time is come that judgement must begin with the house of God”; and then he enquires if “the righteous scarcely [or with difficulty] are saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” But God has undertaken to save the righteous,

although it be with difficulty and in face of an amazing mass of contradiction and trial, as well as of their own utter weakness. All these things make it hard indeed; but what is insuperable to us is an opening for the glory of God and He has got over the greatest difficulty, for this lay in our sins. Is sin - even all sin - any longer a difficulty for Christ? Has He not, for the believer, blotted out sins, and made peace by the blood of His cross? But if there remains no difficulty to God, there are many for us; and the word, “the righteous scarcely are saved,” is in relation to our dangers by the way. Now if this be so, what will be the end of the ungodly? The apostle Peter applies it to the Christian, and looks at the world as coming under judgement when the Lord shall appear. In the Old Testament it is not the church but Israel we find to be concerned; but God, in such a dealing, invariably begins with that which has the nearest responsibility to Him. Accordingly all the first twelve chapters of Isaiah have been occupied with Israel as the foreground of the picture, whatever incidental notice there may be of others.

But from this portion onward through a dozen chapters more we have the Gentiles prominent, though Jerusalem too is judged in their midst, ending with the dissolution of the earth and with the higher ones punished on high. He had shown us the judgement of His own house; now He deals with the nations and all else in relationship with His people, one after another: both close, like all others, with triumph.

First of all Babylon comes up: “The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see” (v. 1). Babylon was the great Gentile power first allowed to take possession of Jerusalem. But God shows that, while He

may use the strangers to chastise His people, He will turn round ere long and deal with their oppressive cruelty, because their mind was to destroy, while God employed them only to chasten. And inasmuch as there was pride of power without conscience toward God, yea also the main source of idolatry, so Babylon cannot escape, being the first among the Gentiles summoned to judgement. Thus the section we now enter upon is not the divine scrutiny of His house in Israel, but the judgement of the world and of the nations, and hence right early of Babylon. Observe, however, that, if the Spirit of God takes notice of what was ere long to befall the Jews (expressly noticing the ruin of their land and people that was imminent, when they should be taken captive to Babylon), for all that He never confines Himself to any blows, however grave, that were then struck. Human limits do not apply to scripture, which goes on from His first acts to the ultimate end.

This indeed is just a characteristic difference between what is of God and what is of man. If man speaks, there are necessary bounds to the application of his words. In what God says there is invariably a germinant sense deepening farther on, evidence of what God has in view to show what He is and to glorify Christ. This appears to be the true meaning of the scriptural canon in 2 Peter 1:20: “No prophecy is of any private (i.e. its own) interpretation.” Apply it but to some isolated event, and you overlook the purpose of God; while prophecy may doubtless include such an event, it as a whole looks onward to the counsels of God in reference to the glory of His Son. Hence the holy prophets needed inspiration in the strictest sense; for whose eye could look onward unerringly and speak of the future according to God?

Such therefore is the aim of the Spirit's testimony. Indeed this is true of all scripture, for Christ is the object of God in giving scripture first and last. He is not merely thinking of man, or of his salvation, blessed as it is, nor of Israel His people, nor of the church, Christ's body, but of His Son. This in effect, as in purpose, is the vindication, security, and display of His own glory; while it gives scope to the fullest love and the holiest judgement, it will illustrate His rich grace in the heavens and His righteous and merciful government on the earth. Compare Eph. 1; Phil. 2; Heb. 2; Rev. 20.-22.

God thinks of Christ, Who is more precious to Himself than all besides. It is in virtue of Christ that there can be a holy purpose of good brought to issue in such a world as this has been. For it is not possible that the creature itself could have any intrinsic value in the sight of God. That which merely flows out of the sovereign will and almighty hand of God can cease to be. He that made can destroy; but when you come to Christ, you have that which, we may reverently say, nothing can annul; yea all the efforts of man or Satan to oppose and dishonour Him have been only turned, in the mighty and gracious wisdom of God, into a display of all-surpassing glory.

Hence we arrive at the great truth for our every-day walk, no less than for eternity and God Himself. We have to do with One now, Whose love nothing can exhaust, Whose ways too are all perfect; we have to do with Him day by day, to wait on Him, to expect from Him, to trust Him, and to be sure of His admirable care for us. Christ is worthy that our hearts should confide in Him, and He cannot be confided in without the blessing that ever flows out. Thus God proves Himself greater than all that can be against us. Apart from Christ there is nothing

even that He Himself made but what, connected with man on earth, soon had a cloud over it. Nay, it is wider still: look where you may, above or below; look at any creature height or beauty apart from Christ, and what is the security?

What is Satan now, and his angels? Where are those that left their first estate, and broke through all bounds of nature? Is not the earth, once so fair, a wilderness? Is not man a moral wreck, and mortality working in him? Israel were brought out into the wilderness to keep a feast to Jehovah; but they made and worshipped a golden calf to His deep shame and their own. And what was Egypt's wisdom? What is the world's of old or now? In the church of God, called to the unity of the Spirit and the reflection of Christ's heavenly glory here below, what breaches, divisions, schisms, sects, heterodoxies, confusions, and every evil work! What guilty ignorance of the Father, what bold denial of the Son, what flagrant sin against the Holy Ghost! How many antichrists, the sign and forerunner of the last antichrist! For all this goes on at an aggravated and accelerating ratio, as the apostasy draws near and the manifestation of the man of sin; the lawless one, to succeed the mystery of lawlessness, whom the Lord Jesus shall destroy with the breath of His mouth and shall annul by the appearing of His coming (2 Thess. 2).

By the lamp of prophecy we look as it were on the closing history of Christendom, the eve and execution of the judgement that slumbers not. But, thank God, we await first of all our Saviour from heaven - a blessed hope, which may be forgotten by worldliness and unbelief but will never fade, because it is not founded on anything short of the grace and word of the Lord Jesus.

He is coming; and as surely as He does, we have the turning-point of all blessing reached for our bodies and all things, even as now by faith for our souls. What a discovery it has been to some of us, that prophecy has the selfsame centre as the rest of scripture, and that its centre in Christ is so much the more conspicuous as it cannot content itself with past accomplishment, but ever looks onward to the grand fulfilment in the future! No matter what it may be, all acquires importance because God is thinking of His beloved Son. And His Son is to inflict the last strokes of judgement: God will deal with man, first by providential means, then in the person of Christ at His return in glory. “Lift up a banner upon a bare mountain, raise the voice to them, wave the hand that they may enter the gates of the nobles. I have commanded my separated ones, yea, I have called my mighty ones for mine anger, even those that exult in my majesty. The noise of a multitude on the mountains, as of a great people! a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations assembled together! Jehovah of hosts mustering the host of the battle! They come from a far country, from the end of the heavens - Jehovah and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole earth” (vv. 2-5).

From the chapter now before us we may gather these two things plainly enough - a preparatory application to the times of the prophet or near them, but the only adequate fulfilment reserved for the great day which is still future. This divine perspective simply and unequivocally meets the difficulty some find in the view of the city, not only taken and ravaged by the Medes, but such as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, the abode of doleful creatures, which was not for centuries after Cyrus conquered. And so it is that Isa. 14 regards

its downfall even to the day when Jehovah will yet choose Israel and set them in their own land: a consummation far beyond the return of the remnant of Judah, and only “in that day” fulfilled when Israel shall take them captive whose captives they were, and rule over their oppressors, which in no real sense has been accomplished. Those who explain it away are no friends of God or man. Those who presume to deny its future fulfilment set up to prophesy against scripture; and we need not hesitate to say that they are not prophets but do lie.

For instance, in verses 6-10 one can see there are greater signs than have ever been verified. “Howl ye; for the day of Jehovah [is] at hand; as destruction from the Almighty shall it come. Therefore shall all hands be feeble, and every heart of man shall melt, and they shall be dismayed: pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall writhe as a woman in travail; they shall be amazed one at another; their faces [shall be] faces of flames. Behold, the day of Jehovah cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation, and to destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun is darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause its light to shine.” These things cannot fairly be said to have literally taken place; yet the Spirit of God does not hesitate to connect them with Babylon’s fall. To talk of hyperbole or exaggeration is to show unbelieving ignorance of scripture and of the power of God. One understands an infidel talking such language as this; but the moment men begin to allow that the Spirit of God willingly sets Himself to exaggerate, the authority of the

whole written word is shaken. If He magnifies a temporal judgement beyond the facts, how can we be assured that He does not exaggerate grace and eternal redemption? And where is the ground in this case for solid peace with God? Is it, or is it not, a fixed principle, that the Holy Ghost always speaks the truth? Still, along with this, we must take care that we understand its application.

“And I will punish the world for evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make weak man more rare than fine gold, a man than the pure gold of Ophir. Therefore I will make the heavens to tremble, and the earth shall be shaken out of her place, at the wrath of Jehovah of hosts, and in the day of his hot anger” (vv. 11-13). To restrain this scene to the past judgement of Babylon is to limit the word of God, and make the Spirit seem to be unreliable. But this is merely our own evil misconception and irreverent error. How momentous, then, it is that we should be in malice children, in understanding men! We may well shrink with horror from a pathway that leads to an end so dishonouring to the word of God. On the other hand, that the Holy Ghost did really speak inclusively of a past accomplishment we hold to be just as certain as that He was looking onward to far more than that.

In verses 14-17 the terms imply that it is a temporal judgment that is spoken of, a description of the lawless way in which man wreaks his wrath upon his fellow. “And it shall come to pass, that as a chased roe, and as sheep that no one gathereth, they shall turn every one to his own people, and shall flee every one to his own land.

Every one that is found shall be thrust through; and every one that is taken shall fall by the sword. Their infants also shall be dashed in pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled, and their women ravished. Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, who will not regard silver, and [as for; gold, they will not delight in it." Verses 18, 19 present a total destruction. "And [their] bows shall dash the young men in pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb, their eye shall not spare children. And Babylon the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, shall be as God's overthrowing Sodom and Gomorrah."

Babylon has indeed been judged in its beauty and pride. An almost unprecedented disaster and destruction fell on that golden city; and this, we know, was under God effected by the junction of the Medes and Persians with Cyrus for their leader. Only the closing verses point to the utter ruin that followed centuries after, and is to last for ever. "It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in to generation and generation; neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there, nor shall shepherds make [their flocks] to lie down there. But beasts of the desert there shall lie down; and their houses shall be full of owls (or howls); and ostriches shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And wolves shall cry in their palaces, and jackals in the pleasant castles. And her time [is] near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged" (vv. 21-22).

But plainly Jehovah here uses the strongest language to show that it goes on to His day. In reading the New Testament as well as the Old, it is of the utmost moment to understand "the day of the Lord" in its real character and import. It is not the same thing as the Lord's

“coming” to receive us. When He comes, the dead saints are raised and the living ones are changed, which is not “the day of the Lord,” nor ever so called in scripture. There is one chapter (2 Peter 3) where there might seem to be some difficulty, but there it flows really from this very confusion, for when you distinguish the two phrases and thoughts here as elsewhere, all is plain. What the scoffers of the last day say is, “Where is the promise of His coming?” etc. What the Spirit of God replies is, that the day of the Lord shall come, and come like a thief in the night to judge wickedness upon the earth. They make light of the Christians who are looking for this bright hope, their Master’s coming; but the Holy Ghost threatens them with the terrible day of the Lord. The Lord is never represented as coming like a thief by night, except when judgement is distinctly spoken of, as to Sardis (Rev. 3:3). In 1 Thess. 5:24 the Spirit brings in the comparison of the thief when He speaks of the day of the Lord coming upon the world, not in relation to the saints who wait for Christ and are not in darkness that the day should overtake them as a thief. (Compare vv. 3-8)

The plain truth is that the expression “coming of the Lord” may apply to His presence before He is manifested to every eye; while “the day of Jehovah” pertains to that part and aspect of His action which inflicts just vengeance upon the world, and after that presents Him judging in righteousness. Here it is the day of Jehovah; and, therefore, of darkness and destruction to sinners. There is not a word about the righteous dead being raised, still less of the living changed; all that which is proper to the New Testament you find therein, and therein only. In the Old Testament

you have the dealing of Jehovah with Israel, judging their wrong but finally blessing them, and patient long-suffering with the Gentiles, where He took notice of them at all, till the day of visitation come in punishment of all ungodliness.

This accounts for the language of Isaiah 13. The Spirit of God has in His view Jehovah's judgement of the whole world; and, therefore, it is called "the day of Jehovah." It will be the termination of all the space allowed to man's will and self-exaltation. It will be the manifestation of God's moral ways when all that is high shall be abased, and Jehovah and the lowly whom He loves shall be exalted for ever. But while the Spirit of God goes onward to that day, there was enough to mark Babylon devoted to destruction by a predicted and extraordinary intervention of God near at hand. The truth of the prophecy was thus witnessed by a special accomplishment in those days. Babylon was doomed to become as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. Its desolation at last was as clearly announced in vers. 19-22, as its sudden and unexpected fall in vers. 2-8. If physically it was not so manifestly a divine judgement as that which of old fell on the cities of the plain, it was morally a stupendous event which changed the whole course of the world's history. The conquest of Persia was in no way a type of the final judgement of the world, neither was the fall of Greece of any striking significance in this respect. The final judgement of Rome, of the fourth world-power, will be even more impressive of course; but this is yet future. It has been, as it were, shaken to pieces, and passed into a long transition state of separated kingdoms. The day is coming when Rome will rise again into splendour and

commanding political power, when it will become the centre of a revived and godless empire. But it will then rise to meet its final doom from the mouth of the Lord (Rev. 17:11-14; Rev. 19:11-21). The past ruin of Babylon is a type of the future destruction of Rome. When Babylon fell, the children of Israel were delivered, there was nothing of the sort when Persia yielded to Greece, or Greece to Rome; there will be a yet mightier result at the end of the age before and when the Son of man comes in power and glory.

Thus the fall of the first great power of the Gentiles is a type of the doom of the last, when Israel will have been finally set free, a converted people, being delivered spiritually as much as nationally, and thenceforward made to express the glory of Jehovah upon the earth.

Isaiah 14

In the chapter before us the Spirit of God goes forward to Israel's deliverance. The connection is plain. The general character of the Burden becomes thus evident and most instructive. "For Jehovah will have compassion on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and rest them in their own land: and the stranger shall join himself with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob. And the peoples shall take them, and bring them to their place; and the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of Jehovah for servants and for handmaids; and they shall take them captive, whose captives they were, and they shall rule over their oppressors" (vv. 1, 2). The overthrow of Babylon involves the emancipation of Israel. It has thus much greater importance than the history of any ordinary power; and the past Babylon is simply a type of the fall of the greater power, its final

heir, which is to the last the enslaver of the Jews, the would-be protector but master of the holy city. Israel are yet to have as their servants the very persons who formerly enslaved them themselves. Expecting this glory for Israel, and this mighty deliverance for the people of the Jews, one can understand their exulting tone.

“And it shall come to pass in the day that Jehovah shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy trouble, and from the hard service wherein thou wast made to serve, that thou shalt take up this parable against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased, the golden city ceased! Jehovah hath broken the staff of the wicked, the sceptre of the rulers. He that smote the peoples in wrath with a continual stroke, that ruled the nations in anger, hath a persecution without restraint. The whole earth is at rest - is quiet: they break forth into singing. Yea, the cypresses rejoice at thee, the cedars of Lebanon, [saying,] Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us. Sheol from beneath is moved for thee to meet [thee] at thy coming; it stirreth up the giants for thee, all the chief ones (or, he-goats) of the earth, raising up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All of them shall answer and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to Sheol, the noise of thy lyres: the worm is spread under thee, and vermin covereth thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O day-star, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, that didst lay low the nations! And thou saidst in thine heart, I will ascend into the heavens, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; and I will sit upon the mount of assembly, in the recesses of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the

Most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, they shall consider thee, [saying,] [Is] this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; [that] made the world as a wilderness, and overthrew the cities thereof; [that] let not loose his prisoners to their home? All kings of the nations, all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house. But thou art cast out from thy sepulchre like an abominable branch, clothed with the slain - those thrust through with the sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcass trodden under foot. Thou shalt not be joined with them in burial, because thou hast destroyed thy land, thou hast slain thy people: the seed of evil-doers shall not be named for ever. Prepare ye slaughter for his children because of the iniquity of their fathers; that they rise not up and possess the earth, nor fill the face of the world with cities. And I will rise up against them, saith Jehovah of hosts, and cut off from Babylon name and remnant, and son and son's son, saith Jehovah. I will also make it a possession for the porcupine, and pools of water; and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith Jehovah of hosts" (vv.3-23).

The king of Babylon sets forth no other than the last head of the Beast, just as Nebuchadnezzar was the first of that line. We must distinguish the imperial chief of the last days from the religious head of the antichrist; and the more carefully, because, having a similar policy and being confederates in evil, they are very generally confounded by ancients and moderns. Although the king of Babylon typifies the person who will finally have the Jews as his vassals, it would be a great mistake to conceive that it is to be a king of the Babylon in Shinar.

We refer to this now merely to show that it rests upon a wrong principle. Some have the thought that there will be a re-establishment of oriental Babylon in the last days. They suppose there will be a literal city in the plain of Shinar. This appears to be fundamentally false.

The New Testament points out by evident marks what the future one will be; and, in order apparently to guard against that illusion, even contrasts the Apocalyptic Babylon in some respects with that of the Chaldees. The Babylon of the old world was built upon a plain; the future Babylon is characterized by the seven mountains it sits on. Thus every one of common information would distinguish the scene of Chaldean pride, and understand the locality of the future Babylon. There is but one city that has had universally and proverbially this title attached to it among Gentiles, Jews, and Christians. Other cities may include seven or more hills, but everywhere Rome has acquired a designation from the circumstance; so that if you speak of the seven-hilled city, there was, there is, hardly an educated child but would answer, “It must be the famous city on the banks of the Tiber.” So every one must have known in apostolic days. This is the city which is to occupy in the last days the same kind of importance that Babylon had in the beginning of Gentile times. It began then and ends with the person that is called in the Book of Revelation, “the Beast.” There were four Beasts in Daniel, but one is by St. John called “the Beast,” as indeed only the last then existed; and if it had to become imperially extinct, it was also to rise again and be present once more before its judgement.

Here then God makes the old enemy to be a type of the new one that menaces them. The final holder of the

power of Babylon thus naturally is a type of him who will wield imperial power against the glory of God in the last days. So in Revelation 17 the general principle is exceeding clear, without the violent supposition of a literal metropolis in Chaldea; where man would have not merely to build the city, but, first of all, to create seven hills. Another thing the Spirit of God speaks of is the reigning of the city over the kings of the earth, not of the control exercised over the empire, but far beyond, under the symbol of the harlot riding the beast; she sits too on “the waters.”

The Apocalyptic Babylon will finally shift from a papal heathen character, as it did from an openly heathen beginning, to final utter corruption. What we have in Isaiah furnishes the groundwork for that which meets us in the Revelation. Thus the strong language in verses 9-14 could scarcely be said to have been exhausted in Nebuchadnezzar or Belshazzar. There was pride and self-exaltation in the one, and most degrading and profane luxury in the other; but what we have here will be fully verified in the last days and not before. After taking this place of power, the lofty one is to be thus abased as no Babylonish monarch ever was historically.

We do not enter into the rest of the chapter farther than to point out another declaration in verses 24, 25. Some suppose that the king of Babylon and the Assyrian are one and the same person; it is a common mistake, and particularly among men of learning. But it is clear that the later statement is something added to the fall of Babylon’s king, who has been already judged. Then the Assyrian follows, who is dealt with summarily in Jehovah’s land. This agrees perfectly with what may be gathered from other parts of God’s word as to the

future. “Jehovah of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass, and as I have purposed, it shall stand: to break the Assyrian in my land; and on my mountains I will trample him; and his yoke shall depart from off them, and his burden from off their shoulders: this the purpose [that is] purposed concerning the whole earth, and this the hand [that is] stretched out over all the nations. For Jehovah of hosts hath purposed, and who shall frustrate [it]? and his hand [is] stretched out, and who shall turn it back?” (vv. 24-27)

But, if we look at the past history of Israel, the Assyrian came up first; his army was destroyed, and himself sent back into his own land, there to be slain by his rebellious sons in the house of his god. The astonishing destruction of his host was typical of the fall of “the Assyrian” in the last days, but only an earnest of it. This was considerably before Babylon was allowed of God to become supreme. It was after the disappearance of Nineveh that Babylon sprang up into the first place. The Assyrian never gained the supremacy of the world, but Babylon did, as a sovereign grant from God, after the royal house of David had become the helper on of idolatry, following the Jewish people in their love for the abominations of the heathen. Then, not before, God told (as it were) the king of Babylon to take the whole world to himself. Babylon was always most conspicuous for its many idols; but as the chosen witness had become idolatrous, the worst might as well have supremacy as another. Babylon was thus exalted to the empire of the world, when Lo-Ammi (not-My-people) was written on all Israel, even on Judah. Its active enmity and idolatry could hardly be thought a claim on the true God,

Jehovah; on the other hand, all this was not allowed to hinder its rise in God's sovereignty into the place of the government of the world. This was, in fact, subsequent to the destruction of the Assyrian, which we have seen before in other chapters (Isa. 8; Isa. 10) must besides contemplate the future.

Here, not as in previous history, Babylon is judged first; then the Assyrian comes up and is smitten in the land of God's people. Why is this? Because the Spirit of God is now taking the circumstances of the Assyrian as well as the king of Babylon, not as a history of the past, but as looking onward to the last days; and in the last days the king represented by Babylon will be destroyed first, when the power of the Assyrian will be broken last of all. This perfectly agrees with the scene as a typical or prophetic picture of the last days. Whereas, if you confine it to the past, it does not tally, and there could be no right understanding of it. While the Spirit of God speaks of the Assyrian subsequently to Babylon, it is certain that in past history the Assyrian fell first in order, then Babylon afterwards. By-and by Babylon will be smitten in the last holder of the Beast's power, and this in connection with the Jews; while the power then answering to the king of Assyria will come up after that, when God occupies Himself with the ten tribes of Israel. The Babylonian despot and the Assyrian, then, are two distinct enemies of the Lord, and types of two different powers in the last days, the one before, the other after, the Jews are in recognized relationship with Jehovah.

The Lord grant that we may be enabled to profit by all scripture, using it for instruction and warning, as well as refreshment and joy. All plans for worldly ease and honour will end only in destruction and bitter

disappointment. Our business is to work out what God gives us now to do. He is saving souls to be the companions of Christ in heaven. Our responsibility meanwhile is to carry out His thoughts of mercy toward sinners, and His love to and in those that cleave to the name of His The division of chapters is singularly unhappy here, for Isa. 14:24-27 has a distinct place of its own to mark the future judgement of the Assyrian relatively to the “burden” of Babylon, which is to be the inverse of history. Also the last five verses of the chapter form a sub-section to themselves, though the whole appears to be connected. The two following chapters (Isa. 15 - Isa. 16) are but one subject, and a new one. What adds to the confusion is the insertion of the sign of the new paragraph at Isa. 14:29; whereas Isa. 14:28 really pertains to the new “burden” - not to Babylon or to the Assyrian, but to God’s Judgement on the Philistines.

“In the year that king Ahaz died was this burden. Rejoice not thou, Philistia, all of thee, because the rod that smote thee is broken; for out of the serpent’s root shall come forth a viper and his fruit [shall be] a fiery flying serpent. And the first-born of the poor shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in safety; but I will kill thy root with famine, and thy remnant shall be slain. Howl, O gate! cry, O city! dissolved, O Philistia, [is] the whole of thee; for out of the north cometh smoke, and none straggleth (or, standeth aloof) in his gatherings. And what shall [one] answer the messengers of the nation? That Jehovah hath founded Zion, and in it the afflicted of his people find refuge” (vv. 28-32).

The death of Ahaz might naturally excite the hopes of his neighbours, the Philistines, who had been put down

by the strong hand of his grandfather Uzziah. Of him it is written in 2 Chr. 26:4-8 that “he did that which was right in the sight of Jehovah according to all that his father Amaziah did. And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought Jehovah, God made him to prosper. And he went forth and warred against the Philistines, and brake down the wall of Gath, and the wall of Jabneh, and the wall of Ashdod, and built cities in [the country of] Ashdod, and among the Philistines. And God helped him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians that dwelt in Gur-baal, and the Meunim. And the Ammonites gave gifts to Uzziah; and his name spread abroad even to the entering in of Egypt; for he strengthened [himself] exceedingly.”

And now not only Uzziah but Ahaz were gone, “the rod [of him] that smote” the land of the Philistines was “broken.” The enemy had learnt to despise Judah in the days of unworthy Ahaz. “For Jehovah brought Judah low because of Ahaz, king of Israel: for he made Judah naked and transgressed sore against Jehovah.” Who was his son that they should fear him? Let them not rejoice, however; “for out of the serpent’s root shall come forth a viper, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent.” The primary accomplishment of this was in the reign of Hezekiah, of whom it is recorded (2 Kings 18:8) that “he smote the Philistines, even unto Gaza, and the borders thereof from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city.”

But is there any reason whatever to suppose that this “burden” is an exception to the rest? Especially does the strength of the language point to a mightier destruction than what was inflicted by that pious king of Judah. Its

proper fulfilment therefore awaits the latter day. And then to the full will be seen the twofold application of divine power, when, on the one hand, “the first-born of the poor shall feed and the needy shall lie down in safety”; and, on the other, Jehovah will not merely break the rod, but kill the root of Philistia with famine and slay its remnant (v. 30). In the next verse the prophet bursts forth with the utmost animation, calling on the gate to howl, and the city to cry out. “Howl, O gate! cry, O city! dissolved, O Philistia, the whole of thee; for out of the north cometh smoke, and none straggleth in his gatherings (i.e. of troops).” Thus an overwhelming and vigorously sustained force is threatened, which will sweep all before itself, as far as the Philistines are concerned. Here too the end is deliverance for the tried of His people. “And what shall one answer the messengers of the nation? That Jehovah hath founded Zion, and the afflicted of his people shall trust [or, find refuge] in it.”

This forms a sufficiently distinct sub-section: Babylon judged; the Assyrian broken in Jehovah’s land; Philistia melted away; and Zion founded by Jehovah as a refuge for the afflicted of His people.

It is instructive to observe that in the day that is coming Jehovah will deal with comparatively small powers as well as the greatest, according to their behaviour toward Israel. Thus, after Babylon and Assyria, we have now Philistia, as we shall have in their place Moab and Syria, the races and lands which surrounded the chosen people. It is in vain to argue that they are now unknown, or to assume that they are extinct. Whatever may have been in the past, these chapters look on to the future; and He, Who will before all the world bring forward

distinctly Israel as compared with Judah, will not fail to single out the long hidden remnants of their neighbours for His retribution in the end of the age.

Nor can we have a more manifest evidence of divine prescience conveyed to God's people than that Babylon should take precedence of Assyria, then in its glory, while Babylon gave no sign of its eventual supremacy; unless indeed we add that, in contrast with history which testifies of Assyria's fall making way for Babylon's rise, we read in prophecy of Assyria to be trodden down on Jehovah's mountains after the desolation of Babylon has been set out to the utmost: a prophecy which awaits fulfilment.

This was feebly, or not at all, seen by the mass of interpreters of old and in modern times. Bishop Lowth expresses their vagueness when he remarks on v. 25 that "the Assyrians and Babylonians are the same people"; yet he refers to his father, W. Lowth, who, after giving a similarly uncertain sound, says, "I am apt to think that by the Assyrian may be meant some remarkable enemies of God's church (see note on Isa. 11:14; Isa. 32:16), and particularly those expressed by Gog and Magog (Ezek. 38), who, as the prophet there tells us (v. 17), were under several names "spoken of by the prophets of Israel"; and it is particularly said of them that they shall 'fall upon the mountains of Israel.'" This is at least better than his son's comment, and ought to have dispelled at once the confusion of Assyria with Babylon. It ought also to have shown without a doubt that our prophet was given to speak of a judgement which closes Jehovah's indignation against Israel (for "the church" of course is not in question) in the destruction of the last of their enemies, when His whole

work is performed on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem. Even Dr. Driver confesses (Lit. of the Old Testament, 202) that “The prophecy has no connection with what precedes. It is directed against Assyria, not Babylon; and it anticipates, not the capture of the city of Babylon, but the overthrow of the hosts of Assyria in Judah.” This witness is true; but, if true, it points to an immense intervention of God at the close of the age, no such overthrow having ever been in the past, whatever the earnest then given.

Isaiah 15

In chaps. 15 - 16. we have “the burden of Moab,” the neighbour of Israel among the surrounding races as a pastoral people and outwardly prosperous hitherto. What a picture of desolation and woe; and so much the more felt, because so unexpected and sudden! The Philistines were not more offensive to God because of the pleasure they took in the calamities of Israel, than the Moabites in their excessive self-security and pride. They were among the neighbouring races which were allowed to harass Israel for their unfaithfulness during the Judges, till David reduced them. Afterwards they took advantage of the revolt of the ten tribes to shake off their subjection, first to Judah, and finally to Israel; but they, like others, fell under the Babylonish conqueror, as we may gather from a comparison of Jer. 10:58, which adopts and enlarges these very predictions of the older prophet, and serves thus to fix the epoch of their application. “For in a night of laying waste, Ar of Moab is undone; for in a night of laying waste, Kir of Moab is undone!” [Dr Henderson prefers to render it thus: “Assuredly in the night of assault Ar-Moab is destroyed

assuredly in the night of assault Kir-Moab is destroyed." They were the two main defences of Moab the city and the castle a few miles off the storming of which decided the fate of the people] (v. 1). Ar-Moab is the more forcible a phrase, because it was not only the capital, but the only real city that Moab possessed. Ar means city, and Kir means a wall and thence a walled fortress. It was not far from the city on the S.E.

Broken thus in their city and stronghold, one after another surprised to their dismay, the people are supposed to go to their places to weep, with deep and universal signs of mourning in public and in private; and this, to the extremities of their land, the very soldiers crying out like the weaker sex. "He is gone up to Bayith, and to Dibon, to the high places, to weep; Moab howleth over Nebo, and over Medeba: on all their heads [is] baldness, every beard is cut off. In their streets they gird themselves with sackcloth; on their housetops, and in their broad places, every one howleth, weeping abundantly. And Heshbon crieth out, and Elealeh; their voice is heard unto Jahaz. Therefore the armed men of Moab cry aloud; his soul trembleth within him" (vv. 2-4).

The prophet, or whosoever is personated by him, cannot but feel for the disasters of Moab; and the graphic sketch of desolation and want and carnage is continued to the end of the chapter. "My heart crieth out for Moab; their nobles [flee] unto Zoar, to Eglath-shelishiyah: for by the ascent of Luhith with weeping they go up by it; for in the way of Horonaim they raise up a cry of destruction. For the waters of Nimrim shall be desolate; for the grass is withered away, the tender grass faileth, there is no green thing. Therefore the abundance they have gotten, and that which they have laid up, shall they

carry away to the brook of the willows. For the cry is gone round about the borders of Moab; the howling thereof unto Eglaim, and the howling thereof unto Beer-elim. For the waters of Dimon are full of blood: for I will bring yet more upon Dimon, a lion upon him that escapeth of Moab, and upon the remnant of the land" (vv. 5-9). Even the escaped should find fresh disaster and destruction from Jehovah. Extreme humiliation is the chastening of excessive pride. But the intense feeling of the prophet, which was assuredly no less in Jeremiah, is the most complete disproof of the heartlessness which unbelieving critics ascribe to Isaiah, or at least to these "burdens" assigned to him. Ewald had too much sense of taste to overlook it. There is no doubt as marked a difference in tone between the deep pathos over Moab's fall and the ode of triumph before the Babylonish potentate. This is as it should be; but vindictive and sarcastic in an evil sense it is not. Even the Christian, who is heavenly, is called to abhor evil, and cleave to good. And heaven resounds with hallelujahs over God's true and righteous judgement of the Great Harlot, though her smoke goeth up for ever and ever (Rev. 19:1-6). How suited for a Jewish prophet to triumph over the last holder of the impious power allowed to rise When Judah was swept away, and whose fall at length ushers in Israel delivered for ever! Here in chaps. 15, 16. he can yield to the most impassioned feeling over kindred but proud Moab brought low.

We may note among the places named which share in the national grief that the Dibon of ver. 2 appears to be called Dimon in ver. 9, a play on the word in order to associate it with the Hebrew for "blood," which was to be its portion. Jerome records that the place in his day

was called both. Death and disasters yet more impended. What a contrast was Beer-elim to Moab and Israel! There Moab's howling was to reach; there Israel sang their song of triumph as they drew to the end of their journeying, where for the refreshing of all the well sprang up under the staves of the chiefs and nobles (Num. 21:16-18). So the true end with enduring joy yet awaits the people after a far longer wandering. But judgements accompany and distinguish "that day," judgements on all the enemies of Israel small and great; judgements that begin with the ancient people of God, and with Judah first of all. For there is no unrighteousness with God. And if it be a day of sifting for all the nations of the earth, He must begin at His house, before Israel can say in truth of heart, His mercy for ever!

Isaiah 16

Our chapter opens with a call to Moab to send the lamb to the ruler of the land from Sela in the wilderness unto the mount of the daughter of Zion: "Send the lamb to the ruler of the land from the rock in (or, to) the wilderness, unto the mount of the daughter of Zion. And it shall be, as wandering birds, as a scattered nest, the daughter of Moab shall be at the fords of Arnon" (vv. 1, 2). I see not the smallest reason to justify the notion of an allusion to the lamb as the well-known type of the Messiah, still less that He is here spoken of as the Lamb, the Ruler of the earth, as if we were reading the Revelation. This appears to be a reference to their ancient tribute to Israel. They were subdued by David of old, and they sent him gifts. "And he smote Moab and measured them with a line, casting them down to the

ground; even with two lines measured he to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive; and [so] the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts" (2 Sam. 8:2). Later on in the history, we find that the king of Moab was a sheep-master, and used to render to the king of Israel the tribute of 100,000 lambs, and as many rams with the wool (2 Kings 3:4, 5). The prophet seems here to remind Moab of its obligation; otherwise their daughters must prepare for still greater calamities to come.

"Take counsel, execute judgement; make thy shadow as the night in the midst of the noonday; hide the outcasts, discover not him that wandereth. Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab, be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler. For the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, the oppressor is consumed out of the land. And in mercy shall the throne be established; and one shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking judgement, and hasting righteousness" (vv.3-5). The prophet, in his second counsel, touches on the dire offence of Moab in Jehovah's eyes. Had he sheltered the outcasts of Israel? or had he taken advantage of their distressful flight to smite and betray them? The prophetic Spirit looks through Hezekiah to the true Son of David, Who shall reign in righteousness when the last oppressive spoiler has come to his end. For who can have overlooked that in the vast theatre of judgement we see in Isaiah 24, 25, etc., that Moab has a conspicuously affecting place? (Isa. 25:10-12). To confine it to the past is far from spiritual intelligence.

The verses that follow (6-12) detail once more the pride of Moab and his most humiliating downfall, when, spite

of his arrogance, “Moab shall howl for Moab; every one shall howl,” and the country shall vie with the towns in extent of devastation; and the prophet weeps afresh at the sight of the wretchedness of the once lofty foe, who prays in his sanctuary; “but he shall not prevail.” “We have heard of the arrogance of Moab - [the] very proud - of his pride, and his arrogance, and his wrath: his pratings [are] vain. Therefore shall Moab howl for Moab, every one of them shall howl. For the foundations of Kir-hareseth shall ye mourn, verily afflicted. For the fields of Heshbon languish, the vine of Sibmah; the lords of the nations have broken down its choice plants: they reached unto Jaazer; they wandered [through] the wilderness; its shoots stretched out, they went beyond the sea. Therefore I will weep with the weeping of Jaazer for the vine of Sibmah; with my tears will I water thee, Heshbon, and Elealeh, for a cry is fallen upon thy summer fruits and upon thy harvest. And taken away is joy and gladness out of the fruitful field; and in the vineyard there is no singing, neither is there shouting: the treaders tread out no wine in the presses; I have made the cry to cease. Therefore my bowels sound like a harp for Moab, and mine inward parts for Kirhares. And it shall come to pass, when Moab shall appear, shall weary himself on the high place, and enter into his sanctuary to pray, that he shall not prevail” (vv. 6-12).

It is remarkably added, “This [is] the word which Jehovah hath spoken from of old concerning Moab. And now Jehovah speaketh, saying, Within three years…” (vv. 13, 14). It seems to be a supplement added to the former strain after an interval. The last verse shows that, whatever may be the full bearing of this “burden” on Moab, “within three years, as the years of a hireling

[i.e., I suppose, exactly measured out, as would be the fact in such a case], and the glory of Moab shall be brought to naught, with all that great multitude, and the remnant shall be small, few, of no account." That this was accomplished to the letter, there can be no doubt to the believing mind, though we know not the instrumentality, whether the king of Judah or the Assyrian.

But as little need one question that the fulfilment of all the unaccomplished terms of the prophecy will be in the grand future crisis; for it is certain that the final king of the north will fail to reach Moab, and that the children of Israel under the Messiah are to lay their hands upon him. Compare Isa. 11:14 with Dan. 11:41. Nothing more clearly proves that, if unknown or little known now, there will remain representatives of that nation in the end of the age to take their part in that catastrophe, humiliating to man but to the glory of God, when the chosen people, in their totality, shall be saved, and restored by divine mercy to the land of their inheritance and their promised dominion. It is certain, from a later strain of our prophet (Isa. 25:10-12), the epoch of which is the day of Jehovah, that the final ruin of Moab will only be at the time when He exalts Israel to their promised place of everlasting supremacy on the earth.

We may notice that if Micah was led to use a prediction of Isaiah in Isa. 2:2, Jeremiah was inspired to borrow from this strain of Isaiah. Compare Jer. 10:58. Was this poverty in the resources of any one of them? No inference can be more shallow and unjust, even if we only regard them as writers; but if we believe in plenary inspiration, it is baser and more evil still. It was the Spirit of God only the more firmly welding the divine

together in that grace which honours every true testimony from God and the vessels of it.

Isaiah 17

Assuming that these prophecies, whatever past accomplishment they may have received, have for their centre the day of Jehovah how are we to meet the difficulty about these various peoples and cities which once troubled Israel? How are we to account for these prophecies looking onward to a future day, seeing that they no longer, or very feebly, exist? The answer is that the very same difficulty applies to Israel. No one knows clearly or certainly where the ten tribes are; neither does it seem any one's business to search beforehand. We may leave them in the obscurity that God has put them in. We know, if we believe His word, that as surely as He has preserved the dispersed remnant of the two tribes, so will He bring out of their hiding-place the descendants of the ten. We know that not only the Jews proper are to be restored, but also the full nationality of Israel. To this the δωδεχάφυλον hope to come; the full twelve tribes making one nation in the land, and one King shall be king over them all. "And they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all" (Ezek. 37:22). Every letter of the promises will be accomplished. Scripture cannot be broken.

Even if we saw no signs, why doubt? Do we need such tokens? It is a proof of feebleness of faith, if we ask a sign. God's word is the best assurance; on this let us take our stand. If God has said that so it shall be, we have a right to expect that He will bring from their recesses the ten tribes, and will save them out of all

their dwelling-places wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them. We are far from being fully acquainted even with the little world on which we live. Long ago there were parts of the world better known than they have been till of late. Thus the early accounts of Africa and central Asia, for instance, have been largely confirmed by recent researches. God may have the ten tribes in some of earth's little explored regions; or they may emerge unexpectedly out of a nation with which they have long been confounded. But we are not bound to show where they are. God has declared that He will bring them into their own land, and this in a peculiar manner; for the house of Israel are to pass through the wilderness again, and there be purged of the transgressors in their midst, who thus never reach the land, instead of being destroyed in it like the apostate Jews (Ezek. 20:36-38). Thus there is a totally different destiny for the ten tribes as compared with the two. If God will accomplish both, nothing will be easier than for the same God to define the descendants of their old Gentile enemies, whether near or farther off. The truth is that the very same principle of faith accepts and accounts for both, as it is mere incredulity which finds a difficulty in either. These remarks apply to almost all these chapters.

Again, some strangely misunderstand the bold figures of the prophets, as if employed to cast their subjects into an enigmatic, if not ambiguous, mould. This is a great error. For they are meant, not so much to throw a cloud over things, as to give emphasis and energy. Many, whose object is to deter Christians from reading the prophecies, talk much of these tropes, as if their presence was evidence enough to show that the

meaning is doubtful. Nothing can be more contrary to the fact; for in the inspired writings, as in others, figures are used, by a kind of understood license, to illustrate, adorn, and enforce the sense, and in no case to mystify. Figures and even symbols are quite as definite as plain or literal terms, and are meant to be only more forcible. The very speech of ordinary life abounds in metaphor and simile; but, of course, the poetical language of the prophecies gives occasion to their more frequent usage therein.

Further, the difficulty of scripture does not lie so much in its figurative style as in the depth of its thoughts. In the word of God there is perhaps nothing more profound than the first chapter of the Fourth Gospel. Yet what first strikes one there is the exceeding simplicity of this scripture as a matter of language. It used to be and perhaps is the common habit, of those teaching the Greek language in some parts of the country, to make this Gospel a sort of initiatory exercise. Notwithstanding, in all the Bible you can find no revelation or handling of truth more full of depths, none that will cause the really spiritual to stand more amazed, however attractive the grace it displays in Christ. This will show how entirely unfounded is the notion of such as fancy it is a simple question of words.

The divine depth of scripture is in sober fact the difficulty, not its obscure language. It is difficult because of our darkness morally, because of our want of acquaintance with the mind of God, judging appearances by the natural senses or by the mind, instead of receiving things from God, and reading His words in the light of Christ. So far from the prophetic scriptures being the most difficult part, they are much

easier than is commonly imagined. It is a great thing to begin with believing them; intelligence follows and grows apace. If we may compare the various parts of scripture, the New Testament is without doubt the deepest of God's communications; and of the New Testament none exceeds the apostle John's writings for penetration into the knowledge of what God is; and of his writings who would treat the Epistles and the Gospel as less profound than the Apocalypse? None, I am persuaded, but such as are too superficially acquainted with any of them to warrant their pronouncing a Judgement.

This may encourage some to take up the prophecies with a more child-like spirit, always bearing in mind that God looks onward to the future crisis that ushers in "the day of Jehovah." He thinks of His beloved Son, and of His glory here below. This gives importance to the prophecies; they unfold the scene, objects, and ways of His interests. The Jews are the people of whom the Lord Jesus deigned to be born as to the flesh. They have proved what they were to Him; He has now to prove what He will be to them. He means to have an earthly people (Israel), as well as a heavenly (the church), for His glory. The word of God stops not short of this. If it is not fulfilled, yet it is in the sure keeping of God, Who has already given a partial accomplishment. Hence we learn the principle for interpreting prophecy; it is as a whole for the glory of the Lord Jesus in connection with Israel and the nations upon the earth. We speak now of Old Testament prophecy. The New Testament takes another character - the Lord Jesus in connection with Christendom also, besides confirming the oracles about Israel. The church then, too, is outside, and above all in

union with its glorified Head in heaven, His body even now on earth.

This may show too why Jehovah attaches importance to a little place or people on the prophetic field. Israel was much in His eyes, because of the Messiah; and His own counsels are not dead if they sleep. Hence too, when God removes the veil from His ancient people Israel, their old antagonists will begin to appear. This is assuredly full of interest. There is a resurrection for every individual. The body will be raised for the manifestation of everything that was done in the body, for it is by the body that the soul acts. Even so will it be with these nations. There is a destiny analogous. As scripture tells us, they are to reappear when Israel does, for the Lord Jesus to take the kingdom; and God will distinguish them according to their original names, not by those they may bear in the process of human history. Jehovah will go up, as He alone can, to the sources. Hence we have their judgement connected with the last days, and not merely that which fell upon them long ago. His words go down to the close. Some may have been more completely accomplished in the past than others, but with this difference, they all look onward to the future.

The last generation will do as their fathers, only with added manifestation of evil by-and-by; then judgement will fall. Thus it is that God will deal with the nations. They will manifest the same hostility to Israel, the same pride against God, as formerly. This may seem a hard principle to some, but it is most righteous. If a child has grown up, knowing his father’s dishonour, hearing of his disgrace and punishment, would not that sin be most peculiarly odious in his eyes, if any right feeling existed?

The public example of his father's evil ways would be ever before him. But if the son trifled with it, and used it as an encouragement to walk in the same path, is it not just that there should be a still more severe punishment exacted of that son? Besides having the universal conscience of men, he had special witness in his own family, which the heart of a child ought to have felt and pondered deeply to avoid all repetition of its evil.

This is just the principle of God's way in government. Man ought to take the more earnest heed from the past; and God, Who deals righteously, will judge according to that which man ought to have remembered. For he ought to have used the witness of the past as a warning for the future. These nations will then reappear, and, instead of recalling their fathers' ways for their own warning and profit, they take exactly the same road of iniquity; and once more they will also endeavour to root out and destroy the people of God.

So it is in Isaiah 17 Damascus, which was to the north of the Holy Land, was the very ancient and most celebrated city of Syria of old. (See Gen. 15:2) It was to be made a heap of ruins - the cities of Aroer a place for flocks. "The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from [being] a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap. The cities of Aroer [are] forsaken; they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down and none shall make [them] afraid" (vv. 1, 2). And as of old Syria and Ephraim conspired against the realm of David's son to their own discomfiture, so once more the remarkable feature of this judgement is that God will deal with His people as well as with their old ally. "The fortress also shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria; they shall be as the glory of the

children of Israel, saith Jehovah of hosts. And in that day it shall come to pass, [that] the glory of Jacob shall be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh shall become lean. And it shall be as when the reaper gathereth the corn, and reapeth the ears with his arm; yea, it shall be as he that gathereth ears in the valley of Rephaim" (vv. 3-5). He will gather out all scandals from them and punish the transgressors; He will employ their enmity to purge that threshing-floor of the land of Israel; He will deal in a judicial manner with His people. The nations may lure themselves and each other on with the hope that it is going hard with Israel; but their conspiracy will be offensive to God, however He may use it for Israel's good. This is here described. "And a gleaning shall be left in it, as at the shaking of an olive tree: two, three berries in the tree-top; four, five in its fruitful boughs, saith Jehovah God of Israel. In that day shall man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel. And he will not look to the altars, the work of his hands, nor have regard to [that] which his fingers have made, neither the Asherahs nor the sun-images" (vv. 6-8).

It is well to bear in mind that not Sennacherib but Tiglath-Pileser destroyed Damascus, a ruin that followed the alliance of Pekah and Rezin to depose David's house in Judah, unworthy and false as Ahaz was. This had been predicted by Isaiah in Isa. 7, and our chapter speaks of its being a ruin heap. But the prophecy clearly goes on to its reappearance and overthrow in the latter day.

There is also plainly anticipated at that time a discriminating judgement proceeding in the land of Israel. Compare Isa. 28:14-22, where the course of the overflowing scourge is described. "In that day shall his

strong cities be as the forsaken tract in the wood, and the mountain-top which they forsook before the children of Israel; and there shall be desolation. For thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the Rock of thy strength; therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plantations, and shalt set them with foreign slips: in the day of thy planting wilt thou hedge [them] round, and in the morning wilt thou make thy seed to flourish: [but] the harvest [will be] a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow" (vv. 9-11).

In due time comes the retribution that regards the end of the age set forth with great vigour. "Woe to [or probably Ho!] a tumult of many peoples, [which] roar like the roaring of the seas; and the rushing of nations, [that] make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters but he will rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like whirling [dust] before the storm. Behold, at eventide trouble; before the morning they are not. This is the portion of them that spoil us, and the lot of them that rob us" (vv. 12-14). Let the nations gather their multitudes; let them rush on like mighty waters. But the rebuke comes; and they flee and are chased, yea, like thistle-down before the whirlwind. "Behold at eventide trouble; before the morning they are not. This is the portion of them that spoil us, and the lot of them that rob us." When was all this accomplished in the past, from the day that Isaiah wrote? Where was seen the gathering of all these nations and their complete dispersion? On the contrary, Israel was broken and scattered, as were the Jews afterwards. Here it is not one nation triumphing over God's people, but a

gathering of all nations, who seem but waiting for the morning to swallow up Israel, but before the light dawns they and their leader are not. Surely it shall be; for the mouth of Jehovah has spoken it.

Isaiah 18

The true reference to Egypt and Ethiopia is in Isa. 19, 20, which accordingly have the title prefixed, “The Burden of Egypt.” It is not so here. Neither is the chapter called a “burden”; nor should the opening exclamation be rendered “Woe” as it often is, but “Ho!” as the context shows. It is a call to a land designedly unnamed, quite outside the bounds of those which Israel knew, and characterized at the time of the action by sentiments of friendship, in contrast with the usual animosity of Gentiles, which here breaks out once more. The last verse intimates that the time when these events occur is the closing scene marked subsequently by Jehovah’s interference on behalf of His people, and in full grace their re-establishment in Zion, to which prophecy as a whole points.

Our chapter seems thus to be distinguished from the overthrow of the nations, predicted at the close of the preceding section, “the Burden of Damascus,” and so forms a scene sufficiently distinct to be treated separately. It is a deeply interesting episode, and it is plain that the new “burden” opens Isa. 19, and distinguishes the judgement of Egypt from the subject before us.

This it is well to notice distinctly, because Jerome and Cyril, Bochart and Vitringa, among many more, have fallen into the error of supposing that Egypt is the “land shadowing with wings,” addressed in verse 1, and that

the Egyptians or the Ethiopians are the people to whom the message is sent in ver. 2, some of them being even brought to the grateful worship of God in ver. 7. Others again are no less confident that Ethiopia is meant, as Calvin, Piscator, Michaelis, Rosenmller, Gesenius, Ewald, Delitzsch, Drechsler, and Driver. Yet Jerome and Calvin agree with the more famous Jewish authors that the people spoken of in vers. 2 and 7 are the Jews. All must be confusion where this is not seen. And a nation is here distinguished by favour to the Jew in its own way, but in vain. There follow nations hostile as usually of old. But the main issue is God, Who observes all, at length accomplishing His gracious purpose in Israel.

The reader need not be surprised at confusion, alas! too Common in commentators ever so erudite and otherwise eminent. For there is hardly a portion of Isaiah which has given rise to greater discord and more evident bewilderment among men of note, from Eusebius of Caesarea (who saw in it the land of Judaea in apostolic times, sending Christian doctrine to all the world, an interpretation founded on the ἀποστέλλων....ἐπιστολὰς βιβλίναις of the LXX) down to Arias Montanus, who applied it to America, converted to Christ by the preaching and arms of the Spaniards! Plainly the right understanding of the chapter depends on seeing that the Jewish nation are those intended in verses 2 and 7; and this, not in the days of Sennacherib, save perhaps as an historic starting-point, but for the future crisis, and its glorious issues. A few expressions, especially in verses 1 and 2, may be obscure, but the general scope is remarkably clear and of exceeding interest.

It is true, as Henderson says in common with very many, that the chapter is not a “woe” (as the Sept., the

Vulgate, and the A.V. translate), nor yet like the preceding or following “burdens,” but rather a call summoning attention - “Ho!” - to the land unnamed, which is to be described. The contrast seems plain between Isa. 17:12-14 and Isa. 18:4-6. One nation whose name is not given, will seek to befriend the Jews in the time and way spoken of; while others break out into their old jealousy and hatred, and wreak their vengeance on them all the more. But that the friendly protector is Ethiopia seems wholly without and against the tests of the chapter. According to this idea, when Tirhakah in alarm summons his troops, the Jews send swift messengers to acquaint him with the destruction of Sennacherib’s host when it seemed to threaten, not only Jerusalem but Ethiopia. But this dislocates the chapter, making the Ethiopians the prominent figure instead of the Jews, and terminating ineptly with a present offered by the Ethiopians to the God of Israel. It is enough to examine the words of the prophet with care, in order to refute any such speculation.

“Ho! land shadowing (or, whirring) with wings, which [art] beyond [the] rivers of Cush” (i.e. beyond the Nile and the Euphrates). It means a country outside the sphere of those nations, which up to the prophet’s day had menaced or meddled with Israel. Usually firm against mere tradition, and careful of scriptural truth, even Dr. Kay has failed to notice the true force of this remarkable expression found here only and in Zeph. 3:10. The object is not at all to direct attention to the country adjoining the file, nor even to combine with this the land adjacent to the Euphrates. The call is expressly to a land beyond either limit. Egypt and Assyria had been the chief of those powers, for there was an Asiatic

as well as an African Cush. The land in question lay (not by any means contiguous to, but perhaps ever so far) beyond these well-known countries. Here is the first indication; and it is of the highest importance, but neglected by most. It expresses a country far away. This comparatively distant land espouses the cause of Israel; but the protection would be ineffectual in result, however loud the proffer and the preparation. The use of "wings" to convey the idea of a cover for the oppressed or defenceless is too common to need proofs. "Ho! land shadowing with wings, which [art] beyond [the] rivers of Cush; that sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of papyrus upon [the] face of [the] waters, [saying,]" (vv. 1, 2).

The second verse shows, in addition to the previous characteristics of this future ally of the Jews, that it is a maritime power, for it sends its ambassadors over the sea, and in vessels of bulrushes (i.e. of "papyrus")15 on the face of the waters Israel is the object of their interest. "Go, swift messengers, to a nation scattered (or dragged) and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning and onward, to a nation meted out and trodden down, whose land the rivers have spoiled" (v. 2). The attempt to apply this description to the Egyptians, or the Ethiopians, has largely affected the view taken of the epithets here applied (e.g. "tall and smooth," and "that meteth out and treadeth down"). The mistake of not a few is to introduce Christianity into the chapter; whereas it is really a question of earthly things and the earthly people in presence of a friendly effort, but also of enemies before God's time comes to deliver them Himself. The learned may enquire whether "boats" are really intended by "keli-gem'?"; in verse 2. Here only is

the word so rendered in all scripture. It occurs very frequently for an ornament, implement, or utensil; even for sack, stuff, or any such thing in general; for armour, or weapons; for instruments of music, or furniture, etc. Hence the Seventy here translate by “paper letters,” which we can well understand requisite for ambassadors sent on their errand. It is the more worthy of careful consideration, as this phrase more than any other has misled the commentators. Otherwise there is but little difficulty in the chapter.

But, in fact, there seems no sufficient reason to question the general accuracy of our authorised version, which, as predicating Israel in ver. 2 yields the sole clear and good sense. Above any, they are a nation whose hope is indeed long deferred, and who have suffered indignity beyond all; yet marked by portents from their existence and thenceforth. Upon them has been exactly measured divine judgement, as none other had. Who else trodden down as they? Nor had their land escaped the desolating ravages of powers overwhelming like rivers, as we find the same figure used of it in Isa. 8 and elsewhere. The difference between the land in the first verse which sends out its messengers and ships, and the dispersed people from all time marvellous or hitherto formidable, but of late ravaged by their impetuous enemies, stands on no minute points of verbal criticism, but on the general bearing of scripture history as well as the context, which the English-reading Christian is quite able to judge.

This is the weakest point in Bishop Horsley’s (Bibl. Crit. ii. 162) otherwise able investigation of the chapter: “The standard of the Cross of Christ; the trumpet of the gospel. The resort to the standard, the effect of the

summons, in the end will be universal." But it is the prevalent bane of theologians to bring in the gospel or the church into the prophets, where the dealings of divine government and ultimately of Messiah's kingdom are really meant.

Thus far we have seen the intervention of this unnamed land, described as the would-be protector of Israel actively engaging with their swift ships, it would seem on a friendly mission in quest of that scattered people, to plant them again in their own land.

But another enters the scene who puts an arrest on the zeal of man. Universal attention is demanded. Great events tremble in the balances. Signs are given visibly and audibly. "All ye inhabitants of the world, and dwellers on the earth, see ye when an ensign is lifted up on the mountains; and when a trumpet is blown, hear ye. For thus Jehovah said unto me, I will take my rest, and I will observe in my dwelling-place like clear heat upon herbs, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest" (vv. 3, 4). God is contemplating this busy enterprise. Man is active. Jehovah, as it were, retires and watches. It is like a clear heat in the sunlight, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest. It is a moment of deep stillness and suspense, where He allows apparent advantage of it but does not act Himself, while immense efforts are made to gather in the Jews by the patronage of the maritime nation of verses 1 and 2. All then seemed to flourish: but what is man without God? "For before the harvest, when the bud is finished (or, past), and the blossom becometh a ripening grape, he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning-knives, and take away And cut down the branches" (v. 6). Thus total failure of the friendly plan ensues. Everything in

appearance betokened a speedy ingathering of good to Israel, and their national hopes seemed to be on the eve of being realized, when God brings all to naught by letting loose once more the old passions of the Gentiles against His people. The effect is that “they shall be left together unto the birds of the mountains and to the beasts of the earth; and the birds shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them” (v. 6).

It was not for that power to interfere, nor was it Jehovah’s time; and yet it was for Himself in the end. The shadow of God’s wings is the true resource of His people’s faith (Ps. 57:61). For “in that time [a period of course, not an epoch merely] shall be brought unto Jehovah of hosts a present of a people scattered and peeled, and from a people terrible from their beginning and onward, a nation meted out and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place of the name of Jehovah of hosts, the mount Zion” (v. 7). Thus will the presumptuous help of man be rebuked, as well as the renewed wrath of the nations once more preying on the poor but loved people of Jehovah. For as surely as they turn again to rend Israel, He will appear in the midst of the desolation, and with His own mighty hand accomplish that which man as vainly seeks to effect as to frustrate. The Jewish nation, at that very season, shall be brought a present to Jehovah; and they shall come not empty-handed but emptied of self, with lowly and grateful hearts to Jehovah in Mount Zion, after their final escape from Gentile fury in His mercy which endures for ever. They bring the present, and they are the present to Jehovah. Here, as ever, the dealings of God in judgement result in the blessing of His ancient

people; and Zion accordingly is the place where His name is manifested in connection with them. We also see how unreasonable it would be to imagine that the church, called to heavenly glory, is concerned as God's object in the chapter. It is Israel only, destined to pass through renewed and bitter trouble, most of all at the close, before Jehovah does His own work of establishing them in the seat of royal grace under Messiah and the new covenant. He has never abandoned this purpose of His for the earth.

The call of the church for union with its glorious Head and heavenly glory came into realization, when the Jews stumbled at the Messiah in humiliation, as they had gone after idols, followed respectively by the Babylonish captivity for the latter, and by the Roman destruction for the former. Meanwhile Christendom enjoys far higher privileges; but not having continued in His goodness, it too shall be cut off, and irrevocably. There is no restoration, but utter destruction for the Babylon of Christian times; there is to be for Jerusalem. The natural branches shall be grafted into their own olive-tree. All Israel shall be saved, and so declares the apostle of the Gentiles as to both. The true members of Christ's body shall be caught up to Christ, and glorified with Him. It is Israel, not the church, which is to be purified on earth, as we see throughout Isaiah and the prophets generally. The restoration of Israel to their land, and supremacy given it over all the nations, we recognize as true and sure. But it is after the heavenly bride has joined the Bridegroom, and purging judgements then fit Israel for its destined place on earth, which is entirely incompatible with the church wherein Jewish and Gentile distinctions are gone, and Christ is all and in all.

According to the last great prophecy the church has the promise of being kept out of the hour of temptation that is coming (Rev. 3:10); whereas all the Gentiles shall be in it, though faithful ones come out (Rev. 7). Again Jer. 30:7 and Dan. 12:1 are express that the Jews must pass through it but be delivered - those that are “written in the book. “

Isaiah 19

This chapter gives “the Burden of Egypt,” and is followed in the next by a personal sign enjoined on the prophet, as a token of the degradation soon to befall Egypt and Ethiopia. The general drift is so clear as to render prolonged remarks almost useless.

“The burden of Egypt. Behold, Jehovah rideth upon a swift cloud, and cometh unto Egypt. and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it. And I will stir up the Egyptians against the Egyptians: and they shall fight every one against his brother, and every one against his neighbour; city against city, kingdom against kingdom. And the spirit of Egypt shall be made void in the midst of it; and I will destroy the counsel thereof; and they shall seek unto the idols, and unto the conjurers, and unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto the soothsayers. And I will give over the Egyptians into the hand of a cruel lord; and a fierce king shall rule over them, saith the Lord Jehovah of hosts” (vv. 14). The prophet thus boldly and with the fullest moral truth sets forth the sure overthrow of the great realm of the old world’s prudence, and of debasing idolatry, and abundant natural riches. What availed the boasted bulwarks of their watery barriers, if Jehovah, Who

“rideth upon a swift cloud,” dooms Egypt to humiliation and decay? Worse than idle their appeal to their false gods; for their idols should be moved at His presence, and the heart of Egypt melt in its midst. Intestine division and civil war (v. 2) should be added to the overwhelming assaults from without; and the downfall be consummated by infatuated counsels as well as the wasting away of all national spirit; for on their recourse in their distress to their old haunts of superstition and sorcery, God would shut them up to the hard bondage of cruel lords and a fierce king.

But the hand of Jehovah should be not only upon the defences of the country, but upon its internal supports, and this in all that was their glory and their confidence. For is not this Ezekiel’s “great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, My river is my own, and I have made it for myself?” (Ezek. 29:3). Surely it is the same, of whom Isaiah here predicts, “And the waters shall fail from the sea, and the river shall be wasted and dried up. And the rivers shall stink; the streams (or, canals) of Egypt shall be diminished and drain away: the reeds and the flags shall wither. The meadows by the Nile, by the banks of the Nile, and everything sown by the Nile, shall be dried up, be driven away, and be no [more]. And the fishers shall mourn, and all they that cast hook into the Nile shall lament, and they that cast nets upon the waters shall languish. And they that work in fine flax, and they that weave cotton (or, white stuffs), shall be ashamed. And her pillars shall be broken in pieces, all workers for hire shall be sad of soul” (vv. 5-10).

The prophet next (v. 11) proceeds to taunt this haughty power in that for which, most of all, it stood high in its

own conceit and the reputation of men. For who has not heard of “the wisdom of the Egyptians “? Who does not know of their science and civilisation while the most renowned lands of the west, which early aspired to the sovereignty of the world, had not yet emerged from their condition of wild untutored barbarism? “The princes of Zoan [are] utterly fools; the counsel of the wise counsellors of Pharaoh is become senseless. How say ye unto Pharaoh, I [am] the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings? Where [are] they then, thy wise [men]?” is the piercing challenge of the prophet; “and let them tell thee now; and let them make known what Jehovah of hosts hath purposed upon Egypt” (vv. 11, 12).

Alas! how many now are wrapped up in the same carnal security. How many in our day, like the wise counsellors of Egypt, are caught in their own craftiness, too wise to heed the sure and solemn words of divine prophecy; not wise enough to guard themselves from foolish superstition, or still more foolish incredulity! Is it not a maxim among the sages of Christendom, that prophecy cannot be known till the event accomplishes it and fixes its interpretation? Than which notion, we dare to say, none can be produced less reasonable in itself or more flatly contrary to the word of God. Not a believer in the Old Testament but protests against the sinful error; for not a soul then was justified who did not look onward, trusting his soul and spiritual hope on that which was as yet necessarily in the womb of the future - the coming of the woman’s Seed, the Messiah. And are believers of the New Testament called of God to be less trustful, less to realise what is coming, with incomparably more light of revelation? What! we, to whom God has revealed by the Spirit, that which, as the brightest of old was compelled

to say, “eye had not seen, nor ear heard, neither had entered into man’s heart” to consider?

Even on grounds of reason, of which some are so vainglorious, what can be more opposed to it, seeing that God has beyond controversy given His prophetic revelation? Is this alone, of all scripture, to be put under human ban? Even on grounds of personal danger the suicidal folly of such scepticism as this is most apparent. For as the great central point of prophecy is the nearness of the day of Jehovah, which is to judge all the pride and irreligion, all the idolatry and rebellion against God, found then on earth and specially in Christendom, it will be too late for men, before they believe, to await that event which will prove the truth of the prophecies in their own destruction. In short and in every point of view the maxim is as false as it is perilous. It really amounts to blotting out all direct use of prophecy whatsoever: for it refuses to hear its warning till its voice is wholly changed. Prophecy accomplished becomes in effect history rather than prophecy (no small value of which is the silencing of God’s enemies); it properly has, while unfulfilled, the admonition and comfort of His people for its primary aim.

But to return. “The princes of Zoan [the ancient royal city of Egypt, named Tanis in profane authors] are become foolish, the princes of Noph [Moph, or Memphis, Hosea 9:6] are deceived; and the corner-stones of its tribes have caused Egypt to err. Jehovah hath mingled a spirit of perverseness in the midst thereof; and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunkard staggereth in his vomit. Neither shall there be any work for Egypt, which head or tail, palm-branch or

rush, may do" (vv. 13-15). They are judicially confounded of God in their policy.

Now we ought not to be indisposed to allow a measure of accomplishment in the time of the prophet. Only let not this measure be allowed to exclude the complete fulfilment which yet remains to be made good. Such a germinant inclusive style, we have seen, is the habit of Isaiah, as indeed of the prophets. Enough was then accomplished for a stay to the faithful; but it was no more than an earnest of that punctual and full payment which God will yet render, in honour both of His own words and of the Lord Jesus when His manifested glory dawns and His world-kingdom comes (Rev. 11:15). "In that day shall Egypt be like unto women, and it shall tremble and fear because of the shaking of the hand of Jehovah of hosts, which he shaketh over it. And the land of Judah shall be a dismay unto Egypt: every one that thinketh of it shall be afraid for himself, because of the counsel of Jehovah of hosts, which he purposeth against it (or, them)" (vv. 16, 17). Egypt has its part to play in the tremendous convulsions which precede Jehovah's appearing; and to this our chapter looks onward, with which compare Daniel 11:40-43. Out of that land shall He gather some of His outcast people (Isa. 11:11, 15), and in the process, as we know, destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea, and with His mighty wind shake His hand over the river, the Euphrates, smiting it into seven streams.

But mercy shall rejoice over judgement; and at the very time when Egypt shall be as women trembling at the shaking of Jehovah's hand, and the very mention of the land of Judah shall strike terror, "In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan,

and swear to Jehovah of hosts; one shall be called, The city of destruction (or, Heres). In that day shall there be an altar to Jehovah in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to Jehovah. And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto Jehovah of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they shall cry unto Jehovah because of the oppressors, and he will send them a Saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them. And Jehovah shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know Jehovah in that day and serve with sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto Jehovah and perform it. And Jehovah will smite Egypt; he will smite and heal: and they shall return to Jehovah, and he will be entreated of them and will heal them" (vv. 18-22). Thus evidently shall Jehovah then deliver and revive Egypt. In that day there will be doubtless not only a governing but a religious centre for all the nations of the earth (Isa. 2:3). For Jehovah shall be King over all the earth; in that day shall there be one Jehovah and His name one (Zech. 14:9). It will be accomplished in and by the Lord Jesus, Who shall build the temple of Jehovah and bear the glory, and sit and rule upon His throne, as Priest as well as King (Zech. 6:12, 13). His house shall be called a house of prayer for all the peoples (Isa. 56:7). But this will not hinder the fulfilment of Mal. 1:11: "For from the rising of the sun even unto its setting, My Name shall be great among the nations; and in every place incense shall be offered unto My Name, and a pure oblation." Under this universal provision for the local worship of the nations falls the special assurance of it for Egypt in that day, which Isaiah here predicts. It was the more impressive to declare it of a nation so debased by idolatry as Egypt of old.

The efforts of interpreters to explain these verses are as manifold as they are vain: and justly are they doomed to darkness who see not the link with Christ, and with Christ the glory of His people Israel then, if they despise Him now. Origen, Eusebius, etc., interpreted it of the flight into Egypt (Matt. 2:13,14), and of the overthrow of idolatry and spread of Christianity there also; Jerome embraces along with this an application to the wasting of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar. Others have tried to find its accomplishment in the temple which Onias induced Ptolemy Philometor to build for keeping the Jews and their worship in Egypt, and which after 200 years was destroyed under Vespasian, like that in Jerusalem. Moderns generally apply it in substance as Jerome did (in part historically, of the disasters under Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Psammetichus, or the Romans; and in part mystically, of the triumphant spread of the gospel past, present, or future). These speculations do not seem to call for refutation: to state them is to condemn them sufficiently.

The true reference to the future crisis on the earth is yet more confirmed by the blessed intimations of the closing verses. “In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth; whom Jehovah of hosts will bless, saying, Blessed [be] Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance” (vv. 23 25). It is not a heavenly scene, but earthly. It is not the present church condition, where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, and Christ is all and in all, but a future state of

large yet graduated blessing of nations. It is not this dispensation, where tares are mingled with the wheat, but the coming age when all scandals are removed from the scene where the Great King reigns in righteousness. That nation, so proud of its natural wisdom, the old oppressor and frequent snare of Israel, shall be humbled to the dust, and out of the dust cry to Jehovah God of Israel, Who shall send them a mighty deliverer; and they shall know Him and worship Him acceptably, Who smote them but will heal them with a great salvation. For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, Jehovah's name will be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto it and a pure oblation; for His name shall be great among the heathen. No wonder therefore that there shall be an altar to Jehovah in the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to Jehovah - a sign and a witness unto Jehovah of hosts in that land. At the same time nothing will supersede Zion as the earth's exalted and religious centre.

But what of that later oppressor of Israel? Has Jehovah but one blessing for the stranger-foe? Has He not reserved a blessing for the Assyrian? Yes, for the Assyrian also. The haughty rival of the north and east shall be brought into the rich blessing of Jehovah. "In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria." Old jealousy and long-lasting animosity shall flee apace and for ever; intimacy and generous trust and mutual love shall cement the alliance that is founded on Jehovah truly known. "And the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria; and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians." Happy, though none then be despised and poor! "In that day shall Israel be

the third with Egypt and with Assyria." That is, Israel shall form one of the trio here specified, and stamped with singular favour in the millennial day. For indeed Jehovah shall bless them, "saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance." Thus again is Abraham 's blessing verified and manifested. "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." But even here, as it appears, the due place of Israel is maintained, and the rank of the others nicely distinguished in God's wisdom, however large His goodness to the rest; for Israel has the glorious title of Jehovah's inheritance, if Egypt be called His people and Assyria fashioned for His praise, the work of His hands.

Isaiah 20

From this chapter, which is an appendix to the last, we learn that the Assyrian ravaged Egypt (with the Ethiopians), leading his captives in shame. "In the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him, and he fought against Ashdod and took it; at that time Jehovah spoke by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go, and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy sandal from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot. And Jehovah said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years [for] a sign and a wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia; so shall the king of Assyria lead away the captives of Egypt, and the exiles of Ethiopia, young and old, naked and barefoot, and with buttocks uncovered,

[to] the shame of Egypt. And they shall be dismayed and ashamed, because of Ethiopia their expectation and of Egypt their boast. And the inhabitant of this coastland shall say in that day, Behold, such [is] our expectation, whither we fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria: and how shall we escape?" (vv. 1-6). History here seems to be silent;16 but not so prophecy, which declares that the land of Egypt shall not escape the king of. the north, or the last Assyrian, at the time of the end, who must then himself be broken without hand (Dan. 11:41-45).

It may also be mentioned, that it is more than doubtful whether Tartan be a proper name. It means more probably "general" or ''commander-in-chief" of Assyria both here and in 2 Kings 18:17. As the other two given as proper names are appellatives of the chief eunuch and the chief butler, so this would point to a chief general employed by Sargon in taking Ashdod, as another was later by Sennacherib when Jerusalem was menaced So Prof. Rawlinson in Smith's Dictionary of the Bible.

It is not surprising that those who look only at the historic pivots on which these utterances turn find a very unaccountable confusion of the events which then occurred. But who is to blame for reading the book of a prophet in a spirit so unbelieving? When it is received from God, as it claims and ought to be, light is shed on those scenes of darkness and evil, and all points harmoniously to Him Who is coming again in the power of His kingdom. There prophecy points and rests.

The symbolical action is by many supposed to be in vision merely, not actual. Perhaps this is due to the very

uncalled-for supposition, that the call was to a condition of entire nudity. But this is baseless, as “naked” is frequently used (see too 1 Sam. 19:24; 2 Sam. 6:20; Amos 2:16; John 21:7) to express the absence, not of all covering, but of the usual outer garb, in one sort or another: so it is not uncommon in well known Latin authors, as many have shown. The prophet already wore sackcloth. This he was to loose from off his loins, and to pull off his sandal from his foot. It seems not improbable that the true sense is “for a three years’ sign and portent,” etc., as the Masoretic punctuation implies and the Septuagint corroborates. The aim avowedly was to produce fear and shame in all who confided in Ethiopia or boasted of Egypt; for the Assyrian was to humble both to the dust. Vain therefore was man’s help.

The moral lesson is apparent. Let not the people look to the kingdoms of the earth for protection in the hour of danger. Jehovah as the true God is and must be jealous. He will not allow compromise any more than unbelief. What are Mizraim and Cush to Israel? Let there be no hope for Israel, but weeping for their own impending humiliation; and let the dweller in the coastland, or Palestine, humble himself, for God is not mocked, and vain the help of man. Israel was really more guilty than any.

Isaiah 21

Is this chapter, though not a long one, are three sentences of judgement - on Babylon (vv. 1-10), on Dumah (vv. 11, 12), and on Arabia (vv. 13-17).

“The burden of the desert of the sea. As whirlwinds in the south pass through, it cometh from the desert, from a terrible land. A grievous vision is declared unto me;

the treacherous dealer dealeth treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth. Go up, Elam; besiege, Media; all the sighing thereof have I made to cease" (vv. 1, 2). There can be no doubt to any fair mind that the great Chaldean capital is referred to. The command to the Medes and Persians to go up and besiege is one indication; and so yet more is the graphic description of the sudden destruction in verses 3-5, which turned the night of revelry into the pangs of terror and death for the dissolute king and his court (Dan. 5). "Therefore are my loins filled with pain; pangs have taken hold upon me, as the pangs of a woman in travail; I am bowed down so as not to hear; I am dismayed so as not to see. My heart panteth, horror affrighteth me; the night of my pleasure hath he turned into trembling unto me" (vv. 3, 4). Is this vindictive feeling or language? It is a holy man of God deeply moved by the prophetic vision of the fall of Babylon, so awful and unexpected. Yet was Babylon Judah's captor.

"Prepare the table, appoint the watch; eat, drink; arise, ye princes, anoint the shield" (v. 5).

"For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman; let him declare what he seeth. And he saw chariots, horsemen by pairs, a chariot with asses, a chariot with camels, and he hearkened diligently with much heed. And he cried [as] a lion, Lord, I stand continually upon the watch-tower in the daytime, and I am set in my ward every night; and, behold, chariots of men come, horsemen by pairs. And he answered and said Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground. O my threshing, and the corn of my floor! what I have

heard of Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, have I declared unto you" (vv. 6-10).

The latter part of the ninth verse crowns the proof, and expressly names Babylon's fall as the object intended. The prophet personifies the city or its people in verse 10.

Nevertheless there is somewhat to be noted in the phrase used of the doomed mistress of the world, especially as there seems to be an evident link between this enigmatic title, "the burden of the desert of the sea," and that applied to Jerusalem, "the burden of the valley of vision," in the beginning of Isa. 22. As the rise and glory of the first Gentile empire was only permitted sovereignly of God in consequence of hopeless idolatry in Judah and Jerusalem, so the judgement of Babylon was the epoch of deliverance for the Jewish remnant, the type of the final dealings of God with the last holder of the power which began with the golden head of the great image. There is thus a correlation between these two cities Jerusalem and Babylon - whether historical or symbolic; and as the latter is designated "the desert of the sea," the former is "the valley of vision." Jeremiah in his vision (Jer. 51:42) beholds the sea come up upon Babylon, so as to cover her with the multitude of the waves. In fact too we know to what a waste this seat of human pride sunk; and so; notoriously it remains until this day.

In verses 6-10 is set forth the twofold leadership of the coming invasion, or at least the twofold nationality of the armies that conquered. The watchman in the vision attests his vigilance, and reports what he saw. This is followed by the solemn tidings of Babylon's fall, and the

prophet's seal on the truth of the announcement. The ruin also we saw in Isa. 13 - 14 irremediable, in the face of the fullest hope and stoutest purpose to make it the metropolis of the earth. So too predicted Jer. 50-51, that Babylon should sink and not rise again.

Next comes "the burden of Dumah," which some consider to border on, if not to be identified with, Idumea. "The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will inquire, inquire; return, come" (vv. 11, 12). The Edomite cry is one of proud scorn and self-security. The brief answer is pregnant with serious expostulation. Let them not trust to hopes of the bright morn; for the dark and dangerous night would assuredly come. Nevertheless a door was still open for repentance. Let them "return, come." How great is the long-suffering of God, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance! But whatever man does or fails to do, His purpose stands, and the day of Jehovah will come as a thief; not more welcome, as little expected. Insult as the world may during the night, the morning will surely come. But there is no morning for the earth till He comes, Who was and is the true Light, and Whose it will be to judge the habitable earth. This is neither the gospel or church time, nor is it eternity when the new heavens and earth are wherein dwells righteousness (2 Peter 3:13). It will be an age of government when He reigns Whose right it is, alone competent to put all evil down, and to maintain both the glory of God and the blessing of man, as He will surely do in that day.

As for “the burden upon Arabia,” little remark is needed. “The burden upon Arabia. In the forest in Arabia shall ye lodge, O travelling companies of Dedanites. Unto him that was thirsty they brought water; the inhabitants of the land of Tema did meet the fugitives with their bread. For they fled away from the swords, from the drawn sword, and from the bent bow, and from the grievousness of war. For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Within a year, according to the years of a hireling, and all the glory of Kedar shall fail; and the residue of the number of the archers, the mighty men of the sons of Kedar, shall be diminished for Jehovah, the God of Israel, hath spoken” (vv. 13-17). The thickets of Arabia17 would be no more an effectual hiding place from the storm than the rocks and mountain fastnesses of Edom. It is not only the travelling companies or caravans of Dedan which are cast on the pity and care of the men of Tema; but utter wasting within a year is pronounced on the mighty men of the sons of Kedar. Man fails, great or small; Jehovah abides and will reign over this earth and all the races of mankind. What a gap there is in the outlook of all who do not believe in the world-kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ!

Isaiah 22

Chapter 22 consists of a prophecy wholly directed against Jerusalem, and entitled, “The burden of the valley of vision.” There may have been some anticipation in the prophet’s day, but it was partial. So much so was this the case, that Vitringa can only eke out an appearance of an historical answer by piecing together the invasion of the city by the Assyrians under Sennacherib, and that by the Chaldeans under

Nebuchadnezzar; and even this by the strong inversion which places the Chaldean movement in verses 1-5 (comp. 2 Kings 25:4, 5) and the Assyrian in the part that follows (with which 2 Chr. 32:2-5 corresponds). Granting this as a primary application, it affords a strong presumption that this chapter, like the last and all we have seen, points to the great day when the reckoning of nations will come in "the morning," and of every individual throughout its course, even to the judgement of the secrets of the heart. It seems strange that believers should rest satisfied with so small an instalment from One Who pays to the uttermost farthing. The spirit that treats as an illusion the expectation of a punctual fulfilment for these prophecies as a whole, in every feature save those expressly limited to a definite time in certain particulars, is either ignorance or scepticism, or, what is common enough, a mixture of both.

The order here ought to strike an attentive reader who believes in inspiration. After the events it would have been unmeaning, were man alone concerned. For where then is the sense of putting a vision of Jerusalem after that of Babylon, and of Babylon reduced to "the desert of the sea "? The order owes all its propriety and force to its looking onward to the end of the age, when Jerusalem shall be taken after Babylon's fall, and the false administrator be replaced by the true, the Righteous Servant.

"The burden of the valley of vision. What aileth thee now, that thou art wholly gone up to the housetops? Thou that wast full of stir, a town of tumult, a joyous city, thy slain [are] not slain with the sword, nor dead in battle. All thy rulers fled together, they are bound

without the bow, all that are found of thee are bound together, they fled far off. Therefore said I, Look away from me: let me weep bitterly; labour not to comfort me for the spoiling of the daughter of my people. For [it is] a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity from the Lord Jehovah of hosts in the valley of vision, of breaking down the wall, and of crying to the mountains. And Elam beareth the quiver, with chariots of men [and] horsemen; and Kir uncovereth the shield. And it shall come to pass [that] thy choicest valleys shall be full of chariots, and the horsemen shall set themselves in array at the gate" (vv. 1-7). The certainty of the accomplishment of prophecy awakens the deepest feeling for God's people, and even for their enemies on whom the judgement falls. It is the opposite of fatalism and its hardness on the one hand, and on the other, of that indifference to which the uncertainty of unbelief leads.

The city is shown us in the early verses, changed from its stir and tumultuous joy to the deepest uneasiness and deadly fear, the slain not fallen in battle but ignominious slaughter, all the rulers fled, but taken and bound; so that the prophet can but turn and weep alone in bitterness. For the trouble and perplexity sprang not from the dust but were by Jehovah of hosts.

The central verses expose the utter vanity and unpardonable sin of recourse to human measures by the people of God when He is dealing with them in judgement. Their only right place at such a time is to bow to His hand and accept the chastening He is pleased to inflict, always confident that mercy rejoices against judgement, and that the end of Jehovah is that He is exceeding pitiful and of tender mercy. Here there

was no humiliation in them, no recognition of Him or His ways. “And he uncovereth the covering of Judah; and thou didst look in that day to the armour in the house of the forest. And ye saw the breaches of the city of David, that they were many; and ye gathered together the waters of the lower pool. And ye numbered the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses ye broke down to fortify the wall. And ye made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool. But ye looked not unto the maker thereof, neither had regard unto him that fashioned it long ago. And in that day did the Lord Jehovah of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth; and behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. And it was revealed in mine ears by Jehovah of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord Jehovah of hosts” (vv. 8-14). The one effort was to escape by policy - a fatal path for the people of God, which speedily leads into mere latitudinarian Sadduceeism. The believer is delivered alike from fear and haste, and from despair and present license.

The close of the chapter sets before us the setting aside of the unworthy Shebna who had crept into the place of chief minister, next to the throne, living only for self, and even seeking after death nothing but his own name and glory. “Thus saith the Lord Jehovah of hosts, Go, get thee in to this treasurer, unto Shebna who is over the house, [and say,] What hast thou here, and whom hast thou here, that thou hast hewn thee out here a sepulchre, [as] one hewing him out a sepulchre on high, graving a habitation for himself in the rock? Behold,

Jehovah will hurl thee away violently as a strong man, and he will wrap thee up closely. He will surely roll and toss thee [like] a ball into a large country: there shalt thou die, and there [shall be] the chariots of thy glory, O shame of thy lord's house. And I will thrust thee from thine office, and from thy station will He pull thee down" (vv. 15-19).

Thereon Jehovah's servant Eliakim is called to take the reins of office in his stead, a father to Jerusalem and Judah, with the key of David's house laid by Jehovah on his shoulder, with full authority and adequate power. "And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkijah; and I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; and he shall open, and none shall shut and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him [as] a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a throne of glory to his father's house. And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue, every small vessel, from the vessels of cups even to all the vessels of flagons" (vv. 20-24). We cannot here fail to recognize the type of Christ displacing the Antichrist. The very fact of the past historical circumstances being put together without regard to mere date, as we have seen, and with personages introduced who officially were not the highest, yet described in terms which open out to a dominion and power beyond the highest, prepares one for the magnificent events of the latter day in the Holy

Land as the only complete fulfilment of the scripture before us.

“In that day, saith Jehovah of hosts, shall the nail that is fastened in a sure place be removed, and be cut down and fall; and the burden that [was] upon it shall be cut off; for Jehovah hath spoken” (v. 25). It was not the position, but the person that made the difference. Shebna had just the same place, but he utterly failed and wrought ruin. Not so Eliakim who followed, as we have seen, in the verses last before us. Rev. 3:7 warrants the application to Christ.

Isaiah 23

The last of these local judgements here comes before us - “the burden of Tyre.” This city is the type of the world’s commercial glory; wealthy, corrupt, and self-confident, but taken though not destroyed after a long siege by Nebuchadnezzar. Such historically is the destruction announced not here only but in Ezek. 26-28. Tyre and the Tyrians formed the centre of the merchandise of the ancient world, the emporium of all the commodities and the luxuries of that day, the link through “the ships of Tarshish” between the west and the east. Its fall therefore could not but affect painfully and universally the dwellers on the earth; and the rather, as trading rivals were fewer than now. Yet how would not in our day the overthrow of the proudest seat of modern commerce make itself felt to the ends of the earth? We know from elsewhere that the siege was prolonged for a term quite unusual, thirteen years; indeed we need not travel beyond the prophetic record (Ezek. 29)18 to learn how severe a task it was for the Chaldean conqueror; but so much the greater was the

moral effect of its fall. So that Tyre and Sidon remained the proverbial and most striking warning of divine judgement, as may be gathered from our Lord's reference.

"The burden of Tyre. Howl, ye ships of Tarshish, for it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in: from the land of Chittim it is revealed to them" (v. 1). There seems to be no need for departing from the ordinary sense of Chittim, either here or in ver. 12, in which the learned Bochart understands the Cutheans or Babylonians, and the meaning here to be "from the land of the Cutheans doth their captivity come." Neither is there in Chittim any necessity to refer this burden to the sack of new or insular Tyre by Alexander the Great, as do Luther and others. The prophet calls the far-famed ships of Tarshish, first and repeatedly, to take up the dirge of the ruined mart for their merchandise, and intimates that though there was no house to receive them, nor haven for their ships to enter, the ill news would be revealed in the far west (primarily Cyprus).

"Be still, ye inhabitants of the isle (or, coast); the merchants of Zidon that pass over the sea have replenished thee. And on great waters the seed of Shihor, the harvest of the river, [was] her revenue; and she was the market of nations" (vv. 2, 3) What a change, when silence reigned where once had thronged their neighbours, the merchants of Zidon, where the treasures of the enriching Nile were gathered, "the market of nations," now a waste! "Be thou ashamed, Zidon, for the sea hath spoken, the strength of the sea, saying, I have not travailed, nor brought forth, neither have I nourished young men, [nor] brought up virgins. As at the report concerning Egypt, they were sorely

pained at the report of Tyre" (vv. 4, 5). Zidon was too nearly allied to Tyre, too intimately bound up with it, not to feel and suffer keenly; and as Tyre had been its boast heretofore, so now its degradation could not but darken their neighbours; since the very sea is by bold but happy figure made to bewail her desolation: whom had she pertaining to her lineage, now that Tyre was no more? And so it was with Egypt also. The Zidonians, though directly profited by Egypt more than all other foreign nations, did not more grieve over the ruin of Tyre than of their great southern ally.

Verses 6, 7 finish these addresses with a direct appeal to the Tyrians themselves, taunting their haughty merchants with the reverse that awaited them, the just recompense of their deeds "Pass over to Tarshish: howl, ye inhabitants of the isle (or; coast). [Is] this your joyous [city], whose antiquity [is] of ancient days? Her feet shall carry her afar off to sojourn" (vv. 6, 7). Far from being an attraction to the ships of Tarshish, they must go and howl there themselves, they the men of the sea-girt land, whose city rang with gaiety, and whose years of proud security were only less ancient than Zidon, and yet more prosperous and eminent! Yes, they must go, and trudge sadly, painfully, in quest of some asylum in a strange land.

And why was this? Who would smite and prostrate the proud city of Phoenicia? "Who hath purposed this against Tyre, that giveth crowns, whose merchants [were] princes, whose dealers [were] the honourable of the earth?" (v. 8). The answer follows in verse 9. "Jehovah of hosts hath purposed it, to stain (or, profane) the pride of all glory, to bring to naught all the honourable of the earth. Overflow thy land as the Nile,

daughter of Tarshish: [there is] no more restraint. He stretched out his hand over the sea, he shaketh the kingdoms. Jehovah hath given a commandment on Canaan [or, the merchant city], to destroy the strongholds thereof, and hath said, Thou shalt no more exult, oppressed virgin, daughter of Zidon: arise, pass over to Chittim; there also shalt thou have no rest" (vv. 9-12). Here the moral reasons are not given in full; we must search other prophets for all. But Jehovah's opposition to the proud is stated, His scorn for the glory of man, His slight of all trust in earthly strongholds. Even in exile the Tyrians should find no rest. In the next verse we have the instrumental means He meant to-employ: "Behold the land of the Chaldeans: this people existed not. The Assyrian founded it for the dwellers in the wilderness: they set up their towers, they destroyed the palaces thereof; he brought it to ruin" (v. 13). The Chaldeans, who, in contrast with old Tyre, were nationally a people but of yesterday, are seen by the prophet bringing Tyre to ruin. Such appears to be the meaning, which is confirmed by the fresh call to grief of the ships of Tarshish in verse 14: "Howl, ships of Tarshish, for your fortress is laid waste."

But the conqueror himself yields to an avenger. Babylon falls; and the full term of seventy years, which beheld the returning remnant of Judah, had a revival in store for Tyre but a revival of her meretricious ways, pandering for gainful trade to all the luxurious habits and corruptions of the nations. "And it shall come to pass in that day that Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king: after the end of seventy years it shall be for Tyre as a harlot's song. Take a harp, go about the city, thou forgotten harlot, make

sweet melody, sing many songs, that thou mayest be remembered. And it shall come to pass after the end of seventy years, that Jehovah will visit Tyre, and she will return to her hire, and will commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the ground" (vv. 15-17). Nevertheless the last verse intimates that even this prophetic scene, though so largely accomplished in the past, is not without its bright side in the day of Joy to the whole earth. "And her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to Jehovah: it shall not be treasured nor laid up [as in former days, when conscienceless tricks of avarice dictated the manner and objects of her trade]; for her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before Jehovah, to eat sufficiently and for durable clothing" (v. 18). The daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift, when the King shall greatly desire the beauty of His earthly bride (Ps. 45:12).

That God was thus pleased to reveal, not only about Babylon and the Assyrian, but about Philistia and Moab and Damascus about Egypt and Tyre, may seem little in the eyes of unbelieving philosophy; but what a favour to His people of old, the centre of all, and not the less because they were weak and worthless and continually turning aside from Him like a deceitful bow! What will it be to that people when they are His in a truer and fuller sense than ever, as they can only be when they judge their apostasy, both in seeking every idol, and in rejecting His Messiah and theirs? Then they will know, as petty and pedantic rationalists cannot through their false starting-point (at bottom the same unbelief as Israel's), that all these prophecies form parts of a vast harmonious system, converging on His future kingdom

over all the earth, when He receives it of God in association with Israel, then made willing in the day of His power, and strikes through kings in the day of His wrath, and judges amongst the nations (Ps. 110:5, 6). Meanwhile the pride of commerce was judged in Tyre, as the pride of nature was in Egypt.

Isaiah 24

The prophet now launches into a larger theme. Hitherto we have had ten "burdens," the burdens of the nations from Babylon to Tyre, not without involving Jerusalem in those judgements which, starting from local circumstances, sweep on to the "end of the age," when God shall put down the rebellious pride of the earth. In the present chapter Isaiah enlarges the scene, with the land and people of Israel as the centre, so as to disclose, not the great white throne before which the wicked dead stand and are judged, but the hour of the earth's universal retribution from God, "the day of Jehovah" in its unrestricted final sense, of which previous dealings, as in the cases of Babylon and Egypt, were but the shadow and the earnest.

"Behold, Jehovah maketh the earth [or, land] empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad its inhabitants. And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest, as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the taker of usury, so with him from whom usury is taken" (vv. 1, 2). There are evidently no limits here. As verse 1 shows us the earth wasted, confounded, and prostrate under the divine dealing, so verse 2 indicates an unsparing overthrow of

all grades among its inhabitants. “The land shall be utterly emptied and utterly spoiled: for Jehovah hath spoken this word” (v. 3). If it is hard work to apply such strong and comprehensive terms to the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, as some conceive, still less can verse 4 be evaded. “The earth mourneth, it fadeth away: the world languisheth, it fadeth away; the haughty people of the earth do languish” (v. 4). How carefully too the Spirit guards against the too common resource of unbelief - the alleged hyperbole of an impassioned seer! - “Jehovah hath spoken this word.”

Next, we have the moral ground on which God judged and executed thus sternly. “The earth [or, land] also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof, for they have transgressed the laws, changed the statute, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore doth the curse devour the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left” (vv. 5, 6). It is no mere providential judgement but a most comprehensive and divine infliction, of which God had spoken almost since the beginning. “Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these” (Jude 14). The oft-threatened long-suspended blow will at length fall, as Isaiah here intimates, and Jude later still, when Christendom’s evil becomes as plain as Israel’s.

“The new wine mourneth, the vine languisheth, all the merry hearted do sigh. The mirth of tambours ceaseth, the noise of them that rejoice endeth, the joy of the harp ceaseth. They do not drink wine with a song; strong drink is bitter to them that drink it. The city of solitude is broken down; every house is shut up, that no man entereth in. [There is] a crying for wine in the streets;

all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone. In the city remaineth desolation, and the gate is smitten, - a ruin" (vv. 7-12). Such and so complete is the picture of woe. Desolation overspreads the country and the city alike. Nevertheless, as always, God reserves a remnant. "For thus it will be in the midst of the land among the peoples, as the shaking of an olive-tree, as the grape-gleanings when the vintage is done. These shall lift up their voice, they shall shout for the majesty of Jehovah, they shall cry aloud from the sea. Wherefore glorify ye Jehovah in the east, the name of Jehovah the God of Israel in the isles of the west. From the end [wing] of the earth have we heard songs, Glory to the righteous" (vv. 13-16). It is manifestly a description of the righteous in Israel, who shall come into prominence, as divine judgements mow down their proud oppressors.

Nevertheless verse 16 appears to mark how deeply the prophet, foreshowing the exercised godly souls of that day, deplores the low condition of the remnant, and the fearful defection and ruin of the mass of Israel. "But I said, My leanness my leanness, woe unto me! the treacherous have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous have dealt very treacherously. Fear, and the pit, and the snare [are] upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth [or, land]. And it shall come to pass [that] he who fleeth from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit, and he that cometh up out of the midst of the pit shall be taken in the snare, for the windows on high are opened, and the foundations of the earth do shake. The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is quite dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth reeleth to and fro like a drunkard, and is shaken like a night-hut; and the transgression thereof is heavy upon it; and it falleth, and

riseth not again. And it shall come to pass in that day [that] Jehovah will punish the host of the high ones on high, and the kings of the earth on the earth. And they shall be gathered together [as] prisoners gathered for the pit, and shall be shut up in prison, and after many days shall they be visited. And the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when Jehovah of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his elders [or, ancients] in glory" [or, gloriously] (vv. 16-23).

The entire chapter, specially its closing verses, brings into the strongest evidence the hopeless difficulties of those who confound earthly things with heavenly, and refuse to see the portion in store for Israel in the latter day, when judgement has fallen on the habitable earth. Writers as early as Theodoret confess the ulterior scope of the prophecy, whatever measure of accomplishment they might consider it to have had in the past: "The discourse contains a double prophecy; for it points out both what was going on at different times among the enemies, and what shall be in the consummation of the present age." But then, immediately after, he makes the singularly unintelligent observation that the second verse describes a state of things properly and truly after the resurrection. The judgement of the quick is ignored. There is in truth not a word here of the dead raised, or souls giving an account of their deeds, but emphatically and repeatedly of the earth's crisis, and of the world smitten and languishing under God's mighty hand. The language, no doubt, is excessively strong; it here and there appears to look on to the dissolution of all things, as is sufficiently common in prophetic style, where the prediction of the signal change which ushers in the

millennium contains a more or less covert allusion to the utter passing away of the heavens and earth that now are, and the coming in of the eternal state. But the conclusion of the chapter makes it plain that the grand aim of the Spirit here is to portray that mighty and universal catastrophe which is succeeded by the times of refreshing for Israel and the earth, of which God has spoken by His holy prophets since the world began.

So profound and all-embracing, however, is the dealing of God, that even the angelic hosts escape no more than the proudest potentates here below. “It shall come to pass in that day [that] Jehovah shall punish the host of the high ones on high [not, ‘that are on high’], and the kings of the earth on the earth,” These spirits of evil had up to this misled man and dishonoured God, seeking to corrupt every mercy almost from the source. But the time is come that angels should be judged as well as living men, far beyond even the judgement of the flood. The power of the heavens shall be shaken - not earth only, but also heaven. But far from its being as yet the melting away of time into eternity, “the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when Jehovah shall reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before his elders in glory.” It is the day of which Zechariah spoke (Zech. 14:9, 10), long after the return from the captivity, when Jehovah shall be king over all the earth. “In that day shall there be one Jehovah, and his name one. All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; and it shall be lifted up, and inhabited in her place, from Benjamin’s gate unto the place of the first gate, unto the corner gate, and from the tower of Hananeel unto the king’s winepresses.” Could expressions be used more precisely to exclude the

mystical interpretation, or more calculated to maintain the hopes of Israel, then to be built on the Living Stone over Whom they have till yet stumbled? Jehovah Messiah will come in His kingdom and reign in Zion. The land as it were broadens out to the earth; not only is the world comprehended in the divine dealing but the heavens. And He, Who has at length taken to Him His great power and reigned, proves Himself the ruler of all things that are in “heaven, and that are on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or lordships or principalities or authorities.” As they were created in virtue of (ἐν) Him and through Him, so were they created for Him, as the day of Jehovah will display, when Jerusalem and Mount Zion still subsist: a state of things manifestly different from and antecedent to the eternity that follows.

Isaiah 25

The bearing of Isa. 24 on the consummation of the age is entirely confirmed by that which follows and is now before us, where we have the prophet personifying the people raising their hearts to Jehovah in praise. They are celebrating God for His wonderful doings, and own that His counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. “Jehovah, thou [art] my God I will exalt thee, I will celebrate thy name; for thou hast done wonderful [things]: counsels of old [which are] faithfulness [and] truth. For thou hast made of the city a heap; of the fortified town a ruin; a palace of strangers to be no city - it shall never be built up. Therefore shall the mighty people glorify thee, the city of terrible nations shall fear thee. For thou hast been a fortress to the poor, a fortress to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the

heat; for the blast of the terrible ones [was] as a storm [against] a wall. Thou hast subdued the tumult of strangers, as the heat in a dry place; [as] the heat by the shadow of a cloud, [so] the song of the terrible ones is brought low" (vv. 1-5). The execution of His judgement takes effect on the strong and their city. It is the habitable earth which comes under Jehovah's hand, as certainly as the end of the chapter before was His dealing with the heavens and the earth.

The eternal state does not enter into account. On the other hand there is no ground for making it bear on present circumstances. It is a new state of things that does not exist now; for if there be one place in the earth where, less than another, the Lord has the appearance of reigning, it is in that very Jerusalem and Mount Zion. The chosen land of Israel (1896) is in the possession of the Turk; it has been in his hands for hundreds of years, and before then it was the object of contention for the kings of the earth and equally so for the followers of Mahomet; it has been the great battle-ground between the east and the west; and up to the present time God has permitted that the devotees of Mecca should appear to have gained the victory there. Ever since the cross of the Saviour, God is no longer maintaining the glory of His Son in connection with Mount Zion. The Son of God has been rejected, and has died upon the cross. Since then all connection with the world is broken, every link with the Jew is gone; and no man has ever seen the Lord of glory, except the believer.

He was witnessed by the world before, seen of men - not merely of angels as now. He was displayed before human eyes, God manifest in the flesh. But, when man cast Him out, all acknowledgment of the world as such

was terminated. He was no more seen after His resurrection by any unbeliever; none but chosen witnesses were permitted to behold Him. Taken soon after up to heaven, He sits at the right hand of God; and thence He will come to judge the quick and the dead. A great mistake it is to confound the judgement of the quick with the judgement of the dead. Scripture indicates that there is a long interval of most remarkable character, which separates the one from the other. Indeed there is to be, in a certain and most important sense, a peaceful judgement of the quick going on all through the interval of a thousand years An awful execution of judgement on open enemies must be before the Lord begins to reign, as there will be an insurrection of the distant nations at the end. The judgement of the dead follows that reign, before the eternal state is manifested. (See Rev. 20 - 21)

The judgement of the dead remains, then, perfectly certain. It is a truth of God that there is a resurrection both of the just and the unjust. But it has not been so generally seen that the Lord of glory is about to revisit this world and stop the whole course of human affairs, and interpose with both providential inflictions, and then His own personal judgement, upon the guilt of man; not yet for judging the dead, which will come afterwards. Before the dead stand before the white throne divine dealing by the Lord Himself will be the portion of living men from the highest to the lowest. To this our Lord referred, when He warned His disciples of the days that were coming. Thus Matt. 24 - 25. and Luke 17, 21 refer, save a part of the last chapter, exclusively to this time and to these circumstances. Some scriptures speak only of the judgement of the dead, others both unfold the

portion of the risen saints to enjoy heavenly glory with Christ, and tell how the dead are to be judged according to their works.

The believer is saved according to the worth of Christ's work; he who shall be judged according to his own works is lost for ever. No child of God, if judged as he deserved, could be saved. For, if judged at all, God must judge after His own justice with no less a standard than Christ. We must be as spotless as His Son in order to be fit companions for Him. But on that ground there is an end of all hope. The gospel turns on this, that Jesus was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification, not for our judgement. What is the value in God's sight of the work He has done? Is it only a partial salvation? or for only some believers? If it be not a full salvation for sinners, yea, for the worst of those who believe it is not what God commends to us, nor a due and righteous answer to the cross of Christ. Therein is the very comfort of the salvation that Christ has effected. It is a perfect salvation, it delivers from all sins, it places the chief of sinners upon a new ground as Christians, kings, priests, and children of God. Thenceforward our business is to trust and obey Him, labouring for and suffering with Christ and for Christ, as we await His return from heaven, even Jesus our Deliverer, Who will judge His adversaries.

It is plain that there are two classes of men who are to enter the resurrection state. I do not say to rise at the same time, for no scripture says this. It is said that "the hour is coming when all that are in the graves... shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgement"19 (John 5:28, 29). All

this is quite true, but not a word about their coming forth at the same time. Other scriptures show that the two resurrections, here shown to be distinct in principle and issue, will not take place simultaneously. Hence, while both might be said to be the rising of the dead, that of the righteous alone is or could be called a rising from the dead, the rest being left as yet in their graves. From Rev. 20. again, it is plain that a thousand years at least will intervene between the resurrection of the just and that of the unjust. Any one reading the Revelation without prejudice could not fail to gather that the righteous dead are raised first to reign with Christ; and then, after the earthly reign, that the rest of the dead are raised, who are judged according to their works; and of these it is said that whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. There is not a hint of any who were found written. When God judges according to works, nothing can follow but destruction. Their evil works abound in the books; and the book of life has none of their names in it.

This strongly links itself with what is before us. Here we have the Lord, not hidden in heaven, but appearing from heaven to reign. He is not reigning on the earth now. It is chiefly. among idle speculative men (of learning perhaps) where you find any dream so foolish. Who is not aware that if any period in the history of Christendom was particularly dreary as to outward light, it is that from Constantine, or some time after, to the Reformation - the dark ages, as they are called? Yet even pious men are not wanting who maintain that this is the very time when Christ was reigning; that it began in the year 320 and ended 1320! that is, the most unrelieved reign of darkness that Christendom has yet seen!

Augustine made this reign begin with Christ and extend all through Christianity. This was bad; the other is worse, though maintained by H. Grotius. Both exercised an enormous influence in the world. The great Dutchman, if consulted in a matter of erudition, would have probably given no inconsiderable help to most men; but when he came to the word of God, he was as much at sea there as St. Peter or St. John would have been in that which was his favourite province. In divine things learning is of small value - except as a drudge to men of spiritual judgement and lowly; for the meek only has God promised to guide in judgement. The assumption that, because a man is a profound scholar, even if a Christian also, he is a safe expositor of scripture, is a grave mistake.

Let my reader, if he know it not already, search and see whether there be not a time coming when the Lord, Who is now in heaven at the right hand of God, will leave it to introduce His reign over the earth with the chosen city as His earthly metropolis. Do you ask why there should be such an attraction to that spot? Certainly it has been the scene of sorrow and shame and rivalry between the east and west, and also of the deepest humiliation of God’s ancient people. But let me ask you, even on your ground, where there is a spot on earth so full of grand associations, so connected with all that is dear to the believer? There the Lord of glory came. There He died. It is His city, the city of the Great King. Why should He not then come and take it for Himself? Is it not worthy of Him to pardon and bless and sanctify and magnify Jerusalem before the world, overcoming her evil with His good? Most plain is the scripture that the Lord has to come there, and to establish it as the capital of His

earthly kingdom. It is not meant that the Lord will dwell literally on the earth, but be King over it. Yet scripture says He will plant His foot upon the mount of Olives. It is therefore quite necessary for the truth of His future kingdom to maintain that He will visibly come and smite the earth, and establish His kingdom there, and fill the world with the blessed effects of His presence and glory. Scripture says that He will surely come and display Himself here; but for how long, to what extent, and how often during that reign, it is not for me at least to pretend to aver; for I am not aware that scripture answers those questions. And as there is a special place, so there is a people He will favour most Jerusalem and the Jewish people.

But what is to become of Christians? Are they and the Jews to be huddled in Jerusalem together as the old Chiliasts affirmed? Is this the Christian hope? Such an idea is ignorant and monstrous. The Christian is even now in title blessed in the heavenly places. Thence he will reign over the earth. The Jews then gathered and converted will be in their own promised land and city, on which the eyes of Jehovah rest continually; for it is the truth of God that He never withdraws a gift, and never repents of a promise. He might repent of creating man: this was not a promise; it was simply an exertion of His will. But if God chose Israel or the church, He repented of neither, though both have been unfaithful; for He meant to bless, He does bless, and, no matter what the difficulty, He will bless for ever. This we have to hold fast: the purpose of God shall stand. Changes in man and the earth may be, but the counsel of God must yet be accomplished.

Hence the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. He gave the land of Israel to their fathers. He gave the promise to make their seed a blessing. He connected His own Son with Israel after the flesh, that, spite of their sin in Christ's cross, in virtue of His grace therein an immovable basis of blessing might be laid, when they shall be raised to such a pinnacle of greatness on the earth as is reserved for no other people here below. When the Lord will come to reign, He will have removed to the Father's house the heavenly people. He will have raised the dead from their graves, and changed the living into the likeness of His own glory. For this all Christians should be looking, as their expectation. When they are caught up thus, then the earth is clear for the Holy Ghost to work among the Jews. The Spirit of God does not operate to two different ends - a heavenly and an earthly - at the same time. But here we find Him at work among the Jews who are not caught up to heaven, as we expect to be, but are blessed under the Messiah on the earth.

Our Lord then having first come and removed the Christians dead and living to be with Himself above, will next begin to act upon the Jews and prepare them as His people when He reigns. This is what is in question here. The earthly centre of His reign is Mount Zion and Jerusalem. This it is which gives to the reign of David such emphasis in the word of God. For he was the chosen type of the Lord, not merely in His humiliation, but also in His glory. He had also to war and put down his enemies, and therefore was called a "man of blood." Our Lord will be first an executor of judgement, though not, as David, allowing anything of his own spirit or will to interfere and spoil the work; but, in the holy authority

of God Himself, in the pouring out of divine wrath and indignation, all will be perfect and dealt with in righteousness. In that day the Lord will convulse the whole universe, punishing “the host of the high ones on high,” that is, in the scene that they have defiled, “and the kings of the earth on the earth” (Isa. 24:21).

Thus the believing Jews of that day will utter the song in evident reference to their experience of the faithfulness of God. They do not address God as Father in the Spirit of adoption, for they are not Christians; they will be believers, but believing Jews. It is gross ignorance to talk of Abel, Enoch, Abraham, David, or Daniel as Christians. They were all saints, but none then were Christians. Not merely was it after Christ came that the disciples were first called Christians, but the place into which believers were at length brought by the work of Christ and the gift of the Spirit differs essentially. There is hardly a worse error for a believer now; for it alike tells upon the present and the future and the past, merging all the various displays of God’s mind in confusion. This blunts the edge of the word, hinders the full blessing and testimony of the church, and by its ignorance mars the glory of God as much as man can, who is not an open adversary.

Now, no doubt, in presence of the cross, and the Holy Ghost sent personally on earth, the old distinctions of Jew and Gentile fade before their common ruin in sin and death morally. But when the Lord comes, He will prepare the Jewish people to receive Him according to the prophets; and they will be made the witnesses of His mercies no less than of His glory here below; as now they are the most obstinate enemies of the gospel and of His grace to the Gentiles. Whereas in this chapter we

hear the proper language of Jews. If a Christian were to address God as Jehovah, it is of course in itself true; but it is a very unintelligent title in our worship. To us there is one God, the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ. Jehovah is the name of God looked at as a governor that maintains His kingdom; whereas Father is that name which first came out in connection with His beloved Son, and now, by virtue of redemption, is true of us who believe in Him.

Hence, as often noticed, the very day that Christ was raised from the dead, He says, “Go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (John 20:17). Christ, by His death and resurrection, has brought us into the same place with Himself. This the Lord always had in view when He was here, so that He never addressed God as Jehovah, because the New Testament presents Him in view of Christianity. But the Old Testament shows that the Lord will have a people, and that they will know Him and the Father as Jehovah. This suffices to indicate the difference; and these remarks have been made to show that another class of people are here spoken of, not Christians, but Jews, who recognise God by that title which God gave Himself in relation to Israel of old. When God chose Moses, He bade him go and make Himself known to them as Jehovah, telling them that He was not so known before. Thus was it ordered at the commencement of the public dealings of God with His people, and throughout their national history it was as Jehovah He appeared. It was not that the name did not previously exist, but He never took it before for His recognised title as the God of Israel.

It is now the prophet who speaks on behalf of Israel, he breaks into the language of praise, and individualises it in behalf of the people in ver. 1. What are the wonderful things? The death and resurrection of Christ? Not a word about either. These are the themes we should speak about. Thus, on the Lord's-day morning, when we come together, what occupies our hearts is the burden of His praise. We have the still more wonderful works of God in Christ and the new creation; and the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven bears His witness to these (Acts 2:11).

Here Israel are supposed to be occupied with the wonderful things God has wrought for the deliverance of their nation. For God will have interposed and put forth His power to deliver His ancient people by the judgement of their mightiest enemies. They speak of the ruin God has inflicted on all around them. As long as the Jews are unbroken for their sins and indifferent to the truth of God, only bent on making money and serving as the world's bankers, people will be content to use them and let them alone. But from the moment that God calls the Jew out of his present spiritual and national degradation, when the dry bones are gathered together, when their hearts turn to the rejected Messiah, the nations will turn against them, and once more rend them, as truly as ever. How do we know this? The Bible delivers the believer from guess work. People who do not study the prophetic word can only speculate about the future. There can be no certainty for them; to pretend to it would be presumptuous. But when you in detail believe the Bible, you are entitled through the teaching of God's Spirit to have the certain light of God. It is entirely our own unbelief if we do not enjoy it.

“And in this mountain shall Jehovah of hosts make unto all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the veil which veileth all peoples, and the covering that is spread over all the nations. He will swallow up death in victory. And the Lord Jehovah will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the reproach of his people will he take away from off all the earth: for Jehovah hath spoken” (vv. 6-8). The Spirit of God refers here to resurrection: so the apostle, in 1 Corinthians 15:54, applies the beginning of verse 8, “When this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” The resurrection synchronises with the deliverance of Israel, which itself will be “life from the dead” for the world (Rom. 11:15). Thus the first open stroke at death will be at this very time. Jesus is the resurrection and the life; and when He comes with His risen saints He will receive His ancient people, and will swallow up the covering that is spread over all the nations. For there is no deliverance wrought in the earth up to that time. It is when His reign over the earth is to begin, not when it ends.

“Jehovah hath spoken.” Why, we ask, does He say so here? Is it not because He foresaw that man would be incredulous? The special mark of Jehovah’s voice is here, the evil heart of unbelief being well known to Him, and all the delusions of wise and unwise, deceiving and being deceived. He knew how Christendom would say, in reading of predicted judgements, they were for the Jews; and of blessings, these are for themselves. Thus

they claim all the good things for the church, as they leave all the dark things for Israel; but even there they destroy conscience by the lie which views prophecy as past and obsolete. “And it shall be said in that day, Behold, this [is] our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this [is] Jehovah; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. For in this mountain shall the hand of Jehovah rest, and Moab shall be trodden down under him, even as straw is trodden down on the dunghill. And he will spread forth his hands in the midst of them, as he that swimmeth spreadeth [them] forth to swim, and he will bring down their pride together with the plots of their hands. And the fortress of the high defences of thy walls will he bring down, lay low, [and] bring to the ground, into the dust” (vv. 9-12).

We must examine of whom God speaks; there are judgements upon Israel and upon Christendom, and blessings for Israel and for the church. That this is for Israel has been already shown; the language used is only suited to them. They speak of themselves, not as we do, conscious children of God, but as His people and of judgements which introduce their blessing. Were all the earth to be dissolved, it would neither lessen nor increase our blessing. When Christ comes, He will simply remove us to Himself, changed into His likeness and out of the scene of weakness and sin and sorrow into His own heavenly home. Whereas here, “It shall be said in that day, Behold, this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is Jehovah; we have waited for him; we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” They are not saved yet. Such is not our case now, save as to the body. Search the New Testament and you will see that, as regards the soul, we must be saved

now; and if we believe, we are. It is plain that here is another class, Jews who have waited in shame for Jehovah, and who when He comes in glory, say, “This is our God, we have waited for Him, and He will save us.” Not for us but for them “shall the hand of Jehovah” rest in “this mountain.” Our portion is in heaven. “This mountain” is the lofty centre of the earthly glory. And accordingly the name of a proud national foe of Israel follows, as doomed to humiliation. Is the Christian looking for Moab to be trodden down? The wholesale christening of the Jewish prophets tends to make scripture ridiculous, and many a man has become hardened in his incredulity by such baseless preoccupation with the gospel and the church. There are general truths and principles that apply to us; for all prophets are intended for the use of the Christian, as the law also. Every scripture is inspired and profitable; but it is absurd thence to infer that all is about ourselves. “The law is good,” says the apostle, “if a man use it lawfully”; and very profitable are the prophets yet we must hear them not as if we were Jews, but as Christians.

Here then is proof plain enough that not Christians, not the church of God, are before us, but Israel. What have we to do with Moab as an enemy? and an enemy which is to be trodden down? Do we look to tread down our enemies, if it were even the Roman papacy? Here is scripture, but it is not a prophecy of scripture about us: assuredly we ought to enjoy it and to bless God for it; yet the people concerned are not ourselves but Israel. They on the earth will see their former enemies completely put down, and Moab among the rest - a consideration which ought to have kept any from

interpolating the church and from obliterating the Jew. For they are preserved as a separate people for mercy at the end, and mercy enduring for ever, and for the first place of earthly distinction and power under the Messiah, whereas we of the church are sharers of Christ's rejection on earth, but to be glorified on high as He is, and to reign over the earth with Him in that day.

Isaiah 26

Here we have another song to be sung. "In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah" (v. 1). That in the last chapter is not so called, yet was it an outburst of praise after the shaking of heaven and earth; in this we have the prophet still further celebrating what God has done for Judah.

If we look at the Jews now, the contrast with what they are to be made by-and-by is very striking. For in Romans 1:18 they are thus alluded to: "For wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness [i.e., Gentile wickedness in general] and unrighteousness of men that hold the truth in unrighteousness [that of Jews]." Here, on the contrary, it is said, "We have a strong city; salvation doth he appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, and the righteous nation which keepeth faithfulness shall enter in" (vv. 1, 2).

Scripture will have been abandoned by the Jewish people, or the larger part of them, in the last days. At the first advent of Christ it could be said that "salvation is of the Jews"; they had the truth but held it in unrighteousness. They had the form of sound doctrine maintained for the most part, save among the Sadducees. But before the Lord comes the second time, the great mass of the nation will not hold the truth but a

lie, the great deceit of the last days, the lie of Antichrist instead of the truth of Christ. Their unrighteousness will be manifest and fatal.

Here we have the blessed contrast of all this: there is a remnant whom God will make to be a strong nation, and they are called, “The righteous nation which keepeth faithfulness.” In verse 3 it is not merely that there is a general profession of the nation, but there will be an individual reality among them. In the past they were called “the holy nation,” as a description that belonged to them, but in the future there is this comfort to all that love them that it will be real collectively and individually. No common privileges are ever meant to make us less mindful of individual fidelity. “Thou wilt keep in perfect peace the mind stayed [on thee], for he confideth in thee” (v. 3).

For very many years the common joy of the church was but little entered into, because of the worldliness, legalism, schisms, divisions, and innumerable wrong ways that had crept in. But there is the danger, now that God has been pleased to show the importance and comfort of corporate blessing, of our forgetting that the individual place has to be all the more carefully watched. It is of primary moment to know the standing of the Christian and the position of the church, but the practical state must be most jealously looked to. Strength depends upon what passes between our own souls and God, Who in His gracious and vigilant care watches over the saints individually.

These then do not forget the public blessings of the nation, but there is also the individual saint’s walk, staying upon God, caring for His glory, Who, on His part,

keeps the soul in perfect peace; the mind is stayed upon God Himself. For no matter what the blessings be, if we have not God Himself as the object of our hearts, they are sure to be misused; therefore it is said, “because he trusteth in thee.” It is not merely the perception of the goodness of God and of the wonders He had wrought for them. Now they know Himself, and trust Himself, and this is a very real thing for our souls - the personal knowledge of God and trust in God. Need it be said that God looks for it now in a still more intimate way than even then? Yet all that ever has been done on the face of the earth will have been outwardly eclipsed with but one exception (and this exception is Christ, to say nothing of His body the church). Nothing can surpass the last Adam; nothing compare with Christ’s cross, unless it be Himself; and both will be our portion, of which we will joy and boast even in glory.

Remark this also that, in all these statements of what they are to share, never do we find such language addressed to them as supposes them to enter into the depths of God’s ways in the cross as is expected of us now. What can be sweeter than the way in which they count on their deliverance, and confide their souls to God? But where are heard such words as “God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”? Yet nothing would have been more easy, had it been in due keeping, than for God to have said so here. We are called into such fellowship with God about His Son, and we are associated with the cross as well as heaven beyond what any one can really find in the Old Testament. When a person starts with the assumption that the theme is all one and the same, the distinctive

value of scripture is lost. For the soul too the least possible measure of blessing is the result.

Here we have the Lord Jehovah brought in for all. “Confide ye in Jehovah for ever; for in Jah-Jehovah [is the] rock of ages” (v. 4). And the reason why they speak of His everlasting strength lies here, “For he hath brought down them that dwell on high, the lofty city; he layeth it low even to the ground; he bringeth it [even] to the dust. The feet shall tread it down, the feet of the afflicted, the steps of the poor” (vv. 5, 6). It will be one nation whom God in the last days will clothe with such honour, after they have been vilified in every way by the Gentiles. Hence they are singing; for not a single difficulty remains then why God should not fully bless them. It is touching to see how God insists that He has done everything that was needed for their deliverance and good. For them is assured the abasement of what is high and lofty; and grace can give poverty of spirit and lowliness to the Jews themselves, once so proud. They will have been brought through tremendous trials, having borne the added and painful reproach of being a most guilty and withal haughty people; but all is changed now.

For a godly few of the Jews will entirely gainsay the lie of Satan when all the power of their nation and the great mass of the westerns will have given way to Antichrist. A little despised remnant will still hold out for the Lord, refusing him who puts himself forward as the true Messiah. They will have been faithful in the face of death, and now they are made thus to praise God. “The way of the just [is] uprightness: thou, the Upright, dost make the path of the just even” (v. 7). It is sweet in thinking of this, that their triumph will not be by their

power or their knowledge, but by their simple trust in Jehovah and faith in His word. But a scanty glimpse will be theirs, for they are the very souls referred to in Isa. 1:10, as walking in darkness and having no light. This ought never to be said of a Christian, though he may slip into such a feeling: for he has seen Christ, the light of life, the true light. He may have but a dim perception of Christ, but still Christ is before his soul and always shines; for it is not true, that where the light of grace has once shone, God takes it back again. The difference is on the part of the Christian. It is never the light that is gone; possibly he may have been unfaithful and turned his back upon it. The Holy Ghost has come down to abide with the Christian for ever. He may not always walk according to the light, but in it he walks as a believer, and cannot but walk; yea, he is now light in the Lord. The Christian walks in the light as long as he professes the name of Christ. He never walks in darkness. He may not enjoy the light, but this is quite another thing.

The contrary language is very common in Christendom, because they confound the position of the Christian with that of the Jewish people, who must go through darkness by-and-by, before their light is come and the glory of Jehovah is risen upon them. Possibly a very few may not be thus walking in darkness. Some certainly will have godliness in contrast “with the many”; they are “the wise.” But the beautiful feature of the godly is that although they thus walk in darkness, yet as they have been touched by the Spirit of God, and know that what is of God can never have alliance with sin, so they will refuse to own that idols and Antichrist can be of God. Thus they pass through the tribulation with but a feeble

measure of knowledge of God, no doubt; but still they will be true to what they have got, and will be brought out to praise God. They are entitled to be spoken of as "the just." So now, it is a great snare as well as mistake of believers not to take the place of being saints of God; for if they decline it, they feel not responsibility in their walk So in earthly relations, if persons in the position of masters or servants do not act from their true position, they will never carry themselves in practice as becomes them. To own our proper relationship is not pride, but a duty and wisdom. If you are occupied therein with self, no doubt pride comes in; but it is all right and important to acknowledge God in the relationships to which He has called us.

The Spirit of God leads them to say, "Yea, in the way of thy judgements, O Jehovah, have we waited for thee; to thy name and to thy memorial [is] the desire of [our] soul" (v. 8). Such is what they had been wading through. They had waited for Him in the way of His judgements; we follow Him in grace and look to appear with Him in glory. "With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgements are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (v. 9). Now we have the individual again. As far as the world is concerned, the patience of God will have ended in the most fearful departure from the truth. God is now suffering the ways of man. He has not left them to their own conjectures or darkness; but He has caused His light to shine in the person of Christ, leaving man to himself, save working by His word and Spirit. Outwardly God seems as though He did not notice what is passing here below, and all this after the full light of God has shone through Christ

upon this world. Saving grace has appeared to men. Favour has been shown to the wicked, this is what is going on now. “If favour be shown unto the wicked, he doth not learn righteousness.” “In the land of uprightness,” it is added, “he dealeth unjustly and doth not behold the majesty of Jehovah” (v. 10). The gospel is but for a witness; it will not, it cannot, govern the world. When God’s judgements are here below, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. Hence there is the further warning in ver. 11, “Jehovah, thy hand is uplifted.” He is coming in the way of judgement. Does the first answer say that “they do not see”? But, says the prophet, “They shall see jealousy [for] the people, and be ashamed; yea, the fire which is for thine enemies shall devour them” (v. 11).

The prophetic Spirit turns to speak of the blessing for the Jews. “Jehovah, thou wilt ordain peace for us, for thou also hast wrought all our works for us. Jehovah our God, other lords than thee have had dominion over us: by thee only will we make mention of thy name” (vv. 12, 13). What had become of them? “[They are] dead, they shall not live; deceased, they shall not rise: for thou hast visited and destroyed them, and made all memory of them to perish” (v. 14). This is of course highly figurative language. If we look at the resurrection, we know that the wicked are to rise as well as the righteous that is, there is a resurrection of all men just and unjust. These Gentile oppressors of Israel must rise in the resurrection of judgement. They will rise like other bad men. But when it is said here, “They shall not rise,” the Spirit does not describe the literal resurrection of the body, but the complete reversal of the lot of the nations and Israel in this world. These old lords are no longer to live

or rise again in this world. This will suffice to show that the language here is put figuratively.

In Isa. 25:8 it is said, “He will swallow up death in victory.” This, we know from God Himself, will be realised in the literal resurrection of the body, when the saints are raised. But in Isa. 26:14 the allusion to resurrection is employed as a figure, because the context proves that it cannot refer to that literal fact; for if it did, it would be to deny that the unrighteous are to rise. This is the true criterion for the understanding of any passage of the word. If a person bring you a text against what you know to be true, always examine what surrounds it, see what God treats of. Here it is plain that it is a question of the way in which God will deal in that day with the nations who lorded it over Israel. But is it not the fact, some may ask, that these Gentiles were literally dead? Certainly, is the answer; but in this case it is not true that they shall not rise.

Perhaps this would not be worth dwelling on, were it not that many apply Isa. 26:19 to the same literal resurrection as Isa. 25:8. We must never force but bow to scripture. The passages that do refer to a raising of bodies we must hold fast; but it is dangerous to misapply others which only use it as a figure, because in this case one might infer, as from our chapter, that which is unfounded. In truth, as we know, all men must rise. “The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth” (John 5:28, 29). There we have the most decisive proof that all the dead, just and unjust, are to rise again from the grave.

Here contrariwise the wicked enemies of Israel “shall not rise.” John clearly teaches the resurrection of all,

good and bad. Isa. 26:14 refers only to the figure of not rising, to comfort Israel from all fears of their old troublers. “Dead, they shall not live; deceased, they shall not rise: for thou hast visited and destroyed them, and made all memory of them to perish.” Thus effectually will Jehovah have disposed of Gentiles who had lorded it over the Jews.

But what has been done for the nation? “Thou hast increased the nation, Jehovah, thou hast increased the nation; thou art glorified. Thou hadst removed [it] far [unto] all the ends of the earth” (v. 15). He does not here speak of the resurrection of the body. Clearly when this takes place as described, it could not be said that He had removed the risen saints far unto all the ends of the earth. Take it of Judah, and how true it is!

Equally plain is what follows. “Jehovah, in trouble they sought thee; they poured out a lisping [when] thy chastening [was] upon them. As a woman with child, [that] draweth near the time of her delivery, is in travail [and] crieth out in her pangs; so have we been before thee, Jehovah. We have been with child, we have been in travail, we have as it were brought forth wind; we have not wrought the deliverance of the land (or, earth); neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen” (vv. 16-18). They will review their past conduct, and see that they have not accomplished God’s design by them. Where had they brought in a divine flow of blessing? They had learnt the bad ways of the Gentiles, and brought a curse on themselves as well as on others; the name of Jehovah was blasphemed because of them.

But now it is said, as a glorious reverse, “Thy dead shall live; my dead bodies shall arise.” What mighty words,

and how tender! Jehovah awakens Israel, and even calls them His dead bodies. It is no question of bodily death, but of national revival, and yet it will have spiritual character too. The daughter of Zion awakes from her long sleep, and Jehovah speaks of the Jews (so long defunct as His people) as His dead. They, for their part, own themselves to be just as bad as the rest of the nations; but the momentous difference is that Jehovah claims them as His own. “Let them be dead,” He says, as it were, “still they are Mine.” It is the Jewish nation that had been like a corpse which Jehovah is graciously pleased to identify as His own, and is bringing them out again. If Abraham would bury his dead out of his sight, here Jehovah asserts His title to fill them with a new life: “Thy dead shall live; my dead bodies shall arise. Awake and sing in triumph, ye that dwell in dust; for thy dew is the dew of the morning, and the earth shall cast forth the dead” (v. 19). It indicates how fully the truth of the resurrection of the dead was familiar to the Jew seeing the prophet uses it so freely as the best expression for God’s resuscitating His people when they shall have been long defunct as a nation.

As some may think this a questionable interpretation of the passage, a scripture or two will prove its soundness. In Ezek. 37. the terms of the figure are quite as strong as here, the Spirit of God shows the prophet a valley of dry bones. And “they were very dry.” “Can these bones live?” was the question (vv. 2, 3). “Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you” (v. 5). Thus the vision is realized, the bones come together. Next there was flesh on them (v. 8). Then the bones, coming forth and clothed with flesh, answer to the dead men here raised out of their graves. But, beyond controversy, this means the

whole house of Israel. “Thy dead shall live,” says Isaiah. To put this chapter of Ezekiel along with Isa. 26:19 makes, to say the least, a strong presumption, that if the figure of resurrection is used to show the fresh start of Israel in the one, so it may be in the other. But it is certainly so intended in Ezek. 37; for, if we have the vision, we have also the inspired interpretation. We are not therefore at liberty to explain the vision according to our own thoughts. The explanation of the Holy Ghost is express and conclusive. Thus we can carry divine light back to Isaiah 26:19, where the very same allusion is found.

In Hosea 6:2 again there is a similar figure. So there is also in Dan. 12:2, “Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” If we divert this to a resurrection of the body, in the first place it is not a resurrection of all, but only of “many.” In the second place, it is of some to everlasting life and of some to shame and contempt at the same time. We must give up the doctrine of the first resurrection, separated by a thousand years and more from the second death (Rev. 20), in order to found on this a literal rising from the graves. All is plain and just if it apply in the same way as Ezekiel and Isaiah to the national revival of Israel, whom God will bring out of all their present condition of shame, though some of them be allowed to display fatal wickedness and pride. This is another confirmation of the truth of the interpretation.

But further the next verses are explicit, where we read, “Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself for a little moment, until the indignation be past. For, behold,

Jehovah cometh forth out of his place to visit the iniquity of the inhabitants of the earth on them; and the earth shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain" (vv. 20, 21). Those who interpret the context of a literal resurrection are led into the error, that the risen saints (for such this scheme supposes to be here meant) would be here on earth whilst the divine indignation is going on! One could understand their holding that some are to pass through the tribulation, though this is not quite the same thing as the indignation. But it is clearly a question of men alive here below not of men changed. God tells them (the Jews) to enter into their chambers until He has spent all His wrath upon the nations. Is this what we look for? Are we not to be taken out of this earthly scene and to enter into the Father's house above? We are not an earthly but a heavenly people. We know the Lord is coming Who will take us to be with Himself where He is; and when He has translated the Christians above, the Jews will be called for the earth. The little remnant will be grievously tried, when the vast body of the nation will receive the Antichrist.

Hence, when the day of Jehovah comes for the judgement of the quick, it is said, "enter into thy chambers." He will not provide a heavenly abode for them, but they are to enter into their chambers - assuredly some place of refuge and earthly security. All this renders plain the right interpretation of the passage, and shows that God is not speaking about the heavenly saints, but refers to the remnant of the Jews in the last days, who are to have a haven of refuge provided for them. It is not like Abraham, for this is our place. Israel will be much more like Lot, for they will be in the midst of the scene where the judgement is to be

executed. Lot entered into his chambers (that is, Zoar) when the judgement came; but as for Abraham, he was entirely out of the trial, and pleading before Jehovah in earnest intercession; and yet before the day came to pass, he knew about it far better than Lot. His position, communion, and experience were typically different from those of his relative. So we shall be taken up to Christ and brought into the Father's house; but afterwards, when the Lord comes to execute judgement, we shall come along with Him.

Isaiah 27

This is the closing portion of the series that has been occupying us. It is "in that day," while Isa. 28 manifestly introduces a new part of the prophecy.

The great crisis is arrived. Not only does Jehovah come out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and the earth is compelled to disclose her deeds of blood, and her slain shall be covered no more; but there are yet greater things. For "in that day Jehovah with his sore and great and strong sword will visit leviathan, the piercing serpent (or, fugitive), and leviathan, the crooked serpent; and he will slay the dragon (or, monster) that is in the sea" (v. 1).20 It is the execution of divine judgement on the power of Satan, figuratively set forth under forms suited to describe his hostility as at work against Israel among the Gentiles. "The day of Jehovah" takes in not only the thousand years of peaceful reign, but a little more.

Thence the Spirit turns to Jehovah's ways with His own. "In that day [shall be] a vineyard of pure wine; sing concerning it: I Jehovah keep it; I will water it every moment: lest [any] harm it, I will keep it night and

day” (vv. 2, 3). His care never failed, whatever the times that passed over His land and people. When earth comes once more into His view, and consequently Israel, His watchful goodness will prove itself unremitting on their behalf. “Fury [is] not in me. Oh that I had briars [and] thorns against me in battle! I would march through them, I would burn them together. Or let him take hold of my strength; let him make peace with me, peace let him make with me” (vv. 4, 5). There seems not a little obscurity in the language, if one may judge from the discrepancies of expositors, and the difficulty of suggesting such a sense as carries the unbiased along with it. But assuming that the substantial force is given in the English Bible, Jehovah on the one hand challenges the adversaries and warns of their sure destruction; on the other He proffers His own protection as the only door of peace and safety. The next verse is transparent, “In future Jacob shall take root; Israel shall bud and blossom, and fill the face of the world with fruit” (v. 6). Such is the purpose of Jehovah, and it shall stand.

It was not only purpose, however: there was patient and persevering discipline in His ways with Israel. “Hath he smitten him, as he smote those that smote him? [or] is he slain according to the slaughter of them that are slain by him? In measure, in sending her away, didst thou contend (or, wilt debate) with her? He hath removed [her] with his rough wind in the day of the east wind. By this, therefore, shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this [is] all the fruit of taking away his sin; when he maketh all the stones of the altar as chalkstones that are beaten in pieces - the Asherahs and the sun images shall not stand. For the fortified city [is] solitary, a habitation deserted and forsaken like a wilderness: there shall the

calf feed, and there shall he lie down, and consume its boughs. When its branches are withered, they shall be broken off: women come [and] set them on fire. For it [is] a people of no understanding: therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and ho that formed them will show them no favour" (vv. 7-11). Thus, there was indeed a mighty difference in God's ways with Israel and their enemies. Faithfully did He chastise them in their pride, and rebelliousness, and unbelief; but it was not with the unsparing judgement which uprooted and destroyed His and their foes. There was slaughter too; but what was it in comparison of those that are destined to be slain before the day of restitution arrives? In Israel's case judgement was tempered with mercy; His dealing was measured. In His debate or controversy with Israel He deigned to plead; and even when the sorest trial came, there was a gracious mitigation and arrest in His people's favour; and not this only, but also moral profit, when every trace of idolatry should be ground like chalkstones to powder. They must not be surprised, then, if in such mighty changes the works of the men of the earth passed away, the defended city was desolated, the habitation forsaken and left like a wilderness only relieved by pasturage for the calf, and by withered, broken firewood for women to come and set on fire; for oh! the folly of the people and the ruin they bring justly, necessarily, on themselves.

Yet here, as elsewhere, great tribulation is the immediate precursor of a greater deliverance. "And it shall come to pass in that day [that] Jehovah shall beat off from the flood of the river unto the torrent of Egypt, and ye shall be gathered one by one, O children of Israel" (v. 12). The Judge of all the earth must do right;

but He will interpose in saving and sovereign mercy. He will sift out and gather the Israelites one by one. Nay more, “And it shall come to pass in that day [that] the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come that were perishing in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt; and they shall worship Jehovah in the holy mountain at Jerusalem” (v. 13). Those who have accompanied me thus far will have no trouble or doubt in determining the true application. It is the trumpet of Matt. 24:31, not of 1 Thess. 4:16 and 1 Cor. 15:52. The latter scriptures refer to the divine summons to the heavenly saints; our chapter, as well as the passage in the first Gospel, describes the call to Israel to re assemble, from north and south, to worship Jehovah at Jerusalem.

It may be noticed that as Isa. 26 was occupied with Judah and its land, however deep it might go, our chapter which deals with the crushing of Satan’s power in various forms goes on to Israel; and this throughout, so as to prove it is not casual.

“We know not” (justly said the eloquent H. Melvill) “with what eyes those men can read Prophecy, who discover not in its announcements the final restoration and conversion of the Jews. It is useless to resolve into figurative language, or to explain, by a purely spiritual [rather, mystical] interpretation, predictions which seem to assert the reinstatement of the exiles in the land of their fathers, and their becoming the chief preachers of the religion which they have so long laboured to bring into contempt. These predictions are inseparably bound up with others, which refer to their dispersion and unbelief; so that if you spiritualize [or, allegorise] any one, you must spiritualise the whole. And since every

word has had a literal accomplishment, so far as the dispersion and unbelief are concerned, how can we doubt that every word will have also a literal accomplishment, so far as the restoration and conversion are concerned? If the event had proved the predicted dispersion to be figurative, the event in all probability would prove also the predicted restoration to be figurative. But so long as we find the two foretold in the same sentence, with no intimation that we are not to apply to both the same rule of interpretation we seem bound to expect, either in both cases a literal fulfilment or in both a spiritual; and since in the one instance the fulfilment has been undoubtedly literal, have we not every reason for concluding that it will be literal in the other?"

(Sermon on the Dispersion and Conversion of the Jews, 131, 132 preached at Cambridge in February, 1837)

15 This description of their vessels or boats is an apparent difficulty, as it is that which has induced most to conceive that Egypt is meant. For no doubt boats of that slight material sufficient to cross the Nile were notorious of old. But may we not infer that as ships of Tarshish are sometimes used in a general way for those employed on long commercial voyages to whatever land they belonged so the vessels of papyrus may designate rapid cruisers in general whatever the material or wherein employed? Beyond the rivers of Cush must surely exclude Egypt as well as Babylonia, or any country within those limits. The maritime people meant is described as outside the lands which wed to have to do with Israel. Hence we find Bishop Horsley writing (Bibl. Crit. ii. 134, 135), Navigable vessels are certainly meant and if it could be proved that Egypt is the country

spoken to these vessels of bulrushes might be understood of the light skiffs made of that material and used by the Egyptians upon the Nile. But if the country spoken to be distant from Egypt vessels of bulrush are only used as an apt image on account of their levity for quick-sailing vessels of any material. The country therefore to which the prophet calls is characterized as one which in the days of the completion of this prophecy should be a great maritime and commercial power forming remote alliances making distant voyages to all parts of the world with expedition and security and in the habit of affording protection to their friends and allies. Where this country is to be found is not otherwise said than that it will be remote from Judaea and with respect to that country beyond the Cushean streams.

16 The Assyrian inscriptions remarkably illustrate the accuracy of the statement here. For many now hold that the conjectures of commentators, which identified Sargon with Shalmaneser on the one side, or with Sennacherib or Esarhaddon on the other, are uncared for and erroneous. They count him a monarch of no common energy, not only distinct from his immediate predecessor, Shalmanesers but also of a distinct family, and yet not Sennacherib but his father. The national annals indicate no allusion to his own father which has been explained plausibly enough on the supposition that he contrived to substitute himself for his predecessor absent at the siege of Samaria, the conquest of which he claims in the inscription. And it is certainly worthy of note, as has been remarked that in 2 Kings 18:9, 10, though Shalmaneser is said to have come up against Samaria and besieged it, the writer avoids saying that he took it. stand at the end of three years they took it...

And the king of Assyria did carry away Israel down to Assyria," etc. Though this had been done by two of the preceding monarchs, it is known that Argon minutely details the settlement of 27,280 families from Samaria in his eastern dominions.

17 Dr. Driver (Lit. of the O.T. 206) remarks that Arab denotes not Arabia In our sense of the word but a particular nomad tribe inhabiting the north of the Peninsula and mentioned (Ezek. 27:21) with Dedan and Cedar as engaged in commerce with Tyre. Kedar was a wealthy pastoral tribe (Isa. 9:7; Jer. 49:29). Tema lay some 250 miles south-east of Edom. Sargon s troops were engaged in war with the Philistines in B.C. 720 and in 711; and it may be conjectured he adds that these two prophecies were delivered In view of an expected campaign of the Assyrians in the neighbouring regions in one of these years. How sad to leave God out of prophecy.

18 Zechariah 9:3, 4 alludes rather, It would appear, to the Macedonian chief who ravaged the sea-board cities of Phoenicia, and of Palestine north and south, so ruthlessly. This at least is the historic occasion, for the Holy Ghost, there, as everywhere has the closing conflicts in His eye, and the future triumph of Israel under the Messiah Some it may be added, think that Isa 23 refers to Shalmaneser's siege of Tyre; but this seem's to the last degree improbable as the city is seen soon after in an opulent and powerful state. Others even deny its capture by Nebuchadnezzar; but Ezek 29:18 teaches not that he failed to take it, but that its results did not compensate for the time and toil the Tyrian ships having carried off the treasures elsewhere.

19 “Damnation” though the effect of judgement, is not the sense of the expression. It is an instance of men giving their own strength to a word and really weakening the passage in result.

20 Delitzch suggests a reference to the Assyrian and Babylonian powers, answering to the swift and straight river Hiddekel, and the very winding Euphrates respectively. But the serpent in either form points to the subtle foe behind the scene.

Section 3: Isaiah 28 - 35

Isaiah 28

This portion, which is intimately connected with Isa. 29, gives us a clear and detailed view of the ways of God with His people and His land, more especially with Jerusalem, in the last days. Israel is to fade as a flower, Jerusalem to be in sore displeasure, but delivered gloriously and for ever. I trust it may be seen plainly how impossible it is to apply what the Holy Ghost announces here, as a whole, to anything that has yet been accomplished. We must leave room for a further and closer bearing of these “woes” of the prophet.

Now simple as this may be, it is immensely important. For even many Christians are looking onward for the gradual progress (not testimony alone) of the gospel. They expect that by the blessing of the Holy Ghost upon the preached word, the nations are to be by degrees brought in; moral evil, infidelity, every form of superstition, all the pride and worldliness of man to be slowly broken down, when the power of the Holy Ghost shall fill men’s hearts with righteousness and peace and joy, and thus the world in general become the reflection of God’s will and ways. To such persons the assertion seems strange that there is to be a total change of dispensation; that God, having first taken us away to be with Christ above, is going to restore Israel into pre-eminence in their own land, — not to convert them simply and bring them into the Christian church, but to lead them to repent and receive their Messiah. Then they shall have their own distinctive promises and the new covenant made good to them, Jehovah’s glory

shining upon Zion, themselves exalted above all nations, who will take a place of conscious willing inferiority to Israel, and vie with one another which shall pay most honour to the chosen of Jehovah. All this, with many weighty consequences, involves such a mighty revolution in people's thoughts, that those more accustomed to the word of God can hardly conceive what an immense draft it makes upon the faith of those who are unversed in the prophetic word; how repugnant it is to all that is most cherished in their minds; and what a death-blow it gives to what they had fondly considered the legitimate hope of the church.

If we come to God's word as the only source of truth and sure test of all previous thoughts, nothing can be plainer; for here we have clearly a vision of the terrible blow that is to fall upon Ephraim, which is not only the name of a particular tribe, but the general designation of the ten tribes who mustered under that leading tribe. Judah and Ephraim are the two chief titles by which the prophets continually contrast the two houses of Israel. What the prophet communicates here is the "woe" that is to fall specially on Ephraim, that is, on those we call the ten tribes. This furnishes us with means for judging the time and circumstances of its fulfilment, because no such judgement as is here described ever historically fell upon the Jews. The others (i.e. Israel) were carried away into captivity to Assyria, and were never as a people restored to the land. Isaiah wrote when this dreadful blow was falling upon Israel, and goes onward to their last days, even to the days when Christ Himself, first in faith, then in delivering power and glory, shall be connected with Judah's remnant.

Looking at the past history of the people, we fail to see any such connection of Christ with Judah, anything that answered to this recourse to the tried Stone, save in those disciples who left the synagogue for the church at a later epoch. The ten tribes were swept away at an early day, and later on the two tribes were carried to Babylon, whence emerged only an inconsiderable remnant of Judah. The prophecy therefore has not yet been accomplished; and that which has not been must be fulfilled. Surely no canon of interpretation can be surer or plainer than this. Scripture cannot be broken: the word of God must be verified sooner or later. The end of this age is the ripe season for making good the bulk of prophecy. Therefore the one question here is whether anything has occurred really and fully corresponding with these judgements to fall on the ten tribes and Judah with Jerusalem also. That there never has been an adequate accomplishment will be manifest enough as we pass on. To the believer the fulfilment is future and certain.

“Woe to the crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim, and to the fading flower of his glorious beauty, which [is] on the head of the fat valley of them that are overcome with wine! Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and strong one, as a storm of hail, a destroying tempest; as a storm of mighty waters overflowing, shall he cast down to the earth with might” (or, hand) (vv. 1, 2). It is not to be thought that drunkenness is to be taken in its merely literal acceptation. It represents their dreadfully excited and stupefied and besotted state, given up to their own pleasure and self-indulgence to the shame of the true God. What intoxication is among men with its frightful natural effects, such in a large moral sense will be the

condition of these proud insensate men of Ephraim. Fulfilled at whatever time it may be, plainly it will be in Israel as such. “The crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim shall be trodden under feet; and the fading flower of his glorious beauty, which [is] on the head of the fat valley, shall be as an early fig before the summer; which [when] he that looketh upon it seeth, while it is yet in his hand, he eateth it up” (vv. 3, 4). And true glory follows: “In that day will Jehovah of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty unto the remnant of his people; and for a spirit of judgement to him that sitteth in judgement, and for a strength to them that turn the battle to (or, at) the gate” (vv. 5, 6). Yet was the condition of Judah better?

“But these also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are they gone astray; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are gone astray through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble [in] judgement. For all tables are full of vomit [and] filthiness [so that there is] no place” (vv. 7, 8). In vain had God met their weakness, and fed them with infants’ food. “Whom will he teach knowledge? and whom will he make to understand the message? [them that are] weaned from the milk, [and] drawn from the breasts? For [it is] precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little” (vv. 9, 10). Another dealing is needed and will surely follow. “For with stammering lips and with strange tongue will he speak to this people: to whom he said This [is] the rest, give ye rest to the weary; and this [is] the refreshing. But they would not hear. Therefore shall the word of Jehovah be unto them precept upon

precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken and snared and taken" (vv. 11-13). Not with that child like instruction which they had slighted, but with the foreign tones of enemies would He scourge them. They would not have His words of rest for the weary, they must needs have a nation they understood not. It was a judgement on their unbelief.

Thus the Assyrian is first represented as a hail-storm coming down from the north on Ephraim, "a mighty and strong one," "as a storm of hail, a destroying tempest, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing." It is the "king of the north," as he is last described in Dan. 11:40. Attention has been already drawn to the mistaken supposition that the lawless one, who is to be manifested as "the king" in Palestine, is the only danger for the Jews. No doubt he, though their king, is at bottom an enemy of the worst character. For what can be more afflicting or disastrous than to have one in your very midst whom you have embraced as a friend, and who turns out the bitterest foe?

Such will be the case when the Antichrist appears in the midst of the Jews and reigns, accepted by them as the Messiah. The Antichrist will be in lawless ways and in false pretensions what the Lord Jesus was in deed and in truth. Though He was God, when He came as man among men, never did He assert His rights as God in His ordinary path here below, however true the glory of His person was to faith. When did He ever use the Godhead to avert trials and sufferings, or man's contempt of Him? He invariably waited on God and trusted in Him. His obedience as man contributed only the more, because of His divine dignity, to prove that He was willing to

encounter all shame and reproach, yea, the death of the cross, that God the Father might be glorified. Antichrist will, on the contrary, use all that Satan gives him (and Satan will endue him with such energy as never has been possessed before by man upon the earth), putting forth all power, and signs, and lying wonders. The consequence will be that the Jews, who characteristically look out for external tokens and prodigies, will accept and worship him as both Messiah and Jehovah their God in Jerusalem.

This is the person who, as 2 Thess. 2 warns us, is to come, as well as the apostasy. With him first of all will the shining forth of the Lord Jesus deal; though the day of the Lord will take in the whole course of judgements, from its first destruction of the enemy's power on earth till the end of the thousand years. All this period will be for the display of divine glory, but conspicuously in the execution of judgement from time to time on those that oppose themselves. Thus, of the other enemies of Jehovah, the chief is Daniel's king of the north, or, as other prophets designate him, the Assyrian scourge that comes down upon Ephraim. Clearly he is an enemy that rises up against the people and the land; whereas Antichrist will reign in the land, being there received by the Jews, and probably a Jew himself, for otherwise he could hardly hope to pass himself as Messiah. But the other external enemy, though he may set up to understand dark sentences (Dan. 8:23), takes, of course, an antagonistic attitude, as a fierce king and mighty man of craft.

From Isa. 28-29. we hear of two attacks on Jerusalem in the coming day. First of all the enemy assails Ephraim, entering the Holy Land from the north, on which

occasion he has it all his own way. He humbles the pride of Ephraim, and is allowed of God to gain a partial success over Jerusalem also. “Therefore hear the word of Jehovah, ye scornful men, that rule this people which [is] in Jerusalem. For ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol are we at agreement: when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves. Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold, I lay for foundation in Zion a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner [stone], a sure foundation: he that believeth (or, trusteth) shall not make haste. Judgement also will I appoint for a line, and righteousness for a plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place. And your covenant with death shall be annulled, and your agreement with Sheol shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, ye shall be trodden down by it. As it passeth through, it shall take you; for morning by morning shall it pass through, by day and by night; and it shall be terror only to understand the message. For the bed is shorter than that [one] can stretch himself; and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself. For Jehovah will rise up as [on] mount Perazim, he will be wroth as [in] the valley of Gibeon; that he may do his work, his strange work, and bring to pass his act, his unwonted act. Now therefore be ye not scorners, lest your bands be made strong: for I have heard from the Lord Jehovah of hosts, a consumption, and [one] determined upon the whole earth” (vv. 14-22). Was this the case in past history? Supposing you look at Sennacherib and his army (2 Kings 18), what is there like it, save as a

preparatory type? Was not his power completely humbled before the Jews? (2 Kings 19). Was it not a godly son of David who then reigned at Jerusalem? Had not Ephraim been swept off years before? It is manifest and certain that Sennacherib never gained an advantage over Jerusalem; whereas this power is to be victorious in the first instance, and even in the second to reduce them to the utmost, when total ruin befalls the enemy.

Mark the language of the prophet here, “Wherefore hear the word of Jehovah, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem... I have heard from the Lord Jehovah of hosts a consumption and [one] determined upon the whole land” (or, earth). Compare with this Isaiah 10:23 in the first section of the prophecy. The fact is, when Sennacherib came of old against Jerusalem, the pious king Hezekiah ruled there who, instead of making a covenant with death, implored the help of Jehovah against the scornful king of Assyria. The result was that the angel of Jehovah smote the host of Assyria, so that there fell no less than 185,000. Save that the Assyrian will once more oppose the Jews, there is scarce a feature in the past which is not the reverse of what we have here.

Let rationalists, if they will, conclude that the book (for the Spirit of God they deny) has made a mistake; believers may be assured that it mainly looks onward to the judgements of the last days. Indolent readers, unintelligent or prejudiced commentators, may slur over the distinctive points of the prophecy, turning what they can to moral profit. But if a man follows out the matter closely, he must accept the truth of the future or become a rationalist, that is, an infidel. It is perfectly certain that nothing which approaches the prediction has yet

occurred. Therefore the only legitimate inference to be drawn from it is, either that the prophecy is yet to be fulfilled, or that the pseudo-prophet was guilty of a lie or a flourish. The Christian, on the contrary, believes that God has written nothing in vain, and that every word, not yet accomplished, must be fulfilled to the letter; among the rest this wonderful dealing in which God is to make “the land of beauty” the grave of man’s pride and power.

Then God will appear for the everlasting deliverance of poor Israel. And that very people, now so proverbial for their obstinate rejection of Christ, will go forth zealously spreading the tidings of divine mercy to the ends of the earth. What an evident contrast with that which exists now! Israel will be brought into their own land and blessed there, when Jehovah of hosts shall reign in mount Zion. Now God has no land that is more particularly holy. The land, holy in His purpose, is (1896) the possession of the Turk. It is still largely a waste country, though proofs of fertility are not wanting in the midst of barrenness. How is so vast a change to be brought about? When consummated, God will lead Israel to build a magnificent temple. The priests, the sons of Zadok, shall minister in due order. The land shall be divided among the twelve tribes after a new fashion. This and more we know from the last chapters of the prophet Ezekiel. Indeed abundant proofs are manifest elsewhere to any person moderately acquainted with the prophecies.

At present the characteristics are, Israel rejected, the Gentiles called, the church formed in union with Christ on high and by the Holy Ghost here below, in which church is neither Jew nor Gentile. Thus the character of

blessing for man is entirely altered. Instead of outward honour resting upon the Jews, they are cast out and dispersed, and have yet to pass through a fiery tribulation at the close. We are God's people, His children now, not they. Peace in Christ is ours, but in the world we have tribulation. In the days that are at hand all will be changed: God, instead of rejecting the Jews, will again choose them to stand forth in their own land, converting them to Himself, quenching all tendency to rest on ordinances, and taking idols for ever away; whereas they formerly and persistently mixed up idols with the worship of Jehovah, later and worse still they rejected their own and His Christ.

Plainly therefore a new state of things must have come in. The prophecies may take us down to the change; but how is the change itself to be brought about? By more tremendous judgements on Israel, and especially on their enemies, than the world has ever witnessed; not only on a great nation, but on the east and west, their old enemies, represented in their descendants. All nations of the earth, in short, will have their representatives there and then. The result will be that God will judge all the nations, at length blessing His ancient people according to the promises He had assured to the fathers, then accomplished to the children. In order to bring about this change, not only must there be an execution of judgement, but also the removal of the heavenly saints to be with the Lord above. As long as the church goes on here below, it is impossible, morally speaking, that God could accomplish these events of a wholly contrasted character. For it is contrary to all analogy that God would act upon two opposite principles at the same time. For instance, how

could God both give and withhold outward honour for a Jew? How form the church at the same time that He restores and owns Israel? If a Jew were to believe now, he, baptised by the Holy Ghost, becomes a member of Christ's body; whereas what we find in the prophets is, that a godly Jew in the last days remains a Jew. The Lord will quicken his soul, no doubt; but he will be found in his own land, where, instead of suffering, he will be blessed in earthly things. Thus it is an altogether different state here below. To this the New Testament supplies the key. Before Jehovah begins thus to work in Israel, the church is removed to heaven.

Hence in the Revelation the great initiatory lesson is taught, that when "the things that are" (or the seven churches) terminate, when those that truly believe now are seen glorified with the Lord in heaven, then (Rev. 7) God takes up a new work among Israel and the Gentiles, who will be, both of them blessed, but even so, presented as distinct from each other. Without doubt the Jews will return to their land in unbelief, and Satan will induce them to install a man as their Messiah who will draw them by degrees to worship himself and an idol in the temple of God. Some might think it strange to assert that these civilised and christianised nations, which count it impossible that the educated could worship idols or the Antichrist, should fall into these very snares. But scripture is explicit, that those who now boast of progress, knowledge, and religion will at that time fall into idolatry and the anti-Christian pit. All western Europe will be drawn into perdition with the mass of the Jews. God will have previously translated to heaven all properly called Christians. Then the apostasy will take place, though in the midst of this fearful evil the Spirit of

God will work, specially among certain of the Jews, who will go through this scene faithful to God, some being killed for the truth, and others surviving in the flesh — a remnant God will reserve to Himself to make of it the nucleus of a new Israel. The Lord Jesus will appear in the midst of this lawlessness, and will execute judgement upon the ungodly, preserving the spared remnant who thereon become the chosen means of spreading the knowledge of Jehovah's glory for the millennial age.

When the Holy Ghost says, "Because ye have said, we have made a covenant with death" (v. 15), we are not to suppose that this is to be taken as if they confessed it. God is rather exposing their real mind in its evil and ruin. They may boast of their covenant, but they do not know it is with Sheol. They are deceived to accept a false Messiah, whose power will turn out to be of Satan; but they are ignorant of the cheat. Jews would not openly say that they had entered into a compact with the devil: a man must be in an extraordinary state of blindness and defiance of God in order to own such a thing. Nor does the word of God at all limit us to such an interpretation. The reference, one may suppose, is to those that enter into a covenant to save themselves from the king of the north. It appears to be a compact entered into between the false prophet and the Beast. The power that scripture designates as the Beast is the emperor of the west, the last Roman ruler when that empire re-appears.

There was a living man, even of late, said to have his mind set on some such scheme: it is a notorious fact, that within the last few years the project had entered into the brain of one who proved that an idea was apt to

govern him. Nor is it absolutely new, this yearning after the reorganisation of the empire, with Rome for its capital. The plan is not to overthrow other European nations, but to make them subject kingdoms, each having its king, under one supreme head. That this was the theory of a recent monarch, there can be no more question than that it was the idea of another before him. I may add, that he, too, like his predecessor, meddled with the affairs of the Holy Land, and that both sought to have a hold of Rome. Some of us have held these interpretations of the prophecies long before the war of the holy places or the possession of Rome. They were thoughts derived not from political events, but from scripture, the shadows of coming events. Plainly then a great power shall arise, in scripture called “the Beast” or the revived Roman empire, with this peculiar form, that instead of putting aside the various kings of Europe, it will allow of separate kingdoms under him, nominally independent but really dictated to by the emperor. He accordingly will be the contracting party with the apostate Jews, in concert with their king the Antichrist; the emperor of the west being the political head, as the prophet-king will be the spiritual head of Christendom (then properly Antichristendom). Thus Jerusalem, which has been the cradle of professing Christendom, will be its grave. As to the particular person who will effect all this one says nothing. He shall be revealed in his own time. The great point is the manifestation of the chiefs at Jerusalem and Rome. Rome will be the centre of an earthly empire, with separate but dependent kings in western Europe, each having their kingdom subject to the one head. This is one feature. The other is, that many Jews will be in their own land, and will be allowed

to form a kingdom; and that this will bring them into the hands, not of Christ, but of Antichrist.

When the Jews are there, the rest of the great drama will follow; they will soon have its predicted leader. Then comes the scene spoken of here. In order to strengthen themselves against the great northern oppressor, or the overflowing scourge, they enter into a covenant with "the Beast." In vain do they think to escape. At this very time God will raise to Himself the hearts of a little band of faithful Jews, who will feel assured that the wicked prince cannot be their Messiah; that the true God is a holy God; that His servant, their promised King, must be, not the man of sin but of true righteousness. The false Messiah they refuse, their hearts in penitence cry, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of Jehovah. These are here individually spoken of as "he that believeth" (v. 16). The rest plot, make preparations, and hope to be saved from the overflowing scourge. But no; God will permit the mass to be trodden down (vv. 17-20). They shall in no wise escape. The first attack upon Jerusalem is to be successful. In the next chapter we see a very different result, when the people in the city have been purged and Jehovah interferes. (Compare Zech. 12 - 14)

Thus Jerusalem is the great battle-field of the nations, and the main platform of the judgements of God. We do not speak now about the last eternal judgement — the great white throne; for this has nothing to do with the earth. Heaven and earth will have fled away before that. Remember there is to be a judgement of the habitable earth, not only a judgement of the dead, but also and previously of the quick. Every baptised man professes that Christ is coming to judge the quick and the dead. How few truly understand and believe it! All its acts will

not take place at the same time. One form of the judgement of the quick comes before us here. The reason why Jerusalem becomes the scene of God's judgements on the nations is that Jerusalem, Judah, and the people of Israel are the chosen centre of God among the nations. In the latter day He will resume His former relations with Israel, though on a better and everlasting ground.

What solemn words in vers. 14-22 for the scornful men ruling in Jerusalem! In vain do they plead past favour or present privileges. Jehovah should rise up to do His work, His strange work, and accomplish His act, His strange act. He loves not vengeance but mercy. But mockers are odious: most of all in Zion. A consumption, therefore, is determined upon the whole earth. He is the same unchanging God: let them not presume because of His long-suffering.

Even with man it is not always ploughing, nor always time to sow. Threshing comes at last, and in divers modes and measures. So will it be in God's judgement of the earth. "Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech. Doth the ploughman plough all day to sow? doth he [all day] open and break the clods of his ground? When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad dill, and scatter cummin, and set the wheat in rows and the barley in an appointed place and the rye in the border thereof? His God doth instruct him in judgement, he doth teach him. For the dill is not threshed with a threshing instrument, neither is a cartwheel turned about upon the cummin; but dill is beaten out with a staff, and cummin with a rod. Bread [corn] is ground; for he will not ever be threshing it; and though he drive the wheel of his cart and his horses

[over it], he would not grind it. This also cometh forth from Jehovah of hosts; he is wonderful in counsel, great in wisdom" (vv. 23-29). The discipline of the people under the mighty hand and the profound wisdom of Jehovah had been in vain through their unbelief. The dull earth yielded far better fruit to the husbandman. But the day of Jehovah is yet to come, and hastens. For yet a very little while He that cometh will come and will not tarry. And every righteous one shall live by faith.

Isaiah 29

As the present chapter was to some extent anticipated in the remarks on the preceding one, one may speak the more briefly now. It opens with the final siege of Jerusalem by "the Assyrian," so familiar in the prophecies. "Woe to (or, Ho!) Ariel, to Ariel, the city of David's encampment! Add ye year to year; let the feasts come round. Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be sorrow and sadness; and it shall be unto me as an Ariel" (vv. 1, 2). By Ariel, the lion of God, is meant Jerusalem, which the proud stranger menaces with destruction. Spite of great names and associations of the past, it is actually brought down into deep distress. Delay should not hinder its humiliation. Feasts or sacrifices should not avert the storm. God's indignation is in question, and not yet ended: still it abides to Him as Ariel, brought justly and utterly low, yet His lion. "And I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with watchposts, and I will raise forts against thee. And thou shalt be brought low, thou shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall come low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall

whisper out of the dust" (vv. 3, 4). That is, agony of terror would produce effects similar to the tone or language affected by those who dealt with spirits. "And the multitude of thine enemies shall be like small dust, and the multitude of the terrible ones [shall be] as chaff that passeth away: and it shall be at an instant, suddenly. Thou shalt be visited by Jehovah of hosts with thunder and with earthquake and great noise, with whirlwind and tempest and the flame of devouring fire" (vv. 5, 6).

It must be plain, I think, how entirely all this falls in with and confirms the reference to the great king of the north in the time of the end. Sennacherib was but a type. Hence the commentators, not seeing this, stumble in hopeless perplexity. Some, applying it to the typical enemy, cannot get over the fact that Isaiah himself expressly predicts (as was the fact, of course) that Sennacherib should not come into the city of Jerusalem, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with a shield, nor cast a bank against it. (See Isa. 37:33). Others, again, suppose the Roman siege to be intended, but this, it is evident, is still more flatly contradicted by Jehovah's intervention at the last gasp to the deliverance of Jerusalem and the utter overthrow of their enemies. In fact it is the future siege at the close of this age, when the great confederacy of the north-eastern nations shall be broken after a previous success against the Jews. The reader can compare Zech. 12 - 14, which bear on the same events; also Ps. 83; Ps. 110:2, 6; Micah 4:11, Micah 5:4-15; and the end of Daniel 11 compared with the beginning of Daniel 12.

The next verses, 7, 8, strengthen this conclusion. "And the multitude of all the nations that war against Ariel,

even all that war against her and her fortifications, and that distress her shall be as a dream of a night vision. It shall even be as when the hungry [man] dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty; or as when the thirsty dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, [he is] faint, and his soul craveth: so shall be the multitude of all the nations that war against mount Zion" (vv. 7, 8). Calvin's notion that they were the various garrisons which the Jews brought in from elsewhere to defend their capital, and that they are threatened with being useless refuse, is quite unworthy of his reputation. It is a clear prediction of the destruction of their foes at the last, led on by him who was prefigured by the Assyrian. They shall be as disappointed of their prey as a hungry or thirsty man who wakes up from his imaginary feast.

The prophet then turns to describe the moral condition of the Jews themselves, and the blind infatuation that ensued. For such a trial as God thus brought on them will have its ground in their evil state, whatever may be His mercy and its rejoicing against judgement in the end. "Be ye amazed and astonished; infatuate yourselves and be blind: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink. For Jehovah hath poured out on you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers, hath he covered. And all the vision is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which they deliver to one that can read, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed. And the book is delivered to him that cannot read, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith I cannot read" (vv. 9-12). Israel were spiritually blind to God's lessons. Judicial

sleep oppressed all: learned or simple made no difference.

Alas! they were formalists and hypocrites taught by the precept of men, as certainly as they avowed their ignorance of God's word. Therefore by God's sentence their wisdom should perish. "And the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw nigh with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught of men: therefore, behold, I will proceed to do marvellously among this people, to do marvellously even with wonder; and the wisdom of their wise [men] shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent ones shall be hid" (vv. 13, 14). In vain their efforts to hide from the Lord or be independent of Him. God, after all, remains God, and man is but as clay in the hand of the potter. "Woe unto them that hide deep their counsel far from Jehovah! And their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us? Ye turn things upside down! Shall the potter be counted as clay; so that the thing made should say of him that made it, He made me not; or the thing formed say of him that formed it, He hath no understanding?" (vv. 15, 16). If this be solemnly true, it is full of blessed comfort. For "[Is] it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest? And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and out of obscurity and out of darkness the eyes of the blind shall see; and the meek shall increase their joy in Jehovah, and the needy among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. For the terrible one shall come to naught, and the scorner shall be no more, and all that watch for iniquity shall be cut

off, that make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for naught" (vv. 17-21).

Soon all will be reversed: not only the lofty Assyrian he abased, and humbled Israel be exalted, but the culpable insensibility of the people give place to spiritual understanding and earnestness. Sweet traits of the Spirit should find increase of blessing and joy: violence, scorn, and iniquity be judged and vanish. "Therefore thus saith Jehovah Who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale. But when he seeth his children the work of my hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall stand in awe of the God of Israel. They also that err in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmur (or, the disobedient) shall learn doctrine" (vv. 22-24).

It is clear that both the external deliverance and the internal work of spiritual blessing in spiritual intelligence indicate a time and a state which have never yet been realised for Israel. The day of Jehovah is in view, of which the sudden overthrow of Tartan and Rab-saris was but a proximate sign. Never yet has the blind stupor lifted from the heart of the people and its rulers, but wrought deeper sin and worse desolation. But the day is at hand which will verify the prophetic word to the full.

Isaiah 30

There is a topic here which has been scantily noticed hitherto, on which the Spirit of God enlarges much. Inasmuch as it comes before us in this chapter, a few

words may well be said on it — the moral condition of Israel, as proved and brought home to them by the revelation of God. For what we have all throughout this section is not merely deliverance, nor this in His grace only, during a time of ruin, but also the righteous Lord proving that He loves righteousness. There was a cause for the proof that the condition of Israel was morally unbearable to God. Blindness was there, religious and finally judicial blindness. This condition is traced by the Spirit in a variety of ways. We will look briefly at what we have before us here.

The first feature of their evil which draws out the indignation of God is that His people should go down into Egypt; that a people blessed of God and possessing promises of still better blessings than they ever tasted, with which they are yet to be blessed by God's own grace in the last days — the best possible blessings for a people upon earth — that such a people should go down into Egypt for help, was not only debasing to themselves, but also peculiarly dishonouring to God. Hence the Holy Ghost now, having shown us their deliverance, goes back and indicates from what they were delivered. God brings out one character of evil after another, and shows that the necessary issue of it was destruction. Yet He brings them out of all their distresses, and at length blesses them fully as His own people. It is peculiarly comforting to read of the ways of God, how He is not only a deliverer from dangers, from outward enemies, from Satan, but also from every form of sin. He does not in any wise gloss over moral evil, for chapter after chapter brings it out, though, as the effect of its judgement, Israel seemed ready to be swallowed up. But as the dark side thus appears so on the other

God is seen interfering in grace, plucking their feet out of the net, setting the dispersed in their own land, and securing the triumph of His own grace as well as righteousness. For this cause, “Woe to the rebellious children, saith Jehovah that take counsel but not of me, and that make leagues, but not by my Spirit, that they may heap sin upon sin” (v. 1). It is a solemn thing to read such words as these, and still more so to think how applicable they may be to ourselves. Even as children of God, the proneness of our hearts is to act according to our own judgements; for the flesh in the Christian is not a whit better than in any other man. Whenever there is a listening to ourselves, we may be sure the same character of evil is at work that the Spirit of Jehovah was rebuking in Israel.

What for Israel was going down into Egypt is to us the taking counsel not of God but of natural wisdom in any difficulty. It was the same fleshly wisdom which Israel sought and of this Egypt is the symbol in the ancient world. No country in the early history of men was so distinguished for the wisdom of nature as Egypt. In later days Greece and Rome sprang up, but that was long after the time to which this vision applied as an historical fact. They were at first little more than a number of contentious hordes. No such wisdom was found anywhere to the same extent as in Egypt. The great Assyrian who invaded Israel was characterized not so much by wisdom as by vast resources and appliances in the way of strength. Egypt depended mainly on good counsel, as if there were no living God — on the counsel of man sharpened by long experience, for it was one of the oldest powers that attained eminence. Accordingly, as they had been versed in the statecraft of the ancient

world, they had an immense reputation for their familiarity with means of dealing in national difficulties, peace, plenty, etc.

Israel, when threatened by the Assyrian, sought the help of Egypt: I am speaking now of the literal fact when this prophecy first applied. Though it did bear on the days of Isaiah, yet the character of the prophecy shows that it cannot be limited to that time: only a very small part of it was accomplished then. But between the two terms of Israel's past and future unfaithfulness in turning to the wisdom of the world in their troubles, there is a serious lesson for us in the pressure of any trial that concerns the testimony of God. The tendency is immense to meet a worldly trial in a worldly way. That you cannot meet the world's efforts against you by spiritual means is what one is apt to think; so there is the danger of recourse to earthly means for the purpose of escape. What is this but the same thing that we find here? And yet who that feels for the children of God and for the truth, but knows the danger of this? Be sure, if we do not feel the danger, it is because we are ourselves under the world's influence. The feeling of the danger, the dread of our own spirits, the fear lest we should meet flesh by flesh, is what God uses to make us look to Himself. God will never put His seal on self-dependence; on the contrary, the great lesson the whole life of Christ teaches is the very reverse. He lived for the Father; so "he that eateth Him shall live for Him." It is in dependence upon another, even Christ, as our object that the joy and strength and wisdom of the Christian are found. This we gather before the difficulty comes. Then "I can do all things through Him Who strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

Where we often fail is through acting from impulse. If we think to plan, instead of praying in real subjection to God, we need to fear for ourselves. What is rendered in 1 Tim. 2:1 “intercession,” and in 1 Tim. 4:5 “prayer,” means such intercourse with God as admits of confiding appeal to Him. We can thus freely and personally speak to Him about all things, now that through the one Mediator we know Him as a Saviour-God, Who has first spoken to us in grace, and given us the access we have into this grace wherein we stand. Is it not, then, an outrage on the God Who has thus opened His ear to us if we look to fleshly means? And yet who does not know that this is the very thing to which perhaps, more than any other, the wise and prudent are prone?

In this way it seems that the moral lesson of this chapter is to be seen — it is taking counsel, but not of Jehovah. Hence God caused the land of Egypt to become the means of deeply aggravating their evil. “Woe to the rebellious children, saith Jehovah, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering (or, as some prefer, that make leagues), but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin; that walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt! Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be a shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt a confusion. For his princes are at Zoan, and his ambassadors are come to Hanes. They shall all be ashamed of a people [that] cannot profit them, that are not a help nor profit, but a shame, and also a reproach” (vv. 1-5). His princes mean those of God’s people, as the next chapter proves decisively. The prophet’s irony thus expresses itself.

“The burden of the beasts of the south. Through the land of trouble and anguish, from whence [come] the lioness and the lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent, they carry their riches upon the shoulders of young asses, and their treasures upon the bunches of camels, to a people [that] shall not profit. For Egypt helpeth in vain, and to no purpose: therefore have I called her Rahab (or, Arrogance) that sitteth still” (vv. 6, 7). Not man’s pride, but God’s guidance avails for His people.

If we examine the New Testament for our guidance in these difficulties, we shall find just the same truth. If the apostle is speaking merely about the ordinary trials of each day, we have the same lesson in other words. Thus he tells us we are to let our moderation be known unto all men, the Lord being at hand; that instead of being careful or anxious about anything (not that we are to be careless, but not to be careful in the sense of anxiety), our requests should be made known unto God with thanksgiving.

Our strength, it is said, is in quiet confidence. Christians have a right to expect God to appear for us; He has entitled us to count on it. We may be perfectly sure, it matters not what the circumstances are; even supposing there has been something to judge in ourselves, if one tell it out to God, will not He listen? He cannot deny Himself. He must deny him that slights the name of Christ (2 Tim. 2:12, 13). Where He now puts to shame, it is in our self-will; so far from His putting shame on such being a proof that He does not love them, it is precisely the proof that He does. But at the same time, let men venture to go beyond what God sees good for the discipline of His child, He soon takes up the rod; and there can be nothing more terrible than when the

adversary exceeds the chastening that is just, gratifying his hatred toward them. For God will rise up in His indignation, and deal with them according to His own majesty; even the grace of the gospel does not set aside that. For instance, see 2 Tim. 4:14. If persons bearing the Lord's name are carried away by their fleshly zeal, and fight against the truth of God or those charged with the proclamation of that truth, God may use them for dealing with faults in His people. God knows how to bring down His people where their looks are high because of anything in themselves, or that grace has conferred upon them. But when the limit of right rebuke is exceeded, woe be to those that fight against them, covering their own vindictiveness or envy under God's name! It is evident that the very grace of the gospel makes it to be so much the more conspicuous; for it sounds so much the more tremendous that God should thus deal in the midst of all that speaks so loudly of His love.

The Gospels also bring out, in the words of our Lord Himself, the wickedness of fighting against what God is doing even by poor weak disciples. This is the great lesson for us; we are not to consult our own heart or have recourse to the strength of man. When we flee to the various resources of the flesh, we slip out of our proper Christian path. Whereas the strength of God has indeed shone in that foundation-pattern in which all the blessing of grace to sinners is contained; and it always takes this form for a Christian, and that is, death and resurrection. There may very likely be a great pressure of trial; there may soon appear a sinking down under it; but as surely as there is the semblance of death, there will be the reality of resurrection by-and-by. Let no one

be disheartened. The cross is the right mould for the blessing of the children of God. When we were brought to Him, was it not after the same sort? We knew what it was to have the horrors of the conviction of sin; but God was going to bring us for the first time into a place of special blessing.

It has always been so with His own. We find it in the case of Abraham, and in proportion to the greatness of blessing is the force of sorrow that precedes it. Isaac was given when Abraham was a hundred years old, and Sarah as good as dead. There was death, as it were, and he had to wait for a son. Even after the birth and growth of the child of promise, he had to surrender him, to offer up his only son to God. Directly that the singleness and truth of his heart was proved, and that the sacrifice was in principle offered up, the angel of Jehovah arrests his hand. How much sweeter now, when Isaac was, as it were, the child of resurrection! And so it is with all our blessings, it matters not what they may be. There must be the breaking down of our feelings, the mortification of self in a practical way, if we are to know what God is in blessing: our blessings are cast in the mould of death and resurrection.

The way by which come all our blessings, is in Him Who is dead and risen. To be blessed practically we must morally go through the same process. There comes the frustration of all natural hopes, the blasting of all the objects we desire. When God visits us in His faithfulness with trial, the first thing man seeks is to escape. Israel goes down into Egypt, instead of looking up in the confidence that God is the giver of wisdom and of power. They go down to the land of human wisdom and ability. Were there no God, were they not His people, it would

have been intelligible; but as it is, what folly! Yet is it the folly of our own hearts. Are we not conscious of it? Beware lest it be, because we are so accustomed to forget it, that we do not realise the humbling truth. We need to consider it more deeply to profit by this lesson. Their strength is quiet confidence instead of hurrying down into Egypt. “Now go, write it before them on a tablet, and inscribe it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever. For it is a rebellious people, lying children, children [that] will not hear the law of Jehovah; that say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits: get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us” (vv. 8-11). Those that wait not on Him for His power must feel the power of His enemies and theirs.

“For ever and ever” (v. 8) it was to be graven in a book that they were “children that will not hear the law of Jehovah” (v. 9). That was even the last of all; rebellion could be forgiven lying children could be made ashamed of their lies. “Prophesy not unto us right things” (v. 10), that is, things according to God. We are not to suppose that they actually said these words. We often read in the Gospels that Jesus answered in many cases where not a single question was put to Him. Why does the Spirit of God say Jesus answered, when He was not asked? Because He knew the thoughts of their hearts. He answered not what they said, for they said nothing; but what He knew they would say if they dared, what He knew was at work within.

So here, Israel may not say it in so many words, but it is what God saw and knew to be the truth of what they

were feeling and doing. They did not like the truth which brought before them their rebellion and lies; they endeavoured to get out of the way and reach of the truth. God was in none of their thoughts. Why not use the best resources of men, now that God did not work miracles for them? Whereas, in truth, God had called out Israel for this — to be the manifestation of a people whose strength was in Jehovah; to be the witness of how blessed it is thus nationally to trust the living God in all their public dealings and in their domestic life. All was to be regulated by the law of Jehovah (which is the technical term for the Old Testament). They were to be the practical exemplification of the blessedness of a people and land in such a case.

To go down into Egypt was to give up God for man: if they had asked counsel, they well knew God would never send them down to Egypt, out of which He had brought them. But they did not seek counsel, they act before they ask, and may have then prayed about it. But what is it to pray for God to bless what we are doing in self-will? Let us ask Him what He would have us to do before we act. It may be that God would have us to do nothing, or possibly give us counsel through one of His children. For God does not intend us to be so many independent lines that never unite, though they may closely approach. He works by Christ's members; He purposes to make us feel that we are members one of another; but whatever may be the value of any one's counsel, each must be responsible to God. The danger is of putting another in the place of God. Men do not value a man more for this, because when we are self-willed and our counsellor is firm for good, the speedy consequence will be that he who stood in the place of

God one day may seem to stand almost in the place of the devil the next. This is the flesh — apt to deify the creature one day, and to demonize it the next.

What we have to seek then is to look up to God; and this is just why the first word is here, “returning and rest.” But there was more besides. In the chapter before, the point was the word of God, which the flesh treated as a sealed book; but God must be waited on as well as His word. He never intended scripture to be taken apart from Himself; over and above the Bible is God Himself. Not that God can ever be against His word, but He is the only power of entering into the application of it. For the Bible is not only for me to look down into: I must look up to God. I am not intended to read it merely as a book of true stories or good sermons, still less of enigmas to solve by wit or learning, but as the voice of the living God to my soul. When one reads it in true subjection to Him, the relation and attitude of the soul is totally changed; you are delivered from the danger of bending the word of God to your own mind and will. Whereas, when the word leads you out in prayer to God, then it is neither the word without prayer, nor prayer without the word; both of which habits are exceedingly dangerous, one leading to rationalism, as the other does to fanaticism. Hence, says the apostle, “I commend you to God and to the word of his grace” (Acts 20:32). We need to wait upon God that we may gather profit from His word, and ever to lean on Him for His grace that we may with simplicity and faithfulness carry it out in the Spirit.

Here Israel had failed, as we see in Isa. 29. So now in Isa. 30 they flee down to the nearest neighbour that could help by human prudence, slighting God’s wisdom and the grace which entitled them to cast themselves on

Him for it. Were they not a people that should dwell alone, and not be reckoned among the nations? "Therefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because ye reject this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon, therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly in an instant. And he shall break it as the breaking of a potter's vessel that is broken in pieces without sparing; and there shall not be found in the pieces of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth or to take water out of the cistern" (vv. 12-14).

Such was Egypt. The flesh is habitually fraudulent and perverse. But God judges it in His own. It is ever restless and pretends to something. It may look imposing, but it is ready to crumble from top to bottom, and is doomed of God. "For thus saith the Lord Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel, In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength; but ye would not. And ye said, No, for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift [Egypt's resources of common sense]; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift. One thousand [shall flee] at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on a hill" (vv. 15-17). God would make them a signal example, and show that the resources they trusted were only so many nets in which they were to be snared. Had they sought to flee? They should flee in terror. Had they sought help to swiftly escape? Swift should be the vengeance of their foes. God constantly makes the earthly object of trust to be the rod for the fool's back.

What is the answer of the Lord when He comes to this? Nothing can be stronger than His condemnation. But if He deals sternly with His faulty people here, is it not always for blessing in the end? If God exposes His children, pulls them down from the seat of pride, brings them into trouble from those they prefer to Himself in some extremity, it is the real action of His great grace. To return to Him even with broken bones is blessed. How magnificent is the burst of the prophet! "And therefore will Jehovah wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he lift himself up [not to cut off Israel, but] that he may have mercy upon you; for Jehovah [is] a God of judgement: blessed [are] all they that wait for him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem. Thou shalt weep no more: he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; as he heareth it, he will answer thee. And the Lord will give you the bread of adversity, and the water of oppression; yet shall not thy teachers be hidden any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers. And when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left, thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This [is] the way, walk ye in it" (vv. 18-21). He had let all this trouble fall upon His people; He had Himself waited and been exalted; and why? That He might be gracious. The enemy might prove his malice, and they their weak and guilty preference of flesh to Himself; and He allowed it all to take place that He might have nothing to do but to take them out of the pit into which they had fallen, and bless them as they had never been blessed before, at length without hindrance to the outflow of all His love. He waits for them, and though He seem to tarry, it is to enrich them with a still greater blessing. They should be morally restored, too, and take vengeance on what had

seduced their hearts in previous times. “And ye shall defile the silver covering of thy graven images, and the gold overlaying of thy molten images; thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth; Out! shalt thou say unto it” (v. 22).

Outward happiness follows here below, and inward blessing and glory from above. For Jehovah asserts the rights of His grace, when His people, all wrong, have been chastened in adversity, and returned to Him in heart.

“And he will give the rain of thy seed, with which thou shalt sow the ground; and bread, the produce of the ground, and it shall be fat and plenteous. In that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures; and the oxen and the young asses that till the ground shall eat salted provender, which hath been winnowed with the shovel and with the fan. And there shall be upon every high mountain, and upon every high hill, brooks, water-courses, in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall. And the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that Jehovah bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound” (vv. 23-26).

Such is the deliverance which God will work for Israel; but what about the Assyrian? Israel are blessed, but not yet the Assyrian judged; Israel had been wrong, but the Assyrian had been merciless. God had dealt with Israel; now He must deal with their foes, as we are told in Isa. 10:12. “When the Lord hath performed His whole work on mount Zion,” then will He bring down the Assyrian. “Behold, the name of Jehovah cometh from far, burning

[with] his anger, and a grievous conflagration: his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire; and his breath as an overflowing stream, that reacheth even unto the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of vanity; and a bridle that causeth to err [shall be] in the jaws of the peoples" (vv. 27, 28). The foe will not know that it is God Who is guiding them to the Holy Land, but think they are going to have the land and the people an easy prey: God, on the contrary, is going to meet them there, and avenge His people. "Ye shall have a song as in the night a holy feast is kept; and gladness of heart, as of one going with a pipe to come unto the mountain of Jehovah, to the Rock of Israel" (v. 29). This is even more than there had been when Egypt was judged; Israel could then eat the lamb but with bitter herbs. Not so in the day which is coming; it is not that part of the passover that this is referred to, but the song of their holy festival. "And Jehovah will cause his glorious voice to be heard, and will show the lighting down of his arm, with indignation of anger, and a flame of devouring fire, [with] a crashing and tempest and hailstones" (v. 30).

It is not a mere providential judgement — God from a distance acting and merely raising up one people to destroy another. The intervention of God shall be manifested, an unmistakable display of divine judgement. "For through the voice of Jehovah shall the Assyrian be broken in pieces, he will smite with a rod. And every stroke of the appointed staff, which Jehovah shall lay upon him, shall be with tabrets and harps; and in battles of shaking will he fight with them" (vv. 31, 32). It is the staff of God's correction, which shall deal to the bitter end with the Assyrian. For. Israel such joy and

gladness shall follow as never had been tasted heretofore. So manifestly is God espousing their cause, that it will be with the loftiest music of praise and every sign of confidence in God. Has this ever, since Isaiah, been accomplished in Palestine? Was it heard there even at the time of Sennacherib? Israel was already in captivity, and Judah was soon swept away by the king of Babylon. Here we have triumph, peace, blessing, and glory. The mighty power of God will have destroyed their enemies for ever. There must then be a fuller accomplishment than the prophecy has yet received.

But it is not to be a mere devastation. “For Topheth [is] prepared of old; for the king also it is prepared; he hath made [it] deep [and] large: the pile thereof fire and much wood; the breath of Jehovah, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it” (v. 33). Tophet is ordained: this shows clearly when and how it will be. Tophet is the figure of the judgement on God’s part that is coming. It should be “for the king also,” not “yea, for the king.” That little change has done much mischief in confounding two important personages. Nobody need deny that the word translated “yea” may be rightly so in certain cases; but the natural meaning of it is either “and” or “also,” and the latter is just what is required here. His declaration is, that Tophet is ordained not for “the Assyrian” only, but also for “the king.” The king and the Assyrian are so totally different and opposed that it was needful to reveal the same doom for both. The mistranslation was because our translators did not know the difference, but fancied the king and the Assyrian to be one and the same.

“The king” is that false Messiah who will be found with the Jews in the last days. Received in his own name, he

will be accepted as the true Anointed, but he is the devil's Messiah. And the consequence is that God's fire or Tophet is prepared for him. The point here is that God will prepare the same fire for both of them; not only for the hostile Assyrian, but for the leader of Judah's wickedness, "the king." For him the fire of Tophet is prepared as well as for his enemy, the Assyrian. God in this marvellous manner, and not waiting for the day of eternity, will cast him directly into hell, even before the devil himself. Lest we might think that he is the only one, it is said, "for the king also"; for this personage, who is to reign over the apostate Jews, will also be singled out of God to be dealt with in the same way. Figurative expressions may be used, but they are figures of a terrible reality which Christendom has long forgotten. The more urgent is the need that the believer should wake up to his fuller confession of the truth, in a day when men sink down in a self-complacent dream of an onward progress for the earth, the ritualist being as besotted as the rationalist. "Behold, the Judge standeth before the door."

Isaiah 31

The chapter now coming before us is a brief moral comment on, or a compressed rehearsal of Isa. 30. "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help, and stay on horses; and trust in chariots, because [they are] many, and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek Jehovah!" (v. 1). How touchingly the prophet warns of the danger through Egypt as defection from Jehovah! "But he also [is] wise, and will bring evil, and will not call back his words [which Israel vainly would escape],

and he will arise against the house of the evildoers [Israelitish or not] and against the help of them that work iniquity. Now the Egyptians [are] men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit: and Jehovah shall stretch out his hand, and he that helpeth shall stumble, and he that is helped shall fall, and they all shall perish together" (vv. 2, 3).

Jehovah's protection over the righteous would be proved in the day when He judged the helpers and the helped. Their material resources were great, their political wisdom famous; but where were they in that which is highest and alone enduring? The true God was in none of their thoughts. They were the most besotted of creature-worshippers. From Zion, not heaven only, He will deal. It is the day of open intervention here anticipated. "For thus saith Jehovah unto me, Like as the lion growleth, and the young lion over his prey, if a multitude of shepherds be called forth against him, he will not be dismayed at their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them: so will Jehovah of hosts come down to war upon mount Zion, and upon the hill thereof. As birds hovering, so will Jehovah of hosts cover Jerusalem: covering he will also deliver, [and] passing over, he will rescue [it]. Turn ye unto [him from] whom, O children of Israel, ye have deeply revolted. For in that day every may shall cast away his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which your own hands have made unto you [for] a sin. And the Assyrian shall fall with the sword, not of a mighty man; and the sword, not of a mean man, shall devour him; and he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall become tributary. And his rock shall pass away by reason of fear, and his princes shall be

dismayed at the ensign, saith Jehovah, whose fire [is] in Zion. and his furnace in Jerusalem" (vv.4-9).

The commentators naturally are perplexed who look not beyond Sennacherib; for though his host was smitten by the angel of Jehovah, and this might in some measure meet the prediction, there are strong expressions which can never be satisfied, short of the great enemy at the close. Then only will be felt the force of Tophet; then only will be seen the ensign of the Divine presence and power which protects Zion and Jerusalem.

For what can be plainer than the assurance that Jehovah will in very deed appear for the deliverance of His people? Whatever has been in the past is but a pledge of the coming glory. We know as a fact that Judah did not hear any more than Israel as a whole; and that as in Christendom, so among the Jews thenceforward evil men and seducers waxed worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. Bright exceptions there were now and then; and faith working by love is never without honour from God, and fruit among men. But the general issue of old, as now, is the same sad and at times rapid and audacious declension. But the time of ultimate blessing is all the more sure. For the Lord will come quickly to receive His heavenly redeemed, and this will but give the utmost impulse to Satan's wiles and apparent victory on earth, when those who stood most opposed in the Spirit are taken out of the way, and God works in a remnant of both Israel and the nations for the kingdom soon to be displayed. Only in Isa. 31 we must hold fast that it is not a question of Antichrist sustained by the Beast or Western Empire, but of the external chief of the nations hostile to the people and their land — the Assyrian. He is not to be destroyed, like the Beast

and the False Prophet by the Lord's shining forth from heaven, but by His going forth and fighting against those nations as when He fought in the day of battle. His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives. (Zech. 14) He will then deign to be in relationship with His people; of which His King set on His holy hill of Zion is the token and the glory.

Isaiah 32

The whole work being now finished at Jerusalem, Jehovah is then shown us reigning, for He and no other is the personage spoken of here. "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgement. And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken. The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly. The vile person shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said [to be] bountiful. For the vile person will speak villainy, and his heart will work iniquity, to practise profaneness, and to utter error against Jehovah, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and to cause the drink of the thirsty to fail. The instruments also of the churl [are] evil: he deviseth wicked devices to destroy the meek with lying words, even when the needy speaketh right. But the liberal deviseth liberal things; and in liberal things doth he stand" (vv. 1-8). It is no longer a question of Christianity but of the kingdom. When He reigns for Whom all believers wait, as all prophets spoke of Him, the righteous shall be called no

more to suffer, but to dwell at ease. It is in view of heavenly glory, and as following Him Who passed through sufferings, that we are now called to do well, suffer for it, and take it patiently. This indeed is grace. But in the day that is coming righteousness shall be displayed by divine power here below, when Satan is set aside and Christ reigns.

This is a totally different state of things from what prevails at present, for it is grace that now reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, not (so to speak) righteousness through glory in the government of the world. In the day that this chapter contemplates, the Lord Jesus will righteously take in hand the sceptre of the earth, and especially of the land of Israel. All the nations will come indirectly under His reign, because there will be one King over all the earth, not to the setting aside of others, as we know, but one supreme central government is to be then maintained. Other kings will be obliged to submit (compare Isaiah 49:23; Isaiah 60:3, 10, 16) to the sway of the Lord, which will continue throughout the whole unbroken period of the millennium. It is called therefore “the everlasting kingdom,” not being transferred to another, and lasting as long as the earth endures. At the end of the thousand years there will be an awful proof of man’s radically unchanged condition; for the nations will then gather together against “the beloved city,” the earthly Jerusalem, compassing about the camp of the saints. This will be allowed for the express purpose of proving the solemn truth that glory no more ameliorates the heart than does the present long-suffering patience of God. If judgement against evil works be not executed, men’s hearts are hardened in wickedness; when God’s

judgements are in the earth, the world will learn righteousness. But alas! even that lesson is forgotten in time; and then is the end.

Jehovah will reign in righteousness, Whose it will be to exercise strong and beneficent government all through His day; but it will be proved once more that the heart is no more changed thereby than under the gospel now, unless renewed in conscience by the power of the Spirit. There must be the possession of a new nature. Man must be born again to see or enter the kingdom of God. It will then be evident that the new birth is requisite not merely for the heavenly glory, but even for the earthly things of that kingdom. (John 3) It is in reference to the earthly part that we hear of a king reigning in righteousness. Rev. 20:7-9 shows the total failure of this display of glory to make the heart of man one whit better. In a higher point of view, far from failure, there will he during this time an amazing exhibition of that which will bring praise to God Himself; and to this we have a reference here.

But what a proof of the selfishness of our hearts, that we do not think much about this blessed time that is coming! Not that it is not believed in; but God give us to think far more, not only of a world set free, but of being with Christ where He is in heavenly blessedness. How blind men are! For, to love, what is so much our own portion as His? Besides we are too apt to slight the deliverance of creation (now travailing in pain) during the thousand years, and this because we are so little identified with the interests of Christ. Whatever glorifies Him ought to be very dear to us. Again we shall be connected with the earth, though our home will be heavenly. We shall indeed reign with Christ over it. God

will make the risen saints to be the intermediary vessels of His glory, and the fruitful channels of His goodness in that bright day. Does it not then show the insensate selfishness of the heart that we are but little filled with the thoughts and feelings suitable to such expectations?

It is freely granted that there is a far higher and nearer hope, even to be with Christ Himself in the Father's house. To see His glory there is more blessed than any inheritance we share anywhere else. But if we look around and see all the sins, miseries, sufferings, and sorrows of a world far from God, what a cheering truth it is that the day is so near when we shall be able to say even of the yet unbelieving Jews, "Their iniquities are forgiven, their sin is covered!" Will not God be magnified? A remnant of Israel suffices not: all shall be saved; every one of them, as the rule, shall then be righteous. Further, the miracles of Christ are called the "powers of the world to come," because it was the sample of that divine energy in man which will never be revoked, though it may be suspended. But it is always in Christ, though the church may not know how to count upon Him for it, or apply it to a needy creation. But we ought to know it is in Christ for faith to draw on, and God has rebuked our low state by withholding the display of these outward ornaments. It is good, however, to remember that it is always in Christ, and that He is coming, and that the end of this age will witness the exercise of the glorious power of that exalted Man, the church too being associated with Him, and every blessing brought in to the exclusion of all evil. This is what the chapter before us anticipates.

Now while God does not put evil down, grace reigns; and now it is only grace in the gospel that can deliver

from sins as well as for heavenly glory. But when the power of evil is smitten above and below (and the Lord will smite before the millennium), the King will rule. It is the kingdom of God administered by the exalted Man, Christ; and a blessed truth it is that God has always had it in His view to exalt Him. Adam's sin was not the fall of man only, but, through him, of all the lower creation too; for the whole system was ruined when he departed from God. Adam was not a mere individual but a head. All thenceforward depends on the coming in of another Man, the Lord Jesus, Who has won a title, not for Himself to stand, which He did not need, but for us to have a standing in virtue of His blood, and death, and resurrection. The consequence is that for the believer the glory of Christ is saving in character, not destructive except of evil in that day.

But much of bright expectation is practically lost for those who do not dwell upon the coming scene of glory. The distinctive mark is Jehovah reigning in righteousness; and moreover, it is a Man Who thus reigns over the earth, not only a divine person. God will put all things under the Man that died and rose in delivering power, as truly as Adam drew down in his fall the race and creation. The world became a wilderness of thorns and briars; it was the consequence of man's fall. Do you believe it? Believe also that the Second Man would be defrauded of no small part of His heritage if He did not deliver, not believing man only but creation, and govern it in power and glory. This future reign is necessary to vindicate the faithfulness of God, to manifest the worth of Christ and the results of what He has done, to display His bride along with Him. It is good therefore to look onward to the scene where this blessed

Man shall thus reign in righteousness. This would be true apart from our own share with Him, for which we must turn to the New Testament. The prophet's subject is earth; we belong to heaven. Hence it is the province of the New Testament to reveal the Father's house and heaven, no longer shut but opened first upon Christ and consequently upon us, that in peace and joy we may approach the presence of God. What a totally different theme from the Old Testament, which brings the earth into prominence as the scene of the reign in righteousness! In the earth it is judicial power that governs. A rod of iron, a sceptre of righteousness, is that by which Jehovah is to break down the pride of the world.

But there are intimations of peace and comfort too. Jehovah is here viewed "as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (v. 2). The world had long been weary of the effects of sin, if not of sin itself. Now the blessing is come. "And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken. And the heart of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly. The vile (or fool) shall no more be called liberal, nor the churl said [to be] bountiful. For the vile person will speak villainy, and his heart will work iniquity, to practice hypocrisy, and to utter error against Jehovah, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and to cause the drink of the thirsty to fail. The instruments also of the churl [are] evil: he deviseth wicked devices to destroy the meek with lying words, even when the needy

speaketh right. But the liberal deviseth liberal things; and by liberal things shall he stand" (vv. 3-8).

It is not as you see now, men who appear to have every good natural quality, and yet when tested they have no heart for divine things, love not the name of the Lord Jesus, nor care for His glory. Here it will not be so. Blessing will flow, evil be judged, shame will vanish away. Things and persons will be manifest and bear their true character. Man will then accomplish for the first time on the earth that for which he was made. It is in contrast with all the deceitfulness of unrighteousness that has gone, and still goes, on here below. We know the uncertainty of human judgement, and yet how men cling to and keep up appearances. There will be no vain show then. Good fruits will spring out of the rich resources of divine mercy, and, in the light of God then shining, there will also be the detection of everything that is false. If wickedness appear, the judgement of the Lord will fall upon it. For during the millennium there will be cases demanding vengeance; and God will not fail to deal with wickedness in a summary manner. There will be a solemn public sight of the execution of His wrath continually before men's eyes (Isa. 66:24) — the more stern in that day, because thenceforth is no temptation to evil. Accordingly, the rebellious objects of God's curse will be immediately visited, so as to keep up a wholesome horror of iniquity in the hearts of men.

This leads the Spirit of God to give a warning, which will be needed, especially as the blessing of Israel will not be brought about in a single day. There is a coming time of sifting: as we know there will be for Israel in the wilderness, so in Jerusalem too there will be another mode of dealing with the Jews proper. Even when

Jehovah appears for their deliverance, it is a mistake to suppose that all is complete at once. Jehovah will gradually put down the enemies round about the Holy Land, and will use Israel as the instrument of certain judgements (Isa. 11; 63; Micah 5; Zech. 9 - 10). He will send forth His armies and deal with the nations in various ways. In His appearing from heaven He does work by His own power. The Jews will have nothing to do with the judgement of the Beast and the false prophet; but He will employ them to put down the then representatives of their old neighbours, who rise up once more in envy against them. He will remember what their forefathers did, and will then definitely deal with them, seeing that they retain and show the same spirit to the last. Thus Jehovah will act thoroughly in righteousness, and Israel will need a warning previous to this judicial period.

“Rise up, ye women that are at ease, hear my voice; ye careless daughters, give ear unto my speech. For days beyond a year shall ye be troubled, ye careless women; for the vintage shall fail, the ingathering shall not come. Tremble, ye women that are at ease; be troubled, ye careless ones; strip you, and make you bare, and gird [sackcloth on [your] loins. They shall smite on the breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine. Upon the land of my people shall come up thistles [and] briars: yea, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city. For the palace shall be deserted; the multitude of the city shall be forsaken; the hill and watch-tower shall be dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks; until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest. And judgement shall inhabit the

wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field" (vv. 9-16). The allusion is to what precedes Jehovah taking His place and reigning in the land. And all the sorrow is to be until the Spirit is poured down upon them. Then comes the great change in Israel. There is not of course the same dwelling of the Holy Ghost in any sense in the believer as now, for that He has a special dwelling in the church also is manifest. But there will be a suited and large outpouring of the Spirit in that day, as we have seen already. It is a mistake to suppose that Jehovah's reigning is incompatible with the Spirit's being thus poured out. He will be poured out very richly then. Now it is more in depth — if we may so speak of a divine person — than in extensiveness. What is not now in breadth is made up otherwise. The Holy Spirit has now baptised into union with Christ on high. Then will be the day for a wide diffusion over all flesh. Now this is only true in principle; and so it is applied from Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:16-21, not as if what is now were the full result for all flesh throughout the earth.

The present time on earth is not a manifestation of judicial righteousness. The righteous One was rejected of men. God's righteousness set Him risen at His right hand and justifies those who believe on Him. Then it will be the King, coming and sitting upon His own throne (not a rejected King exalted on His Father's): earth will be ordered righteously. In incomparable grace our Lord Jesus puts aside for the time His earthly Jewish titles, and God's heavenly counsels are accomplished and revealed while He is above. The Father has seated Him at His right hand and said, as it were, "You shall reign; only, till You are seated on Your own throne, come and sit with Me on Mine." Before Christ comes from heaven,

the Jews (at least a remnant of them) will have welcomed Him in their hearts. Then He will come, where they are, to bless them in the earth, to govern them, and accomplish in the children the promises that were made to their fathers, and this for all the families of the earth.

Accordingly, when the Christians are taken from this world at Christ's coming, the Jews will in due time be converted, so as to be the earthly people of Jehovah, Who will make good in their midst earthly glory according to the prophets; and not this only, but the Holy Ghost will be poured out upon them. The great earthly change is consequent on the effusion of the Spirit from on high. Isaiah speaks of thorns and briars until the Spirit be poured upon Israel. Instead of all being in its appropriate order, everything will need to be restored round the only due centre. All as regards the earth and the Jews is now in confusion and misrule; but the Spirit shall be poured on them from on high, and then what a change! Thus, besides the removal of Satan, there are two things necessary to bring in this time of blessing — the King reigning in righteousness, and the outpouring of spiritual power, specially among the Jews, but also on the Gentiles. In nothing will God fail.

Then shall "the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest." "Then judgement shall inhabit the wilderness": instead of its being the resort of robbers, judgement shall dwell there. Instead of covetousness hankering after the fruitful field, righteousness is to remain there. "And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and confidence for ever" (v. 17). Ends and ways shall be righteous: all is governed

with blessing. “And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places. And it shall hail, coming down on the forest; and the city shall be low in a low place” (vv. 18, 19). The proud organisation of human order, wit, and power, shall be utterly abased in that day. Not the peaceful influence of grace shall effect it, but solemn judgement by the Righteous One. Nevertheless then as now there is every incentive, the right and best encouragement to earnest and free dispersion of the good seed; and grace will bless and use what was once common or unclean. “Blessed [are] ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth [thither] the-feet of the ox and the ass” (v. 20). God’s people shall be sheltered and prosper in peace, whatever befall His enemies. For them assured blessing takes the place of fear and evil. The Seed of the woman triumphs, and the serpent is smitten. Heaven and earth and all things are set under Him Who is worthy.

Isaiah 33

The Spirit of God, having given us a blessed picture of the King-Messiah reigning in righteousness, here contrasts with it a certain spoiler who is not expressly named by our prophet. But we need not find much difficulty in identifying him, if we remember the last prophecy of Ezekiel that describes a hostile Gentile power. It is remarkable that he there describes Gog as one who had been predicted before. Hence it is certain that this marauding power is not peculiar to the later prophet, who tells us in Isa. 38:8-13, “After many days thou shalt be visited... at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought, and thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled

villages; I will come to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, to seize a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thy hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon a people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land. Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto thee, Art thou come to seize a spoil? hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey? to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to take a great spoil?" The next chapter comes in to show in detail that, if there be that which might seem inconsistent with their security, if God permits that there should be a dark cloud gathering for a while over Palestine, it at length falls on their foes themselves, not on Israel. This appears to be the same enemy who is here introduced by Isaiah. It is the last effort of the great coalition against Israel, which leads to the overwhelming destruction of the assembled nations, especially of the East. Then Israel will help themselves to their arms; and their mere burial will occupy the conquerors, still more the spoiling of their arms and appurtenances.

One need not doubt that the policy of the Assyrian, or king of the north, at the end is thus described. Gog will presumably have then accomplished his long-cherished designs on Constantinople and the Turkish empire in its chief dominions. Now "the Assyrian" is a familiar subject of prophecy. This may account for the statement that they were known before. There must clearly have been predictions of him previously to Ezekiel's time, though

some may have prophesied things not committed to writing.

By the way, some have been too anxious to show that the apostles never wrote anything but what we have got. It is quite enough to know that all intended to be of permanent use to the church and for God's glory is preserved. Certainly apostles taught (2 Thess. 2:15), and it is possible they may have written, things which were not meant of God to be preserved as part of the scriptures. But there is a character of perfectness about what we have, which to my mind precludes more. That this is not at all an exorbitant idea is evident from the fact that the apostles preached many discourses that are not recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Of course we have only a very small part of what the apostles preached, as the evangelists were led only to select from what our Lord did. To have added more would have been rather to encumber scripture. Had more communications even of the apostles been added, it would have marred the perfectness of God's written word. We must have confidence in Him. He manifested His will in that all, which He designed for the permanent instruction of the church, was kept by His power in the midst of thousands and myriads of enemies who would have gladly destroyed the scriptures if they could. Never more in Christendom has this dislike of the word of God betrayed itself than now. But the efforts of the enemy only bring out God's power, wisdom, and goodness for all who love Him, as they will to the ruin of those who hate and despise Him.

To return, however: it is only Isaiah 33 which plainly connects itself in character with the northern leader of Ezekiel, unless we identify the Assyrian also with that

power, which seems perhaps within certain limits to be true at the close. However that may be, the moral traits of this foe are sufficiently plain. “Woe to thee that spoilest, and thou [wast] not spoiled; and dealest treacherously, and they dealt not treacherously with thee! when thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled; when thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee” (v. 1). This covetous foe appears to be the last which comes up, and so far distinct from “the king of the north,” which title is not limited to the end. But assuredly it is a ruler of the same sort, insatiable and treacherous.

The Spirit now draws out the prophet, as personifying the godly in Israel, to supplicate, “Jehovah, be gracious unto us; we have waited for thee: be their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble. At the noise of the tumult the peoples fled; at the lifting up of thyself the nations were scattered. And your spoil shall be gathered [like] the gathering of the caterpillar: as the running of locusts shall they run upon them (or, it)” (vv. 2 4). How blessed to have Jehovah as the arm to lean on and do valiantly for us! How complete the reversal when the proud and countless foes yield their spoil to be gathered like that of the caterpillars or locusts! It is Jehovah’s doing, and may well be marvellous in our eyes. “Jehovah is exalted, for he dwelleth on high; he hath filled Zion with judgement and righteousness. And the riches of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times: the fear of Jehovah [shall be] his treasure” (vv. 5, 6). Thus Jehovah Himself has taken them in hand, and all becomes a spoil for Israel, and their proud hopes are blasted for ever. Note that at this

very time Zion shall be filled with righteousness and judgement. The doom which swallowed up the Beast and the false prophet, with the chivalry of Europe, is a lesson heard in vain. Blinded by superstition as well as the lust of universal empire, Gog dreams of destroying Israel, not believing in the presence of Christ, or thinking Him a mere human king. Thus they too will come to their own destruction.

The next verses portray the straits of the people of God and their despair before deliverance appears; nor is danger ever apt to be more felt than when blessing, that seemed to be ours, is once more in jeopardy. “Behold, their valiant ones shall cry without; the ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly. The highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceaseth. He hath broken the covenant, he hath despised the cities, he regardeth no man. The land mourneth, it languisheth; Lebanon is ashamed, is withered, the Sharon is become as a wilderness, and Bashan and Carmel are stripped” (vv. 7-9). But man’s extremity is God’s opportunity, as they say; and so will the Jews then prove. “Now will I arise, saith Jehovah; now will I be exalted; now will I lift up myself” (v. 10). Had He chastened His people sore, and should the insolent foe be unpunished? “Ye shall conceive chaff, ye shall bring forth stubble; your breath [as] fire shall devour [not Israel, but] you, and the peoples shall be [as] the burnings of lime; [as] thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire” (vv. 11, 12). It is Jehovah Who undertakes to dispose of their enemies and thus addresses them. Lime may be hard, but fire ere long reduces it to powder; and thorns, let them be ever so troublesome to those with whom they come into

collision, are notorious, when cut up, for burning with singular rapidity.

Next, attention is drawn (v. 13) to the notable display of God's ways, as well as to the effects of these trials in showing out the true character of men even in Zion. "Hear, ye [that are] far off, what I have done; and ye [that are] near, acknowledge my might," followed by the most animated description of the alarm of the ungodly, and of the divine assurances to those that fear His name and walk in righteousness. "The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from taking hold of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil: he shall dwell on high, his high retreat [shall be] the fortresses of the rocks; bread shall be given him; his waters [shall be] sure" (vv. 14-16).

Then follows (vv. 17-22) a sublime picture of Israel in their conscious blessedness. They should behold the King in His beauty, no longer cooped up within the beleaguered city, but free to look at the most distant part of the land or the earth. Their hearts should meditate on terror, now happily and for ever past; but then it is the more sweet to look back and think of the never-to-be-forgotten rescue, when every expert failed in his calculations, the scribe, or the receiver. The wisest were at fault — at fault in counting up human resources, as if they could avail — at fault in overlooking the only sure Deliverer, though He be not far from every one of us. On the other hand they should see no more and hear

no more the foreign foe, but look upon Zion, the Mount Zion, which Jehovah loved. “Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold a far stretching land. Thy heart shall muse on the terror: where [is] he that counted, where [is] he that weighed [the tribute? where [is] he that counted the towers? Thou shalt no more see the fierce people, a people of a deeper speech than thou canst perceive, of a stammering tongue that cannot be understood. Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tent [that] shall not be removed, the stakes whereof shall never be plucked up, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken. But there Jehovah [will be] with us in majesty, a place of rivers, of broad streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby. For Jehovah [is] our judge, Jehovah [is] our lawgiver, Jehovah his] our King; he will save us” (vv. 17-22).

Is it not utterly vain to apply words like these to the days of Hezekiah with some ancients and of the Maccabees with others, or to gospel times with thoughtless moderns? Even supposing that the rest of the circumstances of the Jews at either of these epochs approached the strength of the prophet’s language, which is not at all admitted, who, in the face of approaching captivity, of a continual servitude to the Gentile powers, of a still more calamitous dispersion under the Romans, the effects of which last to this day — who can affirm that Jerusalem has been seen a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down? How can one hitherto apply to that city, yet trodden down of the Gentiles, the precise and most precious

declaration, “Not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be pulled up, neither shall any of its cords be broken”?

Let in the light of the future for that people and place, and all is changed: the difficulty is at an end, and no wonder; for indeed “there Jehovah is unto us glorious; a place of rivers, of broad streams.” And thus there is not the smallest necessity for dislocating the prophecy from all connection with its historic basis, or diverting its consolations from those whose sorrows it was given to assuage and dispel in proportion to their simplicity or strength of faith. No, whatever of comfort we justly glean, whatever hopes of future triumph from its bright anticipations we may gather, let us rejoice that God is here speaking of afflicted tempest-tossed Israel, who in that day will find in Jesus of Nazareth their long-estranged Lord Jehovah of hosts, Who will prove Himself to be a better safeguard than those rivers and streams, of which Babylon or Nineveh might boast against Jerusalem. But even a river has its dangers as well as its beauty, facilities, and sources of protection: so both these cities proved in opposite ways to their cost. Jerusalem has all these privileges without the perils, has incomparably more, in Jehovah. What if no galley with oars went there, what if no gallant ship passed by, will not Jehovah be their judge, Jehovah their lawgiver, Jehovah their king, and so save them pre-eminently of all nations on the earth? And why should we weaken their claim to advance our own — we who are called into heavenly seats of glory, the object of the Saviour’s love as His bride on high?

To Jerusalem the King then will be their delight and boast and tower of strength. Had not the mightiest of old been broken when but a typical son of David was

there, looking onward to Him Who will surely reign in Zion ere long? And what will it be when the Assyrian in his last phase — when Gog — essays to take Zion at the close of this age? “Thy tacklings are loosed; they could not strengthen the socket of their mast; they could not spread the sail: then was the prey of a great spoil divided; the lame took the prey.” The triumph of Israel is complete, and the more so because it is Jehovah’s hand for them, more than their own. “And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick; the people that dwell therein [shall be] forgiven [their] iniquity” (vv. 23, 24). Happy the people that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is Jehovah! Thrice happy are they who now can rejoice in Israel’s prospect, conscious themselves of a still higher portion in Christ, and in a still better country, that is, a heavenly! May we be content meanwhile to share His rejection, glorying in His cross, not as in an idol or vanity, but by faith graven on our hearts, and therefore proving it by the Spirit in our ways, each crucified to the world and the world crucified to each! For if we be dead together, we shall also live together; if we suffer, we shall also reign together. He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.

Isaiah 34

The Spirit of God has in chapter 34 brought together the earthly extremes of unsparing judgement and of unmingled mercy; these things in two races naturally akin, but so much the more manifesting their divergence and the divine dealing with each from beginning to end. These nations, so judged and so blessed, sprang from the same stock, from the same father, from the same mother, and branched out into twin brothers, Esau on

the one hand and Jacob on the other. The land of Idumea is the centre of the one picture, as of the other is Zion. The proud elder must serve the younger. There was from their birth, and before it, we may say, in antecedent revelation, much to strike the mind in these sons of Isaac and Rebecca, much that would cleave to their posterity till His coming Who will not only judge righteously the past but impress the future with the signs and substance of His own glorious presence.

Yet the early history seemed little to answer either to prophecy or to its fulfilment. “Duke Teman, duke Omar, duke Kenaz” (Gen. 36) and their successors, flourished in the land of Edom, while the sons of Israel were strangers in a land that was not theirs, and ere long proving it a furnace of affliction in bitter bondage. But so it ever is: “that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.” If God’s people hope for that they see not, they must “with patience wait for it.” He Who is sovereign allows that the flesh should show its character to the utmost, save where special mercy interferes to arrest and restrain because of other wise and gracious purposes. But His mercy it is, shown of His own good pleasure, which roused to madness the unbending arrogance of Edom, who never looked to God with a broken spirit even in his deepest need.

On the other hand it was no small moral test for the sons of Israel, that, spite of the divine promises to them, Esau’s descendants should be long settled in peaceful enjoyment as lords of their soil, while Jacob and his seed were sojourners on sufferance, soon to be slaves — and slaves for a long while — in the land of Ham. Half the space that separated the promise from their triumphant

exodus saw them a mere family group; and if they afterwards shot up rapidly into a people, it was in circumstances of increasing oppression and degradation. This was no small trial of faith, whether they looked on this side of the picture or on that. Esau had been long established in power and peace and plenty, while Israel lay among the pots of Egypt, and the accursed race of Canaan ruled in their land. And the Bible contains, in the same books the promise and the trial which early appearances made for faith, presenting all calmly as the word of One Who sees the end from the beginning, Who therefore needs no apologies, puts forward few explanations, but claims the confidence of His children, who know Him Whom they have believed, and are persuaded that He is able to keep against that day the deposit they have entrusted to Him. Scripture does not in a demonstrative way force the truth of God upon His people; on the contrary great simplicity of faith is demanded that we receive it unhesitatingly, trusting God in spite of appearances for the present and delays for the future.

Had you looked more closely and spiritually into Jacob's life, you might have expected long discipline; even as he, their father, was seen lying on his pillow of stone, and Jehovah held out the vision of glory before him. This might have prepared for the thought of trial first, then of gracious blessing. So, later, there was first the crushing of all natural hopes, and then the name of victory conferred (Gen. 32:28). Thus what we have in Jacob's early history prepares one for the vicissitudes of his sons. He was a poor trembling man, with plenty of faults shrinking from the presence of his brother, in whom might appear much that was attractive naturally. But

God saw under it all that the flesh is a false and proud thing — enmity with God, Who allowed that the worst should show out in him, the despiser of his birthright, its real character. Present things were his life; hence profane unbelief and slight of the things of God. All this and more came out prominently in Esau, as they were to be verified in his race. If Gentiles, at any rate they had a blood relation with the people of God. But their very connection with them, though a sort of transition between Israel and the nations around, was the occasion of envious enmity and ruin. They were to prove that it was not only an Egypt and a Pharaoh who were raised up for God to manifest His judgement upon, but that God would do just the same to the sons of Esau, and that Esau's flesh would betray the bitterest defiance of God and His people.

The great northern enemy of Isa. 33 seems to be historically latest; but morally, the account of Edom's judgement is kept for the last, perhaps as being so near to Israel by nature. After that great enemy, the Assyrian, is destroyed, we hear of Edom's doom decided. The reader also may compare the intimation of Ps. 83:6-8. When God was dealing with Israel in blessing or chastisement we have Edom disputing the right of God to bless His people, and taking delight in their shame and sorrow. God resents such spite. And was it not in his race that despised the birthright? This, no doubt, accomplished the purpose of God; but then He admirably makes His end to agree with His word and means. Though a question of His own sovereignty, yet this goes hand in hand with His righteous ways. Jacob was chosen and Esau rejected; but God brought out at the critical time that there was also the seal of

righteousness. Certainly Esau deserved to be cast off by God, though Jacob justly traces everything to His mercy and grace. Thus the transgression of selling his birthright confirms what God had already given out as a question of His own disposal. Esau showed that he set no value on his birthright, present existence being dearer to him than any blessing of God. Jacob was utterly wrong in following his mother's deceitful plan to hinder Isaac's wish and secure the promise. He ought to have waited in peace and confidence, expecting God to make good His own word. But weak as he was, quite wrong more than once, yet one thing you do find in Jacob, not in Esau — a heart for God, a faith that valued the promises of God. He might be apt to drop into his old craft, and to form plans for himself, for he was indeed "that worm Jacob," as scripture calls him; but still at bottom there was a purpose that clave to God and His word. So when the struggle came, when God wrestled with His servant, there was nature that needed to be withered up, lest he should suppose that because of any vigour of his own he prevailed. Still on blessing from God he was set, and would not desist till he had the assurance of it. If flesh was there to be judged, surely divine faith was very manifest. Hence Jacob becomes far brighter towards the close, when the flesh was practically set aside.

So with Israel. Though there will be the chastening of their unfaithfulness, yet the day will come when the nations are fully judged, not borne with; and how will it then fare with Edom? When Israel was in the wilderness, Esau stopped their way. The power of God could have smitten him down (as He had determined long before); but the time was not yet come. So Israel struck not a

blow upon their guilty brother, but rather turned back like a rebuked child. Ah! it was the token in its patience that a still more tremendous judgement was in store for Edom; for there is nothing so ominous as when God takes patiently the iniquity of men. If there be remonstrance, it shows there is, as it were, a hope; but if all be borne silently, it is the solemn sign of judgement that will fall as surely as it lingers. Blessed as it is for those who walk in grace, there is perhaps no more evident a token of perdition to the world than the saints passing through it without lifting a finger in their own defence, or on God's behalf. Alas! we know that the church has failed in this, as Israel after their sort. But their path through the wilderness was a type of the journey of faith in grace, the earthly people and things being the shadow of the heavenly.

Possibly there may have been a preliminary judgement at the time of Nebuchadnezzar's onslaught on the Jews. One might judge from the Psalms (see especially Ps. 137, "Remember, O Jehovah, the children of Edom") that there is a connection between that and Edom; that is, there may have been a partial accomplishment in the days of Nebuchadnezzar. For though on his coming up against Jerusalem, the Edomites helped him to destroy the Jews more effectually, they themselves were not spared by the conquerors. In Ps. 83 we find connected with Edom the Assyrian, the great enemy of the ten tribes as we have seen; with Babylon the conqueror of the two. "Keep not thou silence, O God... They have taken crafty counsel against thy people... Let us cut them off." All confirms what has been already remarked. In the confederacy against Israel figure "the tabernacles of Edom." It is the first power mentioned, of course not

as the mightiest, but as setting on the others to Israel's ruin. Being neighbours, they would have a better knowledge of the people and their land, and so be the more dangerous, besides the moral bearing of the case. There are also the Philistines, Tyre, and the various peoples that lived near the sea coast, as well as round about Idumea and the contiguous regions. Then we find the great power of Asshur mentioned as having joined them. So the Spirit of God classes Edom with Israel's final adversaries, as He had done already by Moses and Joshua with their earliest. There is an evident connection between their rise and the gradual course of their history through scripture. Now at the close we find distinct prophecies applying to Edom. "They are confederate against thee" (v. 5). All their covenants God will break up before the judgement falls upon Esau. They may have joined themselves unto Asshur; but that great power, like the lesser ones, will be directed against God's people in vain, great and small alike hostile, uniting to aim a more effectual blow at Israel, but only to the destruction of themselves.

God, we may see, always goes back to the beginning when He judges. In the time of the Babylonish captivity, why did He judge Israel? He looks at what they did in the wilderness. It was because of Moloch and Chiun (Amos 5:26). They had learnt to worship their images in the wilderness, and therefore should be carried captive beyond Damascus. God, when the time of judgement comes, traces up to the root of evil. So our wisdom as Christians, when we fail, is to go back to our first departure. We never get right by merely judging this or that outbreak, but should always search out the cause. We do not else gather-needed strength, nor is any sin

rightly judged by merely judging the manifested effects; but we must probe into the hidden sources of the mischief. It is not enough to judge our acts; judging self is a very different process. We need to discern the springs within ourselves. If we discerned ourselves, we should not be judged. It does not mean pronouncing judgement upon any particular fault, but judging the real cause and not occasions merely. Such is the Christian way of judging. It is not occupation with the surface, but with that which is underneath, the hardly seen roots of the acts which any can see.

With unerring wisdom then God goes back to what Esau did from the beginning of his history. He had waited long and patiently, nearly a thousand years, and now shows His perfect knowledge of the course and end; but when the end does come, God invariably traces all up to the beginning.

We need not dwell on all the dark account. The full stroke of judgement comes upon the Edomites in the day of Jehovah. Here, though the scene be laid in Idumea, it is a question of all the heathen. This is referred to here. “Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye peoples: let the earth hear, and the fullness thereof; the world, and all that cometh forth of it. For the indignation of Jehovah [is] upon all the nations, and fury against all their armies; he hath devoted them to destruction, he hath delivered them to the slaughter. Their slain also shall be cast out, and their stink shall come up from their carcasses, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood. And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall away, as a leaf fadeth from off the vine, and as the withered [fruit] from the

fig-tree. For my sword shall be bathed in the heavens; behold, it shall come down upon Edom, and upon the people of my ban, to judgement. The sword of Jehovah is filled with blood, it is made fat with fatness, 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 Edom" (vv. 1-6). The day of the calamity of His people! If there be anything He repeats over and over again, it is the day of their calamity. (Compare Obadiah 11-14). He means blessing, and there is nothing that more rouses His judgement than, when through their sin deep sorrow falls and strikes their hearts, men should then take advantage of this to behave themselves proudly against them. There was never a truer picture of the spirit of man than at this very time, unless it be the feeling of Christendom towards those who are seeking to walk in the way that is pleasing to God. If failure is known that fills such with shame, is it not used to wrong them, or to speak evil against them? This was the feeling of Edom; so that we may see how true these principles of God are, and how solemn it is for us to realise the duty that becomes us at the present time.

"And the wild-oxen shall come down with them, and the bullocks with the bulls; and their land shall be drunken with blood, and their dust made fat with fatness. For [it is] the day of Jehovah's vengeance, the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion. And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night and 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. But the pelican and the porcupine shall possess it; and the owl (or, bittern) and the raven shall dwell therein. And he shall stretch over it the line of confusion, and the plummet of emptiness. They shall call the nobles thereof to the kingdom, but none [shall be] there; and all her princes shall be nothing. And thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and thistles in the fortresses thereof; and it shall be a habitation of jackals, a court for ostriches. And the wild beasts of the desert shall meet with the wolves, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; yea, the night-monster shall settle there, and shall find her a place of rest. There shall the arrowsnake make her nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow: yea, there shall the kites be gathered, every one with her mate. Seek ye out of the book of Jehovah and read: not one of these shall be missing, none shall want her mate; for my mouth, it hath commanded, and his spirit, it hath gathered them And he hath cast the lot for them, and his hand hath divided it unto them by line: they shall possess it for ever, from generation to generation shall they dwell therein" (vv. 7-17). There will be one destruction upon the mountains of Israel, but another special carnage in Edom. It is important to bear in mind that this is a future judgement: if any one were to apply it rigorously and in all its extent to the times of Nebuchadnezzar, confusion must result, perverting either scripture or the facts. The contrary rather was seen then. The nations had it all their own way. There was no such thing as God having a great sacrifice of all nations, though treacherous Edom suffered. The real fulfilment will be at the end of the age, though even then will be merely a tremendous convulsion of nature: the total dissolution of heaven and earth will be at the end

of the millennium. The Spirit of God in a measure puts the scenes together here.

Isaiah 35

In singular and striking conjunction with this terrible picture of the vast solitude for man, consigned as it were only to ravenous beasts and birds of prey and reptiles, God thereon shows that the day which beholds this desolation for Edom inaugurates Israel's blessing. Nor is it only Israel rejoicing, but Jehovah will form a large and enlarging scene for His own glory, where erst was misery and barrenness. "The wilderness and the parched land shall be gladdened;21 and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose (or, narcissus). It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon: they shall see the glory of Jehovah, and the excellency of our God" (vv. 1, 2). It is not mere fertility, but the restitution of all things when the day is come on earth: every joy, fruitfulness, and beauty. How singularly blinding is the theological prejudice which the pious J. A. Alexander expresses, when he says (Comm. ii. 34) that without any change of its essential meaning, it may be applied to the restoration of the Jews from Babylon, to the vocation of the Gentiles, to the whole Christian dispensation, to the course of every individual believer, and to the blessedness of heaven. As it has been so applied, certainly it may; but the question is, what is its definite meaning? The chapter before gives the awful judgement that awaits the earth in one aspect of it; so does this the deliverance of creation, and especially of Israel that follows, "in that day."

And assuredly man's deeper wants are not forgotten. "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the tottering knees. Say to them [that are] of a fearful (hasty) heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God! vengeance will come, of God the recompense! He will come himself and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf be unstopped. Then shall the lame [man] leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the glowing sand (or, mirage) shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of jackals, where they lay, [shall be] grass with reeds and rushes. And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called, The way of holiness: the unclean shall not pass over it; but it [shall be] for these. They that go the way, even fools, shall not err [therein]. No lion shall be there, nor shall ravenous beast go up thereon nor be found there; but the redeemed shall walk [there]. And the ransomed of Jehovah shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (vv. 3-10).

God will then and thus demonstrate that, whatever Satan had brought of sin and woe into this world, goodness and mercy are His own delight. Such is the time that is coming for the earth, though an awful storm ushers it in. While all evil came through sin, and there is not an atom of the lower creation that does not bear some trace of Adam's fall, there will surely come the day of the Lord, the last Adam. It seems plain however, that in the world to come judgement will leave its effectual mark. On the land of Edom the destruction will be

unsparing, and that land will be left as a sear upon the face of the earth. It is not said that Edom will be the only one, for Rome also will be proved to he the vile corruptress, as in Paganism so in Christendom and in Antichristendom. But when the proud lie of the “eternal city” is punished for ever, then the poor and despised Jew comes forward, as it is said here. Divine vengeance on the enemies accompanies their salvation. Take all its fullness of meaning: it will be accomplished to the letter. God will prove that not a word of His mercy to Israel and their land can fall to the ground.

Indeed the mighty and blessed transformation which the Lord will then cause for the lower creation is but part of the still grander prospect which the reconciliation of all things opens (Col. 1:20); when the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, even the universe, shall be headed up in the Christ, the Heir of all things (Eph. 1:10) and the Head over all to His body the church. But here it was enough to give the earthly side of glory. It is the common point where, we may say, the bright visions of all the prophets meet. How astonishing that any Christian should fail to see what is so fully attested and so plain! It is painful that pious men in our land or any other should be behind Hengstenberg and the like, who own the change in the lower creation that is to accompany and characterise Messiah’s reign. The geologic ages do not touch the question. In Rom. 8:18-21 is apostolic dogma, which resists all such efforts of unbelief. And Christ’s death, so far from being exhausted in reconciling all saints to God will assuredly reconcile all things in heaven and on earth, as Col. 1:20 affirms. Prophecy, therefore, is in no collision but in perfect harmony with Christian doctrine. It is popular

theology which opposes itself to God's word through inattention and prejudice and tradition. It is irrational to talk of a fulfilment gradually growing more complete in life, but perfected only when probation is over. Scripture reserves the mighty change for the appearing of the Lords when we are manifested with Him in glory. Then at once, but not till then, shall the creation be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

It is equally erroneous to deny heaven for the risen saints "in that day," and to deny the change which God intends for Israel and the nations, and the earth itself and the creatures generally on it. If the fall be believed (and what more unblushing incredulity than to doubt it?), what joy to look onward to the glory of the Lord below as well as above! He is the Heir, as He was Creator, of all things; and were the least and lowest of His creatures excepted from the beneficent reach of His power, so far should He be defrauded of what is due to His name, and to His reconciliation which has no limit. Those only must be banished from the presence of His glory who persistently reject Him, yet even so they shall bitterly and for ever bemoan their rebellious folly. For "in virtue of the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of [beings] heavenly and earthly and infernal, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to God the Father's glory" (Phil. 2:10, 11).

21 The ancient versions do not express the final, which the Authorised Version treats as a suffix, and renders "for them." Some refer this to the noxious animals before named others to the judgements threatened, as others again to the returning exiles Many moderns agree with the ancients.

Section 4: Isaiah 36 - 39

Isaiah 36

Isa. 36-39 form the next portion, the historical episode which severs the earlier half of the prophecy from its latter half. They are of importance not only for the weighty facts they present (for this is sufficiently done and in a twofold point of view in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles), but for their connection with the great sections of the Book of Isaiah. No doubt the incidents had their value, and so also the record of them, as the most conspicuous seal which could then be affixed on the prophet’s character; for the danger was extreme, the distress of the people intense, the antecedents of the king in opposition to the Assyrian by no means reassuring, the confidence of the enemy boundless. Yet was the word of Isaiah distinct, and soon most punctually verified.

But there are deeper grounds for the introduction of this historical matter into the midst of the prophecy. It was of moment that the believer should have the inspired and therefore sure means of discriminating between the part which was then accomplished and the part which yet awaits its fulfilment. The believer readily sees that the Shalmanesers and the Sennacheribs of the past have not exhausted the terms and scope of the prophecy; we can understand that enough has been done to form an adequate type, an historical basis, for that which is to come, and to make good every word that proceeds from Jehovah. Any mind can judge that the overthrow of the Assyrian — as the precursor of Babylon’s supremacy, of the captivity of Judah, and of the long times of the

Gentiles — widely differs from the final judgement of the final foe, when Babylon in its last phase is itself destroyed, and the times of the Gentiles close in the glory of Jerusalem and Israel under the true David, the Beloved, their King, and the new covenant in the pleasant land.

No king since the days of David had shown such trust in Jehovah as Hezekiah. But his faith was much tried. With alacrity of heart he had made Jehovah his object from the day he ascended the throne. “He in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of Jehovah and repaired them” (2 Chr. 29:3). He inspired the Levites and priests with somewhat of his own desire to renounce long indifference for loyalty to Jehovah. “Now they began on the first [day] of the first month to sanctify, and on the eighth day of the month came they to the porch of Jehovah: so they sanctified the house of Jehovah in eight days, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they made an end.” The vessels which were cast away in king Ahaz’s reign were once more prepared. “The king rose early and gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of Jehovah.” Atonement was made for all Israel; “for the king commanded that the burnt-offering and the sin-offering [should be made] for all Israel.” What governed all was “the commandment of Jehovah by His prophets.” He was the first king, since the rent of Ephraim under Rehoboam, whose heart sought that all Israel should come to the house of Jehovah at Jerusalem to keep the Passover to Jehovah, the God of Israel. Godly predecessors felt it too little if they thought of it, they certainly did nothing toward it ungodly predecessors would have desired nothing less, however much they

would have seen all Israel re-united under their own sceptre. Hezekiah clave to Jehovah and sought for all Israel the same blessing. Though his overtures were laughed to scorn and mocked by most, “divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. Also in Judah the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes, by the word of Jehovah.” The old altars to their false gods, at any rate unhallowed and unauthorised altars, were taken away and cast into the brook Kidron, the images were broken, the Asherahs were cut down, the high places disappeared. The due honour of the house and servants and service of Jehovah was provided for as written in His law. “And in every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God, and in the law and in the commandments, to seek his God, he ‘did it with all his heart, and prospered. “

“After these things and their faithfulness, Sennacherib king of Assyria entered into Judah, and encamped against the fortified cities, and thought to break into them” (2 Chr. 32:1). Was it not strange? A great work had been wrought in restoring the defaced lineaments of the worship of the true God throughout Judah: yet this was no sooner done, than the enemy came to swallow them up! Those who judged not by scripture but by providence would at once be stumbled: was it not plain that Hezekiah had done wrong in rejecting the traditions of his fathers? Was not, God now chastening him and them for his rash reformation? Had he not lifted up his sacrilegious hand to destroy the brazen serpent that Moses made, treating with contempt as a piece of brass the venerable sign of divine grace to their perishing fathers in the desert, to which the children of Israel had

till his days burned incense? Was the Assyrian a judgement?

Moreover the pious king did what he could to fortify himself, sent the lowliest message to the proud Assyrian, gave him all the silver in Jehovah's house, and stripped off for him the gold from its doors and pillars; but in vain. There was little of the simplicity, strength, or wisdom of faith in all this: no wonder that the blessing of God was not with him there, and that the enemy was emboldened to ask all. Rabshakeh is sent from Lachish to insult king Hezekiah, to blaspheme the God of Israel, and seduce the people to surrender at discretion to his master. Along with insolent, deceitful, and profane reproach of all kinds like this, truth is mingled; for there were those (not Hezekiah) who did look to Egypt for help. But the aim of all was to reduce the Jews to despair, and to accomplish the designs of Assyria. Hence the very piety of the king, his zeal for Jehovah in throwing down the altars of false gods, is cunningly perverted into a charge of robbing Jehovah of His honour, from Whom (he pretended) his master had received his charge to come up against Hezekiah. Thus the enemy knows how to give a religious gloss to his own wicked devices as easily as he can blacken the most faithful of God's servants. What a mercy to have the unerring standard of His word to test and be tested by!

Thus the account stands in the prophecy. "And it came to pass in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah [that] Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah, and took them. And the king of Assyria sent Rab-shakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem. to king Hezekiah with a strong force. And he stood by the aqueduct of the upper pool, on the highway of the

fuller's field" (vv. 1, 2). There it was where Ahaz despised the gracious word of Jehovah through Isaiah some thirty years before; there now the Assyrian rudely insulted Jehovah and the king.

"Then came forth to him Eliakim the son of Hilkijah, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe (or, secretary), and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder. And Rab-shakeh said to them, Say now to Hezekiah, Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence [is] this wherein thou trustest? I say [sayest thou], Counsel and strength for the war [are but] a word of the lips. Now on whom trustest thou that hast revolted against me? Behold, thou trustest on the staff of that broken reed, on Egypt, on which if a man lean it will go into his hand and pierce it: so [is] Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to all that trust in him. But if thou say to me, We trust in Jehovah our God: [is it] not he whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath removed, saying to Judah and Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar? And now, I pray thee, engage with my master, the king of Assyria, and I will give thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them. How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants? And thou trustest in Egypt for horses and chariots! And am I now come up without Jehovah against this land to destroy it? Jehovah said to me, Go up against this land and destroy it.

"And Eliakim and Shebna and Joah said to Rab-shakeh, Speak, we pray thee, to thy servants in Syriac (or, Aramean), for we understand [it]; and speak not to us in the Jewish [language] in the ears of the people that [are] on the wall. And Rab-shakeh said, [Is it] to thy master and to thee that my master sent me to speak these

words? [Is it] not to the men that sit on the wall, to eat their own dung and drink their own urine with you? And Rab-shakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in the Jewish [language] and said, Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria. Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you, for he shall not be able to deliver you; neither let Hezekiah make you trust in Jehovah, saying, Jehovah will certainly deliver us: this city shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. Hearken not to Hezekiah; for thus saith the king of Assyria, Make peace (lit. blessing) with me, and come out to me; and eat ye every one of his vine, and every one of his fig-tree, and drink ye every one of his cistern (or, well); until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards. Let not Hezekiah persuade you, saying, Jehovah will deliver us. Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where [are] the gods of Hamath and of Arpad? Where [are] the gods of Sepharvaim? And have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who [are they] among all the gods of these countries, that have delivered their country out of my hand, that Jehovah should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand? And they were silent and answered him not a word; for the king's command was, saying, Answer him not.

"And Eliakim the son of Hilkijah, who [was] over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder, came to Hezekiah with clothes rent, and told him the words of Rab-shakeh" (vv. 3-22).

The entreaties of Eliakim and others that Aramean should be spoken rather than the Jewish tongue only drew out further and audacious insolence; for Rab-

shakeh stood and cried in their own tongue to the people on the walls, warning them against their king and commending to them the hard terms of deportation to the east, in the face of the overthrow of the nations already broken by the Assyrian. Little did the blasphemer think that there listened to his taunting demand whether Jehovah should deliver Jerusalem, not Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah only, nor the men on the wall also, but Jehovah Himself. It was now His affair; and then at length begins to shine once more the faith of Hezekiah, whose commandment it was to answer him not.

Isaiah 37

His clothes rent, the king covered in sackcloth repairs to the house of Jehovah, and enquires of the prophet, who returns Jehovah's answer that they were not to fear the words of blasphemy; for Jehovah would undertake the matter and send back the Assyrian to perish in his own land. "And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard [it], that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of Jehovah. And he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz. And they said to him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day [is] a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of contumely (or, rejection): for the children are come to the birth, and [there is] not strength to bring forth. It may be Jehovah thy God will hear the words of Rab-shakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God, and will rebuke the words which Jehovah thy God hath heard. Therefore lift up [thy] prayer for the

remnant that is left. And the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah. And Isaiah said to them, Thus shall ye say to your master, Thus saith Jehovah, Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will put a spirit into him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land" (vv. 1-7).

Still confident, Sennacherib from Libnah sends a letter of similar import to Hezekiah, who spreads it before Jehovah with earnest prayer for His intervention. "And Rab-shakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah: for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish. And he heard say concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, He is come out to fight against thee. And when he heard [it], he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly; and shalt thou be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them, which my fathers have destroyed, Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden that [were] in Thelassar? Where [is] the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivvah? And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up into the house of Jehovah, and spread it before Jehovah. And Hezekiah prayed unto Jehovah saying, Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, that sittest [upon] the cherubim, thou [art] He, even thou alone, the God of

all the kingdoms of the earth, thou hast made heaven and earth. Incline thine ear, Jehovah, and hear; open thine eyes, Jehovah, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, who hath sent to reproach the living God. Of a truth, Jehovah, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the countries and their land, and have cast their gods into the fire; for they [were] no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone; and they have destroyed them. Now therefore, Jehovah our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art Jehovah, thou only" (vv. 8-20).

Isaiah again returns the answer of the only living God. "And Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith Jehovah the God of Israel, Whereas thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria, this [is] the word which Jehovah hath spoken against him. The virgin-daughter of Zion hath despised thee, [and] laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted the voice? Against the Holy One of Israel hast thou lifted up thine eyes on high. By thy servants hast thou reproached the Lord, and hast said, With the multitude of my chariots am I come up to the height of the mountains, to the recesses of Lebanon; and I will cut down its tall cedars, its choice cypresses: and I will enter into the height of its border, the forest of its fruitful field. I have digged, and drunk water; and with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of Matsor" (or, Egypt) (vv. 21-25).

Insult as he might, himself or his servants, the great king, the Assyrian, must learn that God knew all about him, making him but the instrument of His own dealing

with the nations. This work done, he must go back humbled and smitten, for he had exceeded his commission; and would God sanction his rage against Himself? “Hast thou not heard long ago I have done it, how of ancient days I purposed it? Now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest waste fortified cities [to] ruinous heaps. And their inhabitants [were] powerless, they were dismayed and put to shame; they were [as] the grass of the field, the green herb, the grass on the housetops, and [corn] blighted before it be grown up. But I know thy sitting down, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy raging against me. Because thy raging against me and thine arrogance is come up into mine ears, I will put my ring in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will make thee go-back by the way by which thou camest” (vv.26-29). After a sign of coming to Judah (vv. 30-32), Jehovah pronounces His decree (vv. 33-35). “And this [shall be] the sign unto thee; ye shall eat this year that which groweth of itself, and in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruit thereof. And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and out of mount Zion they that shall escape; the zeal of Jehovah of hosts shall perform this. Therefore thus saith Jehovah concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come unto this city, nor shoot an arrow there, neither shall he come before it with shield, nor cast a mount against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and he shall not come unto this city, saith Jehovah. For I will defend this city to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake. And the angel of Jehovah went forth, and smote in the camp

of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when men arose early in the morning, behold, they [were] all dead corpses. And Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat (or, Armenia): and Esar-haddon his son reigned in his stead" (vv. 30-38).

The total fall of the haughty Assyrian's kingdom followed a few years after. Those that walk in pride God is able to abase. How blessed to hear His voice and know His love! Real as it was however, it was no more than a shadow of the great chief of the eastern nations in the latter day; even as Judah's deliverance and blessedness under the son of David of that day was but the witness of a brighter era and a more enduring glory, when Jehovah shall exalt him that was low and abase the high one. "I will overturn, overturn, overturn: and it shall be no more, until he cometh whose right it [the diadem] is; and I will give it him" (Ezek. 21:27).

Isaiah 38

The history we have seen in the preceding chapters is but a testimony to the total destruction which awaits the final Assyrian as well as his hosts, in the latter day and upon the mountains of Israel. This will be the more striking because he will, first of all, be allowed to capture Jerusalem, and slay a portion of the men and treat with indignity some of their women. Jerusalem must pay the penalty of its sins. The Assyrian, or king of the north of Daniel, will then retire southwards for other

projects of ambition; and coming up again, when Jehovah meanwhile has owned His people Israel, he will be for ever put down and destroyed.

This being so, it is evident that the mention of these historical circumstances, and no other, in the midst of our prophecy, is a remarkable sign, not only that their character is typical, but also that God would make plain to His people how far the prophecies already given had been accomplished. They might thus be encouraged to take what was already verified as an earnest of what was to come in full delivering power and glory. Nothing since that day has in the slightest degree resembled these intimations of the prophets. The past Assyrian, after having lost an immense part of his army, returned to his own land, and there was killed by his sons. The future Assyrian, after a partial success, is to come up a second time, and there and then be overwhelmed. The difference is made particularly manifest by the introduction of the past history here; typical of yet greater things, as we know from direct prophecy in Isa. 28.-29, not to speak of other scriptures.

But now in chapter 38. we see another lesson: Hezekiah is sick, and apparently unto death. “In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith Jehovah, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live. Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto Jehovah, and said, Remember now, Jehovah, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done [that which is] good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept much” (vv. 1-3). The king in this shadows forth the spiritual work God will by-and-by accomplish in His people. For Israel is

destined in that day not only to furnish a grand external display of His power, but to experience a deep internal change — the great practical lesson of death and resurrection. This we learn not in our souls alone, but still more profoundly according to the full scope of grace and truth in our Lord Jesus Himself.

Hezekiah then is given up to die; but he humbles himself before Jehovah, Who sends word by the prophet that he was to live. And here we have exercise of spirit; at first, exceeding sorrow, not unmingled with fear, with regrets at leaving the land of the living, and a certain shrinking from God. “And the word of Jehovah came to Isaiah, saying, Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith Jehovah, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add to thy days fifteen years. And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria: and I will defend this city. And this [shall be] the sign unto thee from Jehovah that Jehovah will do this thing that he hath spoken: behold, I will cause the shadow on the steps, which is gone down with the sun on the dial (or, steps) of Ahaz, to return ten steps backward. So the sun returned on the dial ten steps whereby it was gone down” (vv. 4-8).

Is it possible that any professing to know and teach the truth do not perceive that this is not life and incorruption brought to light by the gospel — not what we should look for in a Christian now, though Hezekiah was as truly a saint of God as any Christian? The working of the Holy Spirit in a godly Jew was necessarily modified in both depth and height for the Christian because of accomplished redemption. When believers, Jews or Gentiles after the flesh, are brought to the knowledge of Christ now, they are entitled to the same

high privileges. If they see or enjoy them not, it is because the flesh is not judged; they are merely following in this respect their own thoughts, instead of entering into the new revelations of God founded on a dead, risen, and ascended Christ, made known by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. The natural thought and hope converted Jew then was to live long upon the earth. not say “to depart and be with Christ is far better.” the land of the living he desired to praise Jah, as he living, the living shall praise thee.”

Israelites looked not within the veil; they saw not the Forerunner for them entered in. No such precious sight was revealed to their faith, though they did most truly expect, by God’s teaching, a coming Messiah to deliver and bless them. But they could not yet know death vanquished, nor raise the song of resurrection, nor look on a known Saviour theirs through the opened heavens. Hezekiah goes through the sign of death; he was sentenced however to it, and shrank from it; earnestly pleading, he hears the sentence reprieved. This is the token of the spiritual work God will effect in Israel — not only deliverance from foes without but deliverance from the power of death working in them. But the millennial kingdom will not furnish to Israel or any other on earth, the faith or experience of the Christian, properly speaking nor will they be raised from the dead or changed to go through that reign, but after it for eternity. The valley of dry bones is merely the symbol of their resurrection from death, when they are as a nation caused once more to live, though doubtless there will be a real spiritual work within. But still theirs will be a very different thing from our portion either now or when we are caught up to meet the Lord.

“The writing of Hezekiah, king of Judah, when he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness. I said, In the still noon (or, cutting off) of my days I shall go to the gates of Sheol I am deprived of the residue of my years. I said, I shall not see Jah, Jah in the land of the living. I shall not behold man longer with the inhabitants of the world Mine age (or, dwelling) is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd’s tent. I have rolled off like a weaver my life; from the thrum he cutteth me off; from day to night wilt thou make an end of me. I kept still till morning: as a lion he breaketh all my bones; from day to night he will make an end of me. Like a swallow, a crane, so did I chatter; I mourned as a dove; mine eyes failed [with looking] upward. Jehovah, I am oppressed: undertake for me. What shall I say? He hath both spoken to me, and himself hath done [it]: I shall go softly all my years for the bitterness of my soul. Lord, by these things [men] live, and wholly in them [is] the life of my spirit; and thou recoverest me and makest me to live Behold, for peace I had bitterness on bitterness; but thou hast in love delivered my soul from the pit of destruction, for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. For Sheol doth not praise thee, [nor] death celebrate thee; they that go down into the pit do not hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I this day; the father to the children shall make known thy truth. Jehovah — to save me! My song too we will sing to stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of Jehovah” (vv. 9-20).

Death was to him the most painful prospect. What can more pointedly differ from this than the triumphant language of 2 Cor. 5:1-8 for instance? There the apostle says, “In this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed

upon." "We are always confident, willing rather to be absent from the body [the very thing good Hezekiah was not] and to be present with the Lord." Living here "we are absent from the Lord." You, no doubt, find the king turning his face to the wall; but who could imagine such a thing of dying Stephen? If a Christian were in the spirit beholding Christ, it could not be so. It is not for any of us to say what chastening might fall on self-confidence, on negligence of walk, or anything else unjudged: God might smite the pride of heart which looked down upon a person thus tried. In Old Testament times there could not be the rest and peace and joy of heart created by the revelation of Christ's work and glorified person.

In Hezekiah's case God made him, as thus manifesting the feelings of a godly Jew, to be the sign of the quickening of the Jews, who will by-and-by go, as a nation, through a spiritual process which is likened to death and resurrection. In the future however, one gathers from other scriptures that their outward and inward deliverances will be in the inverse order of that which appears in the history given here. The quickening of at least the remnant will precede their external triumph. Ere the antitypical Babylon has been smitten, the Jew will go through no small spiritual sifting with God, and then the mighty outward deliverance will follow when the last Assyrian is broken and disappears. Thus distinctly is the future marked off from that which has been already accomplished. God will work in them first, and then display His power in their behalf. He gives us now in Christ that in which we shall be displayed at His appearing. Thus we know death and resurrection, because we are taught everything in

Christ. Therefore, the apostle asks, having died with Christ, “why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?” (Col. 2:20). They will be like men living in the world; and so they will have their splendid temple, and their venerable priesthood, and their impressive ordinances, “Touch not, taste not, handle not.” The seventh or sabbath day will be resumed. In the millennium it will not be the Lord’s day but the sabbath-day. God will renew His sabbaths, instead of continuing the first day of the week, the Christian’s memorial of redemption. The sabbath-day occurs once more enforced beyond doubt, as we read in the prophecy of Ezekiel.

Thus God will have prepared His people Israel for their future glory, not by what we know now in the gospel, but by what we have seen represented by Hezekiah’s sickness. He prays that he may not be brought to the gates of hell. “I said, I shall not see Jah, Jah in the land of the living.” To see the Lord in the heavenly country among the glorified is far better than to see Him in the land of Israel. Our joy is that we are to be with Him in heavenly blessing, as we know ourselves in Him in heavenly places even now. Such thoughts never entered the king’s mind. He desired as a Jew that his life might be prolonged to see Jah in the land of the living. So Israel will see Him in the land of the living, and be themselves brought under the shadow of His wing, spite of all their mighty foes. The pure in heart shall see God. We shall be with the Saviour and see Him as He is (not as He was, but as He is), and be with Himself above in the Father’s house, in the presence of God.

But here, on the contrary, the king mourns over his failing strength. “Mine age is departed.” “He will cut me

off as from a [weaver's] thrum." "As a lion, He breaketh all my bones." He repines at God's will, not having a dead and risen Christ to interpret all by. He views death in itself, or its bearing on himself here. How deeply even saints needed a revealed Saviour and a known redemption! "Like a swallow, a crane, so did I chatter.... What shall I say? He hath both spoken to me, and himself hath done [it]." Now light begins to dawn somewhat more. He has asked Jehovah to undertake for him: "He hath both spoken to me," etc. He began to appreciate better the blessed truth that it is not what we say to Jehovah which is the great matter, but what Jehovah says to us, and, more than that, what Jehovah does for us. "I shall go softly all my years." All this trial was just the needed discipline, and good for him. "And thou recoverest me." He anticipates his sure deliverance, as Israel will know "in that day," and surely be brought out of their distresses.

However blessed it all may be, as showing us the working of God in the heart of a real saint of old and the type of the future ways of God to be made good in the hearts of the Jewish remnant, need I repeat that God does not give this as the full standard we ought to apply now? It is a serious thing, this misappropriation of scripture, through attempting to lump together all its testimonies, old and new, as if all must be about one and the same object. Thus what is of earth for the Jew is jumbled up with what is of heaven for the Christian: the result is a mere waste of uncertainty. Of course the Spirit of God never allows the real children of God to suffer all the consequences of their folly. There is a merciful preservative from going through with their mistakes. But still the loss is great indeed. How much

we have to desire, that we may be enabled to feel, serve, walk, and worship as Christians entering into all the will of Jehovah concerning us, not foolish but as wise! All depends on a better knowledge of Christ, for this is the only sure and holy way for every need.

God's will as regards His people on the earth depends on His counsels and ways at any given time in His Son. Where is Christ now? He is at the right hand of God, cast out of the earth, as He said, "I go to My Father." That is, He has total rejection here but all glory there, as may be seen in John 13.-17. He is thus separated to heaven, as He says, "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth" (John 17:19). Not of course that there ever was anything impure in or of Him: such a thought of Christ would be blasphemy. It was taking a separate place from the earth, setting Himself apart from all here below as the heavenly Model-man, so to speak. This is the key to Christianity. It is the power of the Holy Ghost working in the hearts of God's children upon earth and forming them after the fashion of Christ in heaven, on the basis of His death and resurrection, which has justified them by faith. Thus it necessarily supposes Christ's cross, resurrection, and ascension, and that we know ourselves in Him there (John 14:20). We become heavenly because related to Him there. "As is the Heavenly, such are they also who are heavenly."

When Christ comes in glory by-and-by, and takes the earth under His government, and in the truest sense fills the throne of Jehovah over it, the saints here below (not those risen and glorified) will be earthly. They will be born anew; but it will be for the earthly things of the kingdom of God. So the Lord says, "If I have told you

earthly things…" (John 3:12). There is the earthly department of His kingdom no less than the heavenly. To confound them, or the scriptures that relate to them, is to ruin the distinctness of revealed truth, and to sink into half-Jews, half-Christians. The new age, or dispensation, will accordingly, as far as earth is concerned, be the forming man here below according to the character in which Christ is then displayed and will deal. It will be no longer the Spirit making us heavenly, because of uniting us to the Head on high. Christ will then govern the earth and its inhabitants as King, instead of gathering believers out from the world into one as His body. This may serve to show what a wonderful place is ours: in the midst of all the ruin of the outward framework of Christendom there is one body and one Spirit, even as also we were called in one hope of our calling.

"Now Isaiah had said, Let them take a cake of figs, and lay it for a plaister upon the boil, and he shall recover. Hezekiah also had said, What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of Jehovah?" (vv. 21, 22).

If this addition seems trivial or spurious to the natural mind, it was not to the inspiring Spirit. God shows His interest in His own, whatever their infirmity, and explains the means employed, and why the sign was given. To unbelief such a detail has no value; for literary criticism knows as little of divine love or of the soul's need, as man's philosophy.

Isaiah 39

This chapter, it would seem, owes its place here chiefly as a basis for the very weighty place which Babylon (whither Judah was going into captivity) holds in the

controversy which Jehovah had with His people. Hezekiah had not walked softly, when the ambassadors of Merodach-baladan came to congratulate him, but had sunk to their level. Wherefore Jehovah sent the threat of sure judgement. All that David's son in his vanity had spread before the eyes of the strangers should be swept into the city of confusion, the chastiser of Jerusalem's idolatry; only it should not fall in the days of the pious king, notwithstanding his failure.

"At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent a letter and a present to Hezekiah; for he heard that he had been sick, and was recovered. And Hezekiah was glad of them, and showed them the house of his precious things, the silver and the gold and the spices and the precious oil, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not. Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? And from whence came they to thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country to me, from Babylon. Then said he, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All that [is] in my house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them. Then said Isaiah to Hezekiah, Hear the word of Jehovah of hosts. Behold, days come, when all that [is] in thy house, and [that] which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith Jehovah. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, whom thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good [is] the word of

Jehovah which thou hast spoken. And he said, For there shall be peace and truth in my days" (vv. 1-8).

The chapter is of special interest as the first plain indication in later times of a power destined to overthrow the mighty kingdom of Assyria, to be then set up by the God of heaven, after the conquest of Jerusalem, in the imperial seat of the world as thenceforward an unrivalled king of kings. It was as yet the struggle of a province to be independent. This very man, whose name has been recognised in the Assyrian inscriptions, as well as in a fragment of Polyhistor (Euseb. Chron. Can. i. v. 1), and in Ptolemy's Canon, "sustained two contests with the power of Assyria, was twice defeated, and twice compelled to fly his country. His sons, supported by the king of Elam or Susiana, continued the struggle, and are found among the adversaries of Esar-Haddon, Sennacherib's son and successor. His grandsons contend against Asshurbani-pal, the son of Esar-Haddon. It is not till the fourth generation that the family seems to become extinct; and the Babylonians, having no champion to maintain their cause, contentedly acquiesce in the yoke of the stranger" (Canon Rawlinson in Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, ii. 332).

This outline by a competent hand may serve to show what an enormous gap of circumstances yet more than of time severed the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar from him who sent his envoys to Hezekiah, still more from that Babylon whose downfall from the haughtiest seat on earth was announced long before by Isaiah in two of his most remarkable "burdens" (Isa. 13 - 14 and Isa. 21). But all was proved the more to be before God, Who deigned to disclose the end from the beginning. On

every ground Hezekiah should have known better; whereas he forgot even the lessons of his sickness, as well as of God's dealing with Sennacherib's hosts, indulged in the things of men, and sunk to the level of a worldly politician. But at least the solemn rebuke of Jehovah through Isaiah recalled him humbly to accept the divine word with his wonted piety and thanksgiving, of which rationalism has no experience, and so with evil eye sees nothing but despicable egotism in a soul that judged self and bowed to God.

Reviewing the parenthetic history of Isa. 36-39 the believer can but acknowledge the divine wisdom of their place between the first great division of the prophecy and the last. None could be so suited to the work of introducing them at this point than the inspired waiter of the entire book. Although strictly historical, they are very much more, for they are instinct with prophecy, and, on the judicial check given to Assyria, prepare for the prominence given ere long to Babylon, little as this was then expected, as the agent for sweeping Judah and the house of David into captivity. But they adumbrate also the Son of David and David's Lord, Who, instead of being sick and healed would go down, for God's glory and in His grace beyond all thought of man, Into death most real as an offering for sin, yet rise again and make good an everlasting covenant for the blessing of Israel and all the earth, when kings shall stop their mouths at Him, once marred more than any, then exalted and high exceedingly Striking it is to read in Isa. 35:4, "Behold, your God! vengeance cometh" (which in no way characterises the gospel but the future kingdom fully), "the recompense of God. He will come himself and save you"; and in Isa. 40:9, 10, "Behold your God! Behold, the

Lord Jehovah will come with might, and his arm shall rule for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.” The same Spirit, the same hand wrote both passages.

Section 5: Isaiah 40 - 48

Isaiah 40

A sensibly different portion of the prophecy now opens on us, forming what may be called Isaiah's second volume. No longer is the overthrow of kings and peoples in the foreground; nor are we occupied as before with the various Gentile enemies that long beset and troubled Israel. Hence, most appropriately introducing it, stands a touching controversy between God and His own people. We are evidently not looking here on God's dealings without; we enter within. His judgement begins as ever at the house of God: and more closely and thoroughly than the same process in the preface of our prophecy (Isa. 1). More was wanted than ways and judgements in providence. There are moral wants and spiritual wrongs which must be taken up, if the people are to be blessed according to God; and what makes the distinction so much the more striking is the fact that we shall find Babylon again in a totally different aspect from that which had been seen as yet, not so much in her aspect of worldly magnificence and power, but in her sad notoriety as the source and bulwark of idolatry on earth. Evidently this accords with God's pleading with His people, and His distinct unfolding of the chastening that He caused to light upon them because of their idolatry and even worse spiritual sins, as we shall see. Thus not political but spiritual wickedness is here before us; into which they had been drawn by the enemy to set them into opposition to God Himself.

This great change gives rise to an altogether different character of revelation and even style of address.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people,” graciously lets us see the end of all. In the beginning of the book the Spirit of God appealed to Israel as the people then were, attesting God’s judgement of their wickedness and the introduction of the glory of Jehovah. Here too the same Israel were guilty, and the divine glory is surely to be established in judgement; but before we behold the full distressing picture of what they really were in His eyes, He begins with unfailing words of comfort. Thus the heart of every saint would be strengthened at the very outset with the assurance that they were the object of divine mercy, and so too all the better would they bear to hear what Jehovah must tell them of their grievous faults, which could not but be in themselves fatal.

The chapter before formed a kind of link with what follows; for there we have the prediction of their deportation to Babylon; which, as has been often remarked, holds a peculiar place. Babylon, being the beginning of the great image of Daniel, becomes also the type of the last representative of imperial power. The head of gold received supremacy from God in a more direct form than any of the other powers, which were only successors in the line. The grant of imperial power was immediate from the God of heaven to Nebuchadnezzar, who thus typified in a certain sense the image from first to last. More particularly the fall of Babylon prefigured the overthrow of the world-power in the earth which rose on Judah’s ruin, now Lo-ammi; the final judgement of that system of universal supremacy then begun, and, if not still going on, only suspended. For the image-power has not yet been struck by the little Stone (Dan. 2:34), and is awaiting its reorganisation before it is dissolved for ever. Its components are at

present in a broken state; but by-and-by they will again coalesce with an appearance of amazing and renewed strength, which its last head will use directly to oppose the Lord of lords and King of kings. This Rev. 17. clearly shows us; for the judgement of Babylon and of the Beast as there set forth is not yet accomplished. The old Roman Empire, destroyed by the Gothic races, could not be fairly represented by the Beast with seven heads and ten horns, any more than the pagan city answers truly to the harlot drunk with the blood of the saints. What filled the seer with great wonder was the mystery of what claimed to be Christ's bride seated on the Beast, the mother of the fornications and, yet more, of the abominations (or idols) of the earth, and guilty withal of such sanguinary persecution of Christ's followers.

Babylon has thus a special place as being the power of all others that was allowed to enslave Jerusalem and the house of David from whom the Deliverer of Israel was to spring. Now we know that the Son of David is actually come, that He was presented to Israel and rejected by them, that He suffered death on the cross and is gone up to heaven, where He has taken His place, not as Son of David, but as the rejected Son of man Who is the Son of God. The Lord Jesus is there the great High Priest of God as well as Head of the church, seated at the right hand of God, where and whence He acts in power and love, sending down whatever is needful for the good of the saints and for winning sinners by the testimony of God's grace here below. This is what Christ is now doing, not yet fulfilling the prophecies concerning the Son of David as such, nor yet as the King of the nations.

Hence anyone who in a serious inquiry takes up the Old Testament to find the full and clear announcement of

what occupies Christ now must, either give up these prophecies as dark and unintelligible, or he must put a false gloss and violent strain on them to eke out such an application as their full scope. In truth they refer to the future, not to the present; and to Israel, God's earthly people, not to the heavenly church, save in certain general principles or special allusions to the Gentile parenthesis, which the provident wisdom of the Holy Ghost took care to furnish in order to confound God's adversaries. Then there are displays of God in moral ways from which (though about Israel rather than ourselves) we can and ought to extract for our own souls that which is most helpful and cheering. For God is good and full of tender mercy to Israel; and He is surely not less full of grace to us. If He is love to the people He will govern, can He love less the children He now adopts to Himself by Jesus Christ? There are no doubt great differences between the saints He calls now, and those who are to be blessed in the age to come. Now it is His church, Christ's body, the children He is bringing into the place of heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. Israel will inherit the promise made to the fathers; but we, if Christ's now, are heirs with the Firstborn, sons not merely of "the fathers," but of God the Father.

When we thus examine the prophecies, not biased with the foregone conclusion of finding ourselves in them, but free to understand the words as they are written, and simply accepting the intended objects God here speaks of, nothing can be clearer or more certain. Here for instance He calls to comfort His people. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her time of toil (or, suffering) is accomplished, that her iniquity is

pardoned; that she hath received of Jehovah's hand double for all her sins" (vv. 1, 2). The ground He puts it on is that the warfare of Israel is over. Jehovah now interposes. Bad as Jerusalem's sins were, she had, to His reckoning of love, suffered double what her sins deserved in His government. He is not looking at the sins of Jerusalem apart from Christ, but as it were through Him. If there were no suffering Messiah connected with Jerusalem, nothing would remain but the judgement of her sins to her everlasting shame and ruin. But God always looks at Christ on her behalf, and can thus say, "Comfort ye, comfort ye." After disowning Israel as not His people, Lo-ammi, which holds good through the times of the Gentiles not yet expired, He will acknowledge them once more and for ever under Messiah and the new covenant.

Next we have the manner or moral principle in which the comfort will be brought home to them. This furnishes a grave and interesting insight into God's ways. "The voice of one that crieth in the wilderness." The allusion is evident to John the Baptist, who was "sent from God" to bear witness of the True Light and prepare a way for the Messiah. In the midst of his testimony he was slain. Messiah too came, and in the midst of His testimony He was slain. Master and servant, they were both cut off by wicked hands. Thus God's work was, as far as man could see, nipped in the bud; and hence the world is yet in mis-rule and confusion, in sin and misery. When God really fulfils for the earth what He has at heart, there will be the manifest power of ordered blessing to His glory.

But look up, not down, and read in the risen and glorified Christ the proof to faith that the cross, the very

thing that seemed the total ruin of all the counsels of God, is in truth their solid basis and justification, by which He is and will be for ever glorified. The cross of the Lord Jesus is the triumph of grace, as the resurrection and ascension are its righteous answer; but it is a triumph known only to faith. The world sees not heaven opened nor Him glorified there; it saw in the cross One Who suffered to death. In the Acts of the Apostles man's rejection of Christ is constantly contrasted with God's raising Him from the dead. There we see that man and God are in complete opposition. The cross is thus looked at in the light not of God's purposes, but of man's wickedness. In the Epistles the truth chiefly insisted on is the cross, not so much as the extreme point of all man has done against God, but as the deepest exercise of the grace that God feels towards guilty man. Not that love was created by the cross; it was in God before the coming of Christ, and because of it He sent His Son. The propitiation is the fruit of God's grace, not its cause. Propitiation vindicates it, judging and putting aside all the sin on man's part, which otherwise would have proved an insurmountable barrier. But the love was on God's part from everlasting. We must bear this in mind in looking at propitiation, which indeed is the strongest possible proof of His love, while it equally proves His holiness and the necessary judgement of our sins.

John's testimony was a call to repentance in view of Messiah's advent; his baptism therefore was a confession both of sins and of Him, Who should come after himself. it was "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of Jehovah, make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (v. 3). It

was not the person nor the work of Israel's hope in power. For Israel as a whole was blind and deaf; the testimony was interrupted, the Messiah refused. There was therefore but a partial application, the people's unbelief thus intercepting and breaking off the thread of God's ways, while His counsels abide irrefragable and accomplished, through their unbelief, in the cross as they never else could have been. The way of Jehovah was not yet prepared, nor was there a straight highway in the desert for God. Man was put on his responsibility and heard the cry only to sin the more; but by-and-by God will make all good in grace by His own power. Then "Every valley shall be exalted; and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed, and all flesh (not Israel only) shall see [it] together; for the mouth of Jehovah hath spoken" (vv. 4, 5).

Thus plainly we have, as far as its scope goes, the sure purpose of God. Every difficulty, depths, heights, rough or crooked, all must disappear: for God yet means to make this earth the scene of His glory. A most blessed prospect it is, that the sin, misery, and weakness of man, the groaning of all creation around, the wiles and power and presence of Satan must vanish and give place, not to the revealed grace of God in Christ, which has shone (we know) in the despised Nazarene, but to the revealed glory of Jehovah, when all flesh shall see it together. It cannot refer to the day of the judgement of the dead, because then it will not be "all flesh" nor any flesh whatever, but the dead raised before the great white throne. But here it is a question of man living in his natural body on the earth. The Jew was apt to overlook

the judgement of the dead at the end of all dispensations; the Gentile is just as negligent as to the judgement of the quick, though it be confessed in the commonest symbols of Christendom. As infidelity increases, the rejection of this truth is perhaps more complete now than it has ever been since the gospel was preached to the Gentiles.

In the dark ages people at least believed enough to be panic-struck from time to time, but now Christians are accounted fanatics if they testify of these coming judgements. But none the less will God cut short the course of this world, and the glory of Jehovah will be revealed, so that all flesh shall see it together. This John the Baptist had to announce: only the first word committed to him, and already accomplished in its measure, was the preparation of the way of Jehovah. Hence it appears that the third verse does not refer solely to the mighty changes of the new age, but includes also such a moral preparation as befitted the coming of the Lord in humiliation. Thus, for the time, it went no farther than God's working in the hearts of a remnant, whose souls were made to be in a measure prepared for the Messiah. We know that such was the fact. See John's disciples leaving him to follow Jesus, and John delighting in it. "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:29, 30). Hence says our Lord in Matt. 11:14, "If ye will receive it, this is Elias that was for to come," clearly showing that to faith John the Baptist was Elias (compare Mark 9:11-13); but, as a matter of fact, the full predicted circumstances are postponed till the great day that is coming (compare Mal. 4:5, 6). Thus he is to come, not before the Lord takes up the church, with which he has nothing to do, but before the proper

blessing of Israel, with whom he has a close connection. John the Baptist went before Jehovah-Jesus in the spirit and power of Elias but Elias himself publicly vindicated the true God in opposition to the apostasy of Israel and in the discomfiture of the priests of Baal. He will return by-and-by, and resume a work of the most solemn character before the great and terrible day of Jehovah. John the Baptist anticipated this in the way of preparing a remnant for receiving Him Who should and did and will come.

Next, "A voice saith, Cry. And he saith, What shall I cry?" Here follows the substance of John the Baptist's testimony, though it may be still more manifest in the end of this age "All flesh is grass"; it is man morally and universally. "And all the goodliness thereof [is] as the flower of the field" (v. 6). Could a man use this to think well of himself? Verse 7 cuts down all boasting — "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the Spirit (or, breath) of Jehovah bloweth upon it." Not its beauty but its frailty God refers to. The moment you have God testing its character, if it were only by the breath of His nostrils, all flesh comes to nothing; and this too in Israel, not in Gentiles only: "surely the people is grass." Nor is this all; He utters its sentence again and again. The reason for the first repetition seems to be the emphatic judgement of "the people," that is, the Jews. The second case is particularly connected with the resource for faith. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever" (v. 8).

Thus the reception of the Messiah and His reign over Israel by-and-by are conditioned by their repentance, a work wrought in their souls by the word of God applied by the Holy Spirit, as Nicodemus had to learn from our

Lord in John 3. So the Christian proves yet more profoundly under the gospel, and by faith receives eternal life in the Son of God. So must the Jew in due time for the future world-kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. These two truths are of no less importance at the present moment, as we know how Peter used them for the Christian Jews from the first. They will be urgently needed when God begins to work in the Jews once more, when they painfully learn, feel, and prove the utter worthlessness of man as he is in divine things. Even now the men of the world are making no small strides in material things; but they will yet do greater things. And the devil will mature and display his plans as they have never been witnessed in the world before. What then will be the security of faith? “The word of our God shall stand for ever.”

But as the church, the heavenly mystery of Christ (or rather part of it), really came into view when all hopes of the earth and man for the present (and always, as far as they are concerned) were buried in Christ’s grave, so we may well believe, as the end draws nearer, we do greatly need to rest with simplicity upon God’s word. We may, as only knowing in part, understand but little; but it is a poor feeling and unworthy to be called faith only to believe His word when understood. Not that it is not sweet and cheering when we consciously enter into any of its depths; but intelligence of the word is the gift of grace and product of faith, not the ground why one believes. God sends one His testimony, and the soul bows to it, setting to its seal that God is true. Am I a sinner without peace or even hope, or any real anxiety before God? That word comes and pronounces to my conscience that all flesh is grass. My soul is thus laid

bare. If I do not believe God, all my life and death will be just the proof of my folly and sin. But if I submit to the humbling yet gracious testimony of God, while proving its truth in what I am, I enter into the comfort and strength of His own word, and I too am made to stand through that same word. “The word of our God shall stand for ever.” Our experience follows, and confirms of course the truth of the word in breaking one down. Thus God’s word is the only standing-ground. Yet outwardly the word of God is just like the cross of Christ. There may well be difficulties to such as we are; and the word seems a weak thing to confide in for eternity; but, in truth, it is more stable than heaven and earth. So in 2 Tim. 3:16, 17 the apostle, anticipating the ruin of Christendom, casts the man of God on this unfailing resource.

But we turn in the next verse to the special earthly object of God’s affection — Zion. It is the symbol of the grace of God working in Israel, also the centre of the royal glory that is about to be revealed here below. “O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into a high mountain; O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold, your God! Behold, the Lord Jehovah will come with might, and his arm shall rule for him; behold, his reward [is] with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs with his arm, and carry [them] in his bosom; he will gently lead those that give suck” (vv. 9-11). As there can be no doubt, the person Who came of old and will come by-and-by is Christ; in a word, the same Jesus is not only Christ but Jehovah. He is here spoken of as the God of Israel,

Jehovah, Whose reward is with Him and His work before Him. First of all is His coming in power; next, with all tenderness of heart, as One taking compassion on them because of their defenceless and exposed condition.

But the verses from 12 let us know, when we come to inquire who is the great and loving Deliverer, that He turns out to be no such petty conqueror as Rabbis conceived and as the carnal desires of Israel craved so long and ardently; He is the Creator. How strange that such a height of glory should be unwelcome! Even then it was God's warning of His judgement on idolatry which is the first great question in this part of Isaiah's prophecy with Israel even more than the nations. His people would apostatise more and more from Jehovah and follow the Gentiles in their worship of idols. But before the Spirit of God deals with this iniquity, He first of all identifies the Messiah with God, and expatiates on what He is as the eternal, Almighty, and only wise, the Creator and Governor of all things, the Holy One, Jehovah of Israel.

This accordingly gives an occasion for a glorious description of the true God. "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out the heavens with [his] span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in a balance, and the hills in scales? Who hath directed the Spirit of Jehovah, and [as] his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and [who] made him understand, and instructed him in the path of judgement, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are counted as a drop from a bucket, and as the fine dust on the balance, behold, he taketh up the isles as an atom.

And Lebanon [is] not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All the nations [are] as nothing before him; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity" (vv. 12-17).

Then He challenges the folly of those that set up graven images as entitled to resemble or to represent Him. "To whom then will ye liken God? and what likeness will ye compare unto him? The workman casteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains. He that [is] impoverished so that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree [that] doth not rot; he seeketh unto him a skilled workman to prepare a graven image [that] shall not be moved. Do ye not know? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood the foundations of the earth? [It is] he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof [are] as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a veil (or curtain), and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: that bringeth the princes to nothing; that maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely are they sown, scarcely hath their stock taken root in the earth, but he also bloweth upon them, and they wither, and the whirlwind taketh them away as stubble. To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold. Who hath created these [things], bringing out their host by number? He calleth them all by name; by the greatness of his might, and strength of power, not one faileth" (vv. 18-26).

Lastly, Jehovah falls back on what He has been to His own from the beginning. "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from Jehovah, and my

judgement is passed over from my God? Dost thou not know, hast thou not heard, [that] the everlasting God, Jehovah, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? [There is] no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to [them that have] no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall stumble and fall; but they that wait upon Jehovah shall renew [their] strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint" (vv. 27-31). He cannot deny Himself, nor fail to strengthen the weakest that wait on Him. But the great public demonstration of His ways will be when His people at the consummation of the age are delivered from that evil heart of unbelief, which has been fatal to them hitherto in all their varied history, and has postponed the era of righteous happiness which yet awaits not Israel only but all the nations. Then shall the blessings prevail above the blessings of Jacob's progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills; they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of Him that was separate from His brethren: Jehovah, how long! Then will Judah own in deepest penitence his sin of blood-guiltiness, "the great transgression," against Him Who deigned to be his brother, and against a greater Father than his father. Benjamin will be joined to Joseph in a mightier sense, and the true Joseph make Himself known to His brethren by grace made true, and Israel be at length the Israel of God. The fame thereof will be heard throughout all the earth, and the long alienated and unworthy nations that knew not God will seek and rest in Him Who alone makes Himself known in deed and truth, Whose resting-place shall be glory.

Though a little out of its place, it seems but fair to say that while in the above translation the text of v. 9 has been rendered with the Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate, Grotius, both the Lowths, Gesenius, Rosenmüller, Leeser, and many otherwise differing scholars, that of the A.V. is supported by the Peschito, the Greek v.v. of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, as well as by Calvin, Vitringa, Ewald, Alexander, Stier, and many more of no small weight. According to these, Zion and Jerusalem are addressed as messengers of good tidings to the cities of Judah, instead of being the object of the message which is to be spread to others also.

It will be a blessed exchange, proved now in the soul of every one that believes the gospel, when Israel shall abandon confidence in self under law for the word of God which reveals His grace in Christ. They thus discover that flesh is but grass, and its goodliness no better than the flower of the field. He Who created the world is the same Jehovah, Israel's Saviour God, Who will make good in power and glory for His people what He once presented personally in humiliation and obedience, when alas! they in their pride and incredulity refused Him. None but the Framer and Governor of the universe could be adequate to such a result; and the nations that envied while they despised the Jews will judge all their folly in the day when their graven images shall be spurned for ever.

Isaiah 41

This chapter, if it be not a second part the preceding one being the first, is a most appropriate sequel. For Jehovah, having opened His counsels as to Jerusalem and its comfort (after, many vicissitudes and troubles) at

His coming in power and glory, turns now to the Gentiles, challenging them to meet Him in judgement. He had there been displayed in His shepherd care over Israel, in His might and wisdom over all, needing no counsellor, and the nations counted less than a cipher and vanity, so that comparison or image was futile, and Israel's unbelief was the more deplorable because of His special goodness to all amongst them who waited on Him. Now He says (v. 1), "Keep silence before me, islands, and let the peoples renew [their] strength: let them come near, then let them speak; let us draw near together to judgement."

Cyrus is meant though not yet named. It is no question of a past name of renown, but of a future deliverer, of whom God knew all: man and his idols could say nothing. Before the prescient eye of the prophet stands the mighty conqueror of Babylon. None but the true God, Who made him the instrument of His designs in providence, had anticipated his rise. Jehovah here describes him, but typically (in the manner of the prophetic Spirit) as the shadow of a greater than Cyrus, Who should for ever overturn the idols of the nations, judge their pride, and deliver the people of Israel from all their dispersions, as well as from the sins which brought them under wrath in the righteous ways of Jehovah. "Who raised up from the east him whom righteousness calleth to its foot? He gave the nations before him, and made [him] rule over kings; he gave [them] as dust to his sword, as driven stubble to his bow. He pursued them, he passed on safely, by a way he had not come with his feet. Who hath wrought and done [it], calling the generations from the beginning? I Jehovah, the first, and with the last; I [am] He" (vv. 2-4).

It is as vain to drag in the gospel of Christ here as in Isa. 40 to interpret Jacob and Israel of Christendom. Nor is the plea at all valid that the Jews will never more meddle with idols. Matt. 12:43; Matt. 24:15, not to speak of the Revelation, are clear evidence confirmatory of Isa. 65-66, and of other passages in the Old Testament, which prove that the end of the age will see a fatal revival of idolatry, the return of the unclean spirit (Matt. 12:43-45) with the full antichristian power of Satan, which will bring down the Assyrian scourge on the Jews and thereon also the Lord's coming in vengeance, when the indignation shall be accomplished, and Jehovah's anger, in the destruction of the foe. The last state of that generation which rejected Christ will then be characterized both by idol worship and the Antichrist; so that, on this score, there is no pretence for turning aside the expostulation, here addressed to the peoples, to the Gentiles that are now baptized, or for interpreting Jacob and Israel of Christendom as some have done who ought to have known better.

Again, it is absurd to say that the gospel could be foreshown by the first one raised up from the east; for, among the Jews, the east was always reckoned from Palestine, never Palestine itself. The Rabbinical idea (strange to say, espoused by Calvin, Hausschein, Piscator, Lowth the younger, Bengel, and stranger still, by the late Mr. Birks) was not so unreasonable: the allusion, they thought, was to Abraham, who was a righteous man called out of Mesopotamia. But this idea fails. For who could think that the patriarch's exceptional sally against the kings of the east who were returning after their successful raid into the valley of the Jordan, or the incidents of Pharaoh and Abimelech, duly

answer to the discomfiture of nations and subjugation of kings, making his sword as a column of dust and as the driven stubble his bow in resistless progress? Still less does verse 2 suit the testimony of Christ in the gospel.

The comparison of Isa. 45:1, 13, ought to convince any unbiased thoughtful mind that Cyrus is really in view, but of course ultimately the foreshadowed triumph when Christ comes in His kingdom, putting all enemies under His feet instead of gathering souls out of the world in one body for heaven, as He is now doing by the Holy Ghost's power through the gospel. (Compare also Ezra 1:1-3) If the Babylonish captivity of Judah was the divine chastening of their idolatry by means of the chief patron of idols on earth, the fall of Babylon was a tremendous blow on its own idolatry, predicted as this was by the Jewish prophet long before either event. These were among the reasons which made the first success and the final ruin of Babylon so important in scripture. They were bound up with God's ways in His people. And hence the answer to the infidel sneer touching the silence of prophecy respecting America. What has the discovery or growth of the New World in the far west to do with Israel? From the New Testament again all such matters are excluded, because the rejected Messiah involves not only the disappearance of Israel and the kingdoms of the earth from the foreground, but the calling of the church for glory in the heavenly places as the body and bride of Christ, at least until the corruption of Christendom becomes morally unbearable. For the age ends in the judgement of apostate Jews and Gentiles under the Beast and the false prophet, when Christ and His glorified saints appear from heaven, and the godly remnant of Jews here below will become a strong nation,

the earthly centre of His kingdom under the whole heaven.

Hence the suitability here of confronting in this very connection “Jehovah, the first, and with the last,” the One Who had wrought and spoken. Why were the gods of the nations silent and powerless? why were the boasted oracles dumb? If the fall of Judah, moral necessity as it was (unless Jehovah must sanction His own dishonour in the midst of His people, and sustain them to give His glory to a graven image), made His power questionable in a Gentile’s eyes, let them learn in the downfall of Babylon, which the Jews alone knew generations beforehand, even to the name and race of him who was its instrument, that His righteousness and wisdom were no less than His power, and that the chastised Jews were the people of His choice. “The isles saw [it] and feared; the ends of the earth were afraid, drew near, and came. They helped every one his neighbour, and [each] said to his brother, Be of good courage. So the carpenter encouraged the founder, he that smootheth [with] the hammer him that smiteth on the anvil, saying of the soldering, [it is] good: and he fasteneth it with nails, [that] it be not moved. But thou, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend, whom I have grasped from the ends of the earth, and called from its corners (or, nobles), and said unto thee, Thou [art] my servant; I have chosen thee, and not rejected thee. Fear not, for I [am] with thee; be not dismayed, for I [am] thy God. I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (vv. 5-10).

The honour to which Cyrus was called by the way was no change in His purposes or affections respecting Israel. Not Cyrus but Israel was His servant. “Behold, all they that are incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they that strive with thee shall be as nothing, and shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, — them that contend with thee. They that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of naught. For I Jehovah thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not, I will help thee. Fear not, thou worm Jacob, ye few men of Israel; I will help thee, saith Jehovah, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I have made thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh and beat small the mountains, and shalt make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in Jehovah, thou shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel” (vv. 11-16).

These last words, however, render it beyond just doubt that the prophet carries his eye far beyond the immediate occasion, and presents, not the condition of the Jews under their Persian or other Gentile lords, but days still future when Israel shall take them captive whose captives they were, and shall rule over their oppressors. It is impossible to apply to the same period the prophetic description here and Nehemiah’s language: “Behold, we [are] servants this day, and [for] the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof, behold, we [are] servants in it; and it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our

cattle, at their pleasure, and we [are] in great distress" (Neh. 9:36, 37). Here the word is in manifest contrast, and in figurative language, no doubt; but it prefigures neither servitude, nor the grace of the gospel, but triumph when the true Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings, and Israel shall flourish and tread down the wicked in the day that shall burn all the proud and lawless as an oven.

The Maccabean or the apostolic triumphs of Vitringa and others are a burlesque on a sound interpretation. Not only must we leave room for the future, but for a total change from the character of God's actual working in and by the church. Now it is grace building living stones on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone; then it will be the awful descent of the Stone cut without hands on the statue of Gentile empire in its last phase, which leads to, as it corresponds with, the judicial functions of Israel here described in "that great day" of the future.

Not that refreshment will fail from Jehovah for Israel. "The afflicted and the needy seek water, and [there is] none; their tongue faileth for thirst: I Jehovah will hear them, [I] the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness into a pool of water, and the dry lands into water-springs. I will give in the wilderness the cedar, acacia, and myrtle, and oleaster; I will set in the desert the cypress, pine (or, plane), and box-tree together; that they may see and know and consider and understand together, that the hand of Jehovah hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it" (vv. 17-20).

Jehovah then recurs to a renewal of His challenge to the Gentiles and their idols, but in terms of justly increased contempt for their trust in a thing of naught, again grounding His appeal on their ignorance of the scourge of idolatry who should come from the north and east. “Produce your cause, saith Jehovah; bring forth your strong [reasons] saith the King of Jacob. Let them bring [them] forth and show us what shall happen: show the former things, what they [be], that we may pay heed to them, and know their issue; or declare us things to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye [are] gods; yea, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold [it] together. Behold, ye [are] of nothing, and your work of naught: an abomination [is he that] chooseth you. I have raised up [one] from the north, and he shall come; from the rising of the sun will he call upon my name: and he shall come upon princes as [upon] mortar, and as the potter treadeth clay. Who hath declared [it] from the beginning, that we may know? and beforetime, that we may say, Right? Indeed there is none that declareth, indeed there is none that showeth, indeed there is none that heareth your words. The first [I say] to Zion, Behold, behold them; and to Jerusalem I will give one that bringeth good tidings. For I look, and there is no man; even among them, and there is no counsellor, that, when I ask of them, can answer a word” (vv. 21-28). The oracles are dumb, even reason abashed — nothing but insensate folly is in men owning as gods things which could neither speak nor hear. “Behold, they [are] all vanity: their works [are] naught: their molten images [are] wind and confusion” (v. 29). Human helps to devotion are the death-bed of faith. Man by his devices, now as of old, only succeeds in shutting himself out from

the living God; and the mercy He reveals in His word, as well as His judgements, are sealed up in the darkness of unbelief. Prophecy is the truest and most permanent witness of the true God, till His power overwhelm those that dispute it and dishonour Him. Hence the gravity of the present scepticism in Christendom which will issue in “the falling away” or apostasy (2 Thess. 2:3).

Isaiah 42

Distinguished though the place of Cyrus might be as the righteous man from the east,” whom God employed to break the pride of Babylon and set the captives free to return to the land of Israel, a greater is here. “Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect [in whom my soul delighteth! I have put my Spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgement to the nations. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A crushed reed shall he not break, and dim flax shall he not quench; he shall bring forth judgement in (or, for) truth. He shall not faint nor be crushed till he have set judgement in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law” (vv. 14). We know that Christ is intended (the typical one, it seems, giving occasion to the introduction of the Antitype). It is the more remarkable as being lost after this brief moment when the prophetic strain resumes its previous course, and the servant of Jehovah elsewhere in this chapter and to the end of Isa. 48 is unequivocally not Christ, but Israel.

Here however it is the Servant, the object of Jehovah’s delight as of His choice, the vessel of the power of the Spirit, and the manifester of judgement to the nations, compared with whom the Gentile avenger of God’s honour on the source and patron of all idols was little

indeed. Yet He, Whose glory was thus beyond all competition, displayed it first in perfect unobtrusive lowliness. Might of far-reaching testimony even was not what characterized Him thus, meek retirement rather, not only in presence of murderous hatred, but away from the multitudes that followed Him and the admiration of the healed who would have spread His fame. He “charged them that they should not make him known, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold my servant...” (Isa. 42:1-3; Matt. 12:14-21). This state of things is seen here terminated by the victory of His second advent, when He shall set judgement in the earth and the isles shall wait for His law. The intervening action of the Holy Ghost here below, while Christ is exalted on high, does not enter into account in this prophecy.

This leads Jehovah in magnificent terms to speak of what He will accomplish through His own name and glory, in contrast with graven images. “Thus saith God Jehovah, he that created the heavens, and stretched them forth; he that spread abroad the earth and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein. I Jehovah have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thy hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles, to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, [and] them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house. I [am] Jehovah; that [is] my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise unto graven images. Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring

forth I tell you of them" (vv. 5-9). Is this, or anything else, too hard for Jehovah?

"Sing unto Jehovah a new song, his praise from the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein, the isles and the inhabitants thereof. Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift up [their voice], the villages Kedar doth inhabit; let the inhabitants of Sela (or, the rock) sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory unto Jehovah, and declare his praise in the islands. Jehovah will go forth as a mighty man; he will stir up jealousy like a man of war: he will cry, yea, he will shout aloud; he will do mightily against his enemies. I have long time holden my peace, I have been still, I have restrained myself: [now] will I cry out like a travailing woman, I will gasp and pant together. I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs; and I will make the rivers islands, and will dry up the pools. And I will bring the blind by a way they know not, in paths they know not will I lead them; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do to them, and I will not forsake them. They shall be turned back, they shall be greatly ashamed, that trust in graven images, that say to the molten images, [Ye are] our gods" (vv. 10-17).

From verse 18 onward we have the utter shame of such as trust in these lying vanities insisted on, so as to touch the conscience of the guilty Jew. "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see" (v. 18). Could Israel as they are testify for Jehovah? How could they look the Gentiles in the face, and reprove their idolatries? What were they themselves after all the favours of the true God? "Who [is] blind but my servant? and deaf as my messenger [that] I sent? who his] blind as [he that is]

made perfect, and blind as Jehovah's servant? Seeing many things, but thou observest not; opening the ears, he heareth not" (vv. 19, 20). It is Israel who are in view, "perfect," yet "blind." Such was their perfection in privilege and therefore in solemn responsibility, but such their woeful failure. Jehovah contrariwise is right in all His ways. "Jehovah was well pleased for his righteousness' sake to magnify the law, and make [it] honourable. But this [is] a people robbed and spoiled; [they are] all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison-houses: they are for a prey, and none delivereth; for a spoil, and none saith, Restore. Who among you will give ear to this? [who] will hearken and hear what is to come? Who gave Jacob for a spoil and Israel to the robbers? did not Jehovah? — he against whom we have sinned; and they would not walk in his ways, nor be obedient unto his law. Therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle: and it set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid [it] not to heart" (vv. 21-25).

Such has been the way of Jehovah in chastening His rebellious people. Nor does He disguise the severity of His discipline. The day is coming when it will prove not in vain, as the next chapter declares His faithful affection when they knew it not. But they will yet and soon learn it in His grace.

Isaiah 43

After all their faithlessness to His name, which entailed on Israel the fury of Jehovah (yet misunderstood and unfelt through the blinding influence of idolatry), in this chapter He proclaims His faithfulness Who had called Israel by their name and made them His own. "But now

thus saith Jehovah that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called [thee] by thy name, thou [art] mine. When thou passest through the waters, I [will be] with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I [am] Jehovah thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour; I have given Egypt as thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou has; been honourable, and I have loved thee; and I will give men for thee, and peoples for thy life. Fear not, for I [am] with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; r will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the end of the earth every one that is called by my name, and whom I have created for my glory; I have formed him, yea, I have made him. Bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears. Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the peoples be assembled: who among them declareth this, and showeth us former things? let them bring their witnesses, that they may be justified; or let them hear, and say, [It is] truth. Ye [are] my witnesses, saith Jehovah, and my servant whom I have chosen; that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I [am] He; before me there was no god formed, neither shall there be after me" (vv. 1-10).

This renders the subject (namely, Israel as God's servant) as plain as His own mercy in the last days. The Jews by their idol-loving were the blind people that had eyes and the deaf that had ears. Yet were they alone of all nations Jehovah's witness and His servant. They will

yet know, believe, and understand. It was because of Him Whom they rebelled against that they have been so spoiled; it is because of Him that they will be delivered, pardoned, and blessed; for as He, Jehovah, is the only God, so is He equally the sole Saviour. It was for Israel's sake that He had sent them to Babylon and brought down their pride; and new things should cause the old wonders to be forgotten when God gives water in the wilderness and rivers in the desert for His chosen people, formed for Himself to show forth His praise. It was God Who once, for their sins, "profaned the princes" and people of Israel; it is He Who for His own sake will blot out their transgressions and justify themselves. Before that day dawn, we know (what is to them still a secret) the great salvation by His grace, whereby alone He can thus righteously deal with the guilty: Christ, the cross, is the only key.

"I, I [am] Jehovah; and beside me there is no Saviour. I have declared, and I have saved, and I have shown, and there was no strange [god] among you: therefore ye [are] my witnesses, saith Jehovah, that I [am] God. Yea, since the day [was], I [am] He; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall hinder it? Thus saith Jehovah, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and I will bring down all of them as fugitives, even the Chaldeans, in the ships of their rejoicing. I [am] Jehovah, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King. Thus saith Jehovah, who maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters; who bringeth forth the chariot and horse, the army and the power — they lie down together, they shall not rise; they are extinct, they are quenched as flax — Remember ye not the former things, neither

consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing; now shall it spring forth: shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, [and] rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honour me, the jackals and the ostriches; because I give waters in the wilderness, [and] rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen: the people have I formed for myself, that they might set forth my praise Yet thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; for thou hast been weary of me, O Israel. Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt-offerings; neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices. I have not made thee to toil with oblation, nor wearied thee with frankincense. Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices; but thou hast made me to toil with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities. I, I [am] he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake; and I will not remember thy sins. Put me in remembrance; let us plead together: set thou forth [thy cause], that thou mayest be justified. Thy first father sinned, and thine interpreters have transgressed against me. Therefore I profaned (or, will profane) the princes of the sanctuary, and made (or, will make) Jacob a curse, and Israel a reviling" (vv. 11-28).

Kimchi remarks that the construction indicates the future or the universal present rather than past time, Jehovah always "profaning" the responsibly holy chiefs who betrayed His name (cp. Ps. 84:39). In the day that is coming grace will work not only for but in them. Jehovah will work for His own sake man having failed in every way. The "interpreters" or mediators of v. 27 that rebelled seem included in the "princes of the sanctuary."

It has been objected to the natural sense of “thy first father” (ver. 27) that Adam was not peculiarly father of Israel, being the parent of all mankind. But there seems to be no force in the argument. Israel alone had sure knowledge from God about him who was the first man and head of the race; and he alone, who was created innocent, gave the due emphasis to the description — “sinned.”

Isaiah 44

The opening verses (1-5) seem to be the proper conclusion of the foregoing chapter. The salvation of God is worthy of Himself, even as it springs from His own grace, and can have no end short of His own glory. Hence it is that not only God blots out His people’s transgressions for His Son’s sake, and will not remember their sins, but that He would banish their fear and fill them to overflowing with His blessing. “And now hear, O Jacob my servant, and Israel whom I have chosen. Thus saith Jehovah that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, [who] helpeth thee, Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; r will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up among the grass, as willows by the water-courses. One shall say, I [am] Jehovah’s; and another shall call [himself] by the name of Jacob; and another shall inscribe [with] his hand, [I am] Jehovah’s, and surname [himself] by the name of Israel” (vv. 1-5). There is not the slightest need, nay, nor even room, for diverting these exceeding precious promises from Israel to the Gentile. It is quite true of course that the wild

olive graft enjoys now all this too; but the word of Jehovah is pledged and sure to Jacob His servant. The express object is to banish the dread of the conscience-stricken Jews after their long departure from the true God. Elsewhere express allusions to the call of the Gentiles during that interval appear, as notably in Isa. 65:1; Rom. 10:20, but the point here is the consolation of the ancient people when grace is at work on their behalf.

Some, like Fry, from whose general teaching better might have been expected, were led into this misconception by not understanding how the next sections could have any just bearing on the future ways or dangers of the Jew. But this is to overlook a large part of scripture, and a solemn portion of that people's wonderful destiny. For two thousand years idolatry has not been their snare, but other characters of evil, leading to and consequent on the rejection of their Messiah. This, as we shall find, has its place in our prophecy from Isa. 49 to Isa. 57; as the general picture of their moral condition is portrayed with signal precision in Hosea 3:4. But it is certain, both from the Old Testament and the New, that in the latter day they will fall once more into their old love of idols, along with the acceptance of the Antichrist, thus finally reproducing together the two sins of the past which had, each of them, brought on them such stern judgement providentially from God's vengeance. And "there shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." (Cp. Matt. 24:15 with ver. 21) There is thus no ground for turning aside these plain predictions of Isaiah from the literal Israel, of whom he speaks so often and

emphatically, to the apostate churches of Christendom. Idol-worship is here too, no doubt, and will surely not go unpunished; but the mass of the Jews in future days will fall for the last time into that besetment and worse. Hence, while the remonstrance of the prophet bore on the evil of his own days, there need be no question of its being requisite for the Jew up to the end.

And who can assert the glory of the true God, who expose the folly of false gods, like the Holy Ghost? “Thus saith Jehovah, the King of Israel and his Redeemer Jehovah of hosts; I [am] the first, and I [am] the last; and besides me there is no God. And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? And the things that are coming, and shall come, let them show unto them. Fear not, neither be afraid: have not I caused thee to hear long ago, and showed [it]? And ye [are] my witnesses. Is there a God besides me? yea, there is no Rock: I know not [any]” (vv. 6-8).

Next follows a withering exposure of idolatry. If Israel were witnesses of the true God, Jehovah, the idols themselves bore witness by their powerlessness against their foolish devotees. “They that make a graven image [are] all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they [are] their own witnesses: they see not, nor know, that they may be ashamed. Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image [that] is profitable for nothing? Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed; and the workmen [are] but men. Let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; they shall fear, they shall be ashamed together. The smith [hath] tongs (or axe), and worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with his strong arm; but he is

hungry and his strength faileth he drinketh no water, and is faint. The carpenter stretcheth out a line; he marketh it out with chalk; he fitteth it with adzes, and he marketh it out with the compass (or, chisel), and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of man, to remain in the house. When he heweth him down cedars, he also taketh a holm-oak and a terebinth, and he maketh one strong for himself among the trees of the forest; he planteth a mountain-ash, and the rain nourisheth [it]. And it shall be for a man to burn; and he taketh thereof, and warmeth himself; he kindleth [it] also, and baketh bread; he maketh also a god, and worshippeth [it]; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh, he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth Himself], and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the light. And with the residue thereof he maketh a god, his graven image; he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth [it], and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou [art] my god. They have no knowledge and understand not: for he hath plaistered their eyes, that they see not; [and] their hearts that they understand not. And none taketh it to his heart, neither [is there] knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire, and also have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten [it]: and with the residue thereof shall I make an abomination? shall I bow down to a block of wood? He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, [Is there] not a lie in my right hand?" (vv. 9-20). The sarcastic shafts of classic poets are poor in comparison for beauty or power, not to speak of their worthlessness morally; for mere ridicule, which ends in leaving the satirist at

the shrine of his despised divinities, is the mirth of a fool which ends in sorrow and shame without end.

Not so Isaiah:

“Remember these things, O Jacob and Israel; for thou [art] my servant: I have formed thee; thou [art] my servant; O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me, for I have redeemed thee. Sing, O ye heavens, for Jehovah hath done [it]; shout, ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains, the forest, and every tree therein. For Jehovah hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel. Thus saith Jehovah, thy Redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I [am] Jehovah the maker of all [things]; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself; that frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise [men] backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish: that confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers; that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited, and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built, and I will raise up the decayed places thereof; that saith to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers; that saith of Cyrus [He is] my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built, and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid” (vv. 21-28).

And how comes it to pass after so lofty and striking an assertion of Jehovah’s glory and wisdom and power that men wonder He by His interpreter discloses to His people the conqueror of Babylon, and the restorer of the remnant? What more pertinent than to proclaim the

name of Cyrus at this point? So did the man of God out of Judah name Josiah at Jeroboam's altar in Bethel (1 Kings 13:2) three centuries and more before the event. When will they be ashamed thus to belittle either God and His word, or His care for His people? Alas! if the night be far spent, the darkness is not less but more. And we know that the darkest hour is not yet come, though the day is at hand. But it will not be, except the falling away, the apostasy, come first, and "the man of sin" be revealed. Truly coming events cast their shadows before; which may sadly and satisfactorily account for the wave of incredulity, and against prophecy in particular, that now overspreads Christendom. But God does not leave Himself without witness; and He has wrought by His Spirit in many a land and tongue that there should be faithful men who have a Spirit-given confidence in the living oracles. These, not content with having learnt by grace what the church of God is in union with its glorified Head, are awaiting Him from the heavens and proclaim the coming of His universal kingdom over the earth. Hence they look with unwavering faith for a deep and gracious work in a remnant of the Jews first and of Israel afterwards, to be united at length as one people of Jehovah under the true Beloved, their Messiah once despised and crucified, their one Shepherd and Prince, yea withal the Lord Jehovah of Israel. All the earth in that day shall be filled with His glory, and with the knowledge of it and of Himself, when the heavens shall show it forth still more wondrously in the glorified saints, especially in the bride, the Lamb's wife.

Isaiah 45

Here Jehovah deigns to explain why He called the Eastern deliverer of His people by name. “Thus saith Jehovah to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held fast, to subdue nations before him; and r will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two-leaved gates, and the gates shall not be shut. I will go before thee, and make the elevated places plain, I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron; and I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that r Jehovah who call [thee] by thy name, [am] the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant’s sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name; I surnamed thee, though thou didst not know me” (vv. 1-4).

The challenge of Jehovah which begins with ver. 5 does not appear to be a mere repetition of what begins in Isa. 44:6, but in a very interesting way it meets the special evil into which those fell who under Cyrus overthrew Babylon and its idolatrous vanities. For the Persians were famous for their dualistic scheme of good and evil, light and darkness, Ormusd and Ahriman. What can be more pointed in view of the utter confusion of this scheme than the words that follow? “I [am] Jehovah, and there is none else, there is no God besides me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none besides me. I [am] Jehovah, and there is none else, forming the light, and creating darkness; making peace, and creating evil: I Jehovah do all these [things]. Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open, and

let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I Jehovah have created it. Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! [Let] the potsherd [strive] with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? Woe unto him that saith unto a father, What begettest thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth?" (vv. 5-10).

If Jehovah reprove with woe upon woe all striving with Himself and fault-finding with His ways, how graciously He calls on His people in the very next verse to ask Him of things to come about His sons, and to command Him concerning His sons, and the work of His hands! "Thus saith Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of the things that are to come; concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands, command ye me. I have made the earth, and created man upon it; I, [even] my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded. I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will make straight all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let my exiles go, not for price nor reward, saith Jehovah of hosts" (vv. 11-13). He Who made heaven and its host, earth and man upon it, was the raiser up of Cyrus to build His city and liberate His captives, "not for price nor reward, saith Jehovah of hosts." The haughtiest of the Gentiles should yet own God to be in Israel, as enemies of Christ once owned the power of the Spirit in the church.

Then when the last idol-makers perish to confusion, Israel shall be saved in Jehovah with an everlasting salvation. "Thus saith Jehovah, the labour of Egypt, and the merchandise of Ethiopia, and the Sebaim (Sabeans), men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall

be thine, they shall go after thee; in chains they shall come over; and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, [saying], Surely God [is] in thee; and there is none else, no [other] God. Verily thou [art] a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour. They shall be ashamed, yea, confounded, all of them they shall go into confusion together [that are] makers of idols. [But] Israel shall be saved by Jehovah with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded unto the ages of ages." Jehovah, the Creator, had not spoken in secret nor bid the seed of Jacob seek Him in vain; He speaks righteousness. "For thus saith Jehovah that created the heavens God himself that formed the earth and made it; he that established it, not a waste he created it; he formed it to be inhabited I [am] Jehovah; and there is none else. I have not spoken in secret, in a place of the land of darkness; I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: I [am] Jehovah speaking righteousness, declaring things that are right" (vv. 14-19).

The closing appeal is exceedingly direct, urgent, and triumphant. "Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together ye [that are] escaped of the nations. They have no knowledge that carry the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god [that] cannot save. Declare, and bring [them] near, yea, let them take counsel together. Who hath declared this from ancient time? [who] hath told it long ago? [Have] not I Jehovah? and there is no God else besides me; a just God and a Saviour, there is none besides me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I [am] God, and there is none else. J have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth [in] righteousness, and shall not return, that unto

me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Only in Jehovah, shall [one] say, have I righteousness and strength: to him shall [men] come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In Jehovah shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory" (vv. 20-25).

The commentators clash as to the "escaped of the nations" (ver. 20). But the conjecture of Mede is far from the mark, for he puts the expression along with Rev. 21:24. He ought to have known that "the nations of them that are saved" would be the inverse of Isaiah's phrase, rather than a parallel. But it is a bad reading, probably from a scholium of Andreas, and contrary to every authority of value, all of which have simply "the nations."

Our prophet widens the salvation in these concluding verses: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." So in the next verse, "unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." This extends beyond "all the seed of Israel who shall be justified and glory in Jehovah." It is clearly applied to the Lord Jesus by the apostle Paul in the largest extent, and with the utmost depth of its meaning (Rom. 14:1; Phil. 2:9-11).

It is indeed a triumphant result for Israel. An everlasting salvation is assured them when they recognize in the Christ Jehovah, to Whom every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear in that day. No glorying shall be in the creature thenceforth. The idols are no gods, but wood or stone, or other material of man's device, with demons behind all, as the apostle teaches. God is a just God and a Saviour: how true now in the gospel! how

manifest when the vanities of man are demolished by the shining forth of the glory of the Lord!

Isaiah 46

The chapters 46 - 48. close this section of the prophecy, the discussion of Israel's guilty love of idols in presence of the doom of Babylon, the patron of idolatry and the instrument of the punishment of the Jews for that sin.

Chapter 46 in the most spirited way contrasts the fall of the helpless objects of Babylonish worship with God's gracious care over Israel. "Bel [their chief god, answering to the Zeus of the Greeks] boweth down, Nebo [answering to the Greek Hermes] bendeth: their idols are upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: your loads are lifted up, a burden to the weary [beast]. They bend, they bow down together, they could not deliver the burden, and themselves are gone into captivity" (vv. 1, 2). Thus, chief or subordinate these false deities could do nothing for their votaries, and could not deliver themselves. The victorious foe carries them off as part of the spoil. The Persians detested idols.

On the other hand, Jehovah had carried Israel from their national birth to their old age: "Hearken unto me, house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne [by me] from the belly, who have been carried from the womb: even to old age I [am] He, and to hoary hairs will I carry [you]: I have made and I will bear; and I will carry and will deliver" (vv. 3, 4).

Next follows the challenge to whom they would liken the God of Israel. As for the Chaldean gods, it was but a question of gold and silver, which the goldsmith made up, and the people fell down and worshipped. "To whom

will ye liken me, and make [me] equal, and compare me, that we may be like? Such as lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance, hey hire a goldsmith, and he maketh it a god; they fall down, yea, they worship. They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place, and he standeth; from his place shall he not remove: yea, [one] shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble. Remember this, and show yourselves men: bring [it] again to mind, ye transgressors" (vv. 5-8).

Nor is this the only appeal. It was well to bethink them that the gods of the nations were beneath those that adored them: but the prophet adds, "Remember the former things of old: for I [am] God, and there is none else; I [am] God, and there is none like me. declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times [the things] that are not done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure, calling a bird of prey from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country. Yea, I have spoken, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed [it], I will also do it" (vv. 9-11). Cyrus is here again cited as a striking proof of the reality of God's dealings with His people, and this both in foreknowledge, in declared purpose, and in providential ways. This leads to the concluding call: "Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that [are] far from righteousness: J bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry; and I will give salvation in Zion unto Israel my glory" (vv. 12, 13). Such is the end of Jehovah, and He is very pitiful and of tender mercy. He Who carried His people as a nurse through the wilderness at the beginning will manifest unfailing grace at the end. In the face of their long and

manifold wanderings from Him Who did them nothing but good, He will deliver. Yet will His salvation be no more sure than His righteousness. This we know now in the gospel, as Israel also will when the kingdom comes in display.

Isaiah 47

This chapter shows us the degradation of Babylon itself, as in the preceding chapter we had judgement executed against its gods.

“Come down, and sit in the dust, virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground: [there is] no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate Take the millstones, and grind meal; remove thy veil, strip the train, uncover the leg, pass over rivers. Thy nakedness shall be uncovered, yea, thy shame shall be seen. I will take vengeance, and I will meet no man. [As for] our Redeemer Jehovah of hosts [is] his name, the Holy One of Israel. Sit silent, and get thee into darkness, daughter of the Chaldeans: for thou shalt no more be called Mistress of kingdoms. I was wroth with my people, I profaned mine inheritance, and gave them into thy hand: thou didst show them no mercy; upon the aged hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke. And thou saidst, I shall be a mistress for ever; [so] that thou didst not lay these [things] to thy heart, neither didst remember the latter end thereof” (vv. 1-7).

The anger of God at His guilty people was no justification for the merciless behaviour of Babylon; and her confidence in the stability of her resources would be the precursor of ruin. “Now therefore hear this, [thou that art] given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, that sayest in thy heart, I [am], and all besides me [is]

nothing; I shall not sit [as] a widow, neither shall I know loss of children. But these two [things] shall come to thee in a moment in one day, loss of children, and widowhood: in full measure shall they come upon thee, in spite of the multitude of thy sorceries, of the great abundance of thine enchantments. For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness; thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thy heart, I [am], and all besides me [is] nothing. And there cometh upon thee evil; thou shalt not know the dawning thereof: and mischief falleth upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it away; and desolation thou knowest not shall come upon thee suddenly" (vv. 8-11).

We must remember too that what made the taunt the more cutting was Babylon's boast in their sorceries and enchantments; but even so, they could not profit nor prevail. "Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest terrify. Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels: let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from [the things] that shall come upon thee. Behold, they shall be as stubble, the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: [it shall] not [be] a coal to warm at, a fire to sit before. Thus shall they be unto thee wherein thou hast laboured; they that have trafficked with thee from thy youth shall wander every one to his quarter none shall save thee" (vv. 12-15). As they could not really predict, still less could they save; so He predicts, Who is the Saviour God. And it is to be feared that such as

believe not His prophetic word are strangers to His saving grace. For without faith it is impossible to please God. To predict, divine as it is, must be regarded as a small thing compared with the grace that saves righteously. Comparatively few in Christendom accept that man here as elsewhere is wholly lost in himself, or that in Christ the believer is truly saved. Those who trust in ordinances and in such as administer them never rise above the uncertainties of probation. Human contingency is not the true grace of God in which we are called to stand.

Isaiah 48

Our chapter is a more direct and exclusive appeal to Israel to those that come forth “out of the waters of Judah.” It is a beautiful homily to His people. “Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah; who swear by the name of Jehovah, and make mention of the God of Israel, not in truth nor in righteousness. For they call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel; Jehovah of hosts [is] his name” (vv. 1, 2). It explains why God had long foretold, and then suddenly acted. They could not thus defraud Him of His praise. “I have declared the former things from of old; yea, they went forth out of my mouth, and I showed them: suddenly I wrought, and they came to pass. Because I knew that thou [art] obstinate, and thy neck [is] an iron sinew, and thy brow brass; therefore I have declared [them] to thee from of old, before they came to pass I showed thee, lest thou shouldest say, Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image hath commanded them. Thou hast heard;

behold all this; and ye, will ye not declare [it]? I have shown thee new things from this time, and hidden things, which thou hast not known. They are created now, and not from of old; and before this day thou heardest them not, lest thou shouldest say, Behold, I knew them. Yea, thou heardest not, yea, thou knewest not; yea, from of old thine ear was not opened: for I knew that thou didst deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb" (vv. 3-8).

In verse 9 Jehovah tells them why He had not cut them off. "For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and [for] my praise will I refrain as to thee, that I cut thee not off. Behold, I have refined thee, but not as silver, I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. For mine own sake, for mine own sake, will I do [it]: for how should [my name] be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another" (vv. 9-11).

Then (in vv. 12-21) comes a tender expostulation, accomplished in measure at the return from captivity, but to be fulfilled by-and by in all its extent. "Hearken unto me, O Jacob, and Israel my called: I [am] HE, I the first, I also the last. Yea, my hand hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spread out the heavens: I call unto them, they stand up together. Assemble yourselves, all ye, and hear; which among them hath declared these [things]? He whom Jehovah hath loved shall perform his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm [shall be] on the Chaldeans. I, I, have spoken; yea, I have called him: I have brought him, and his way shall be prosperous. Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; from the beginning I have not spoken in secret; from the time that it was, there [am] I and now the Lord Jehovah hath sent me, and his Spirit. Thus saith

Jehovah, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, I [am] Jehovah thy God, who teacheth thee to profit, who leadeth thee in the way thou shouldest go. Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea; thy seed also had been as the sand, and the offspring of thy bowels like the gravel thereof: his name should not be cut off nor destroyed from before me. Go ye forth from Babylon, flee from the Chaldeans; with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it to the end of the earth; say ye, Jehovah hath redeemed his servant Jacob. And they thirsted not [when] he led them through the deserts: he caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them; he clave the rock also, and the waters gushed out." Cyrus had not acted without the God Who had called him by name. Nor was it (save judicially) he who had ordered things for Israel. The word is, "Jehovah hath redeemed his servant Jacob." The moral is, "[There is] no peace, saith Jehovah, unto the wicked." It is a misconception of Israel's future to imagine that no future question arises between God and them as to graven images. The Lord Jesus has ruled the contrary, if we understand His intimation in Matt. 12:43-45, with other scriptures of like purport, and even from the prophet before us. We all know how confident the Jews seem that they are proof against idols They were not in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, long after the return from Babylon; and they are destined to fall into the same pit again ere the age closes, as Dan. 9:27; Dan. 11:38, 39 plainly prove. For when has self-righteousness effectually resisted Satan's wiles? "Even so shall it be unto this wicked generation." The generation of unbelief has not yet passed away. And as it will be guilty once more of its old love of such abominations, it will also see

greater than these, as the next part of our prophet notifies.

Section 6: Isaiah 49 - 57

Isaiah 49

A new division of Isaiah opens here. It is no longer Babylon and idolatry, and a destruction viewed as the overthrow of image worship in the earth. Here it is the far deeper question of Christ Himself and His rejection by the Jews. We find that this portion runs from Isa. 49:1 to the end of Isa. 57, where, as the former ending was “There is no peace, saith Jehovah, unto the wicked,” so the latter ends with “There is no peace saith my God, unto the wicked”. “Jehovah” is in contrast with idols, and “my God” is connected with the still deeper iniquity of the people in refusing “the true God and eternal life,” even the Lord Jesus, their anointed King. They were wicked in both respects: wicked in going after false gods of the Gentiles wicked yet more in rejecting their divine Messiah.

The chapter opens with a call to the isles to listen. “Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye peoples from afar. Jehovah hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name.” There was a great providential preparation. “And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me.” There was thus protection also. “And he said unto me, Thou [art] my servant Israel, in whom I will glorify myself” (vv. 1-3). Such was the purpose of God about Israel; but, Israel failing, Christ becomes the true Israel. It is the transition from the people to the Messiah in Whom alone it could be.

“And I said (says Christ), I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for naught.” Christ substitutes Himself for Israel. They had been the servant nominally and responsibly; Christ becomes the true and righteous servant of God, when the other proved false. Nevertheless, even in Christ all comes to nothing at first through Jewish unbelief, through man’s evil and enmity. “I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for naught, and in vain; nevertheless my judgement [is] with Jehovah, and my work with my God” (v. 4). The failure, apparently, of the purposes of God in the first instance from man’s wickedness only leads to a better establishment of them, and to a more glorious form and display in result. “And now, saith Jehovah that formed me from the womb [to be] his servant, that I should bring Jacob again to him (though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of Jehovah, and my God shall be my strength).” This is the comfort of Christ, that although the work was not done, and Israel would not be gathered (how often would He have gathered them!) yet would He be glorious. “And he saith, It is a small thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the nations, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (vv. 5, 6).

The original thought was to gather Israel, but Israel would not be gathered. Then, says God, That is too small a thing; I will save the nations also. But Christ is first given as a light to the Gentiles. It is rather going out than gathering in: at any rate, such is the turn given to the passage now, under the gospel. While Israel is not yet gathered, Christ becomes a light to the Gentiles. But

God's purpose never fails, and so we find, "Thus saith Jehovah, the Redeemer of Israel, his Holy One, to him whom the soul despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth" (it is clear that Christ is now viewed as a rejected person, the cross being the great expression of that rejection), "to a servant of rulers, kings shall see and arise, princes and they shall worship, because of Jehovah that is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who hath chosen thee. Thus saith Jehovah, In an acceptable time have I answered thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee and give thee for a covenant of the people (that is, of Israel), to establish the land (or, earth), to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; saying to the prisoners, Go forth, to them that [are] in darkness, Show yourselves" (vv. 7-9). It is evident that this supposes all to be in ruin, but that the Lord Jesus is the destined repairer of the breaches.

"They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures [shall be] on all bare heights. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them will lead them, and by the springs of water will he guide them. And r will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted. Behold, these shall come from afar; and behold, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim" (vv. 9-12). It is the return of Israel that is here predicted from all parts of the earth, but a return after they have been dispersed thither; so that not only from the north and south, but even from the land of Sinim — that is, from China — they finally emerge and gather in Palestine. It may not be known to all who read this volume, that the learned Ewald tries to prove, in opposition to the "higher critics" generally, that Egypt

was the land, not Babylon, where these closing chapters of Isaiah (or, as they would say, the pseudo-Isaiah) were written. He bases his dream on the slender ground that there are so many allusions of interest to Egypt and Ethiopia; so much acquaintance with their habits and ways, etc. To this end he binds the name of Sinim to the people of Pelusium. Gesenius, however, was too sensible to overlook that a remote race in the south or east extremity of the world was meant; and even Knobel and Hitzig point to China, the Rabbinical name of which is Tsin.

No wonder that we find not merely a call to the isles, but to heaven and earth to rejoice. “Shout, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains. For Jehovah hath comforted his people and will have mercy on his afflicted ones” (v. 13). It is the last days, and Jehovah reviewing His goodness and calling upon all the universe to be joyful.

“But Zion said, Jehovah hath forsaken me, and the Lord hath forgotten me.” But Jehovah pleads with Zion’s reproach, and says, “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea. they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. ‘Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of [my] hands: thy walls [are] continually before me. Thy children shall make haste; thy destroyers and they that made thee waste shall go forth from thee” (vv.14-17). The enemies of Israel disappear, and Israel comes forward, long forgotten apparently, but now to be established for ever. So their God calls upon them to see a wondrous sight: “Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, [and] come to thee. [As] I live saith Jehovah, thou shalt surely clothe

thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them [on thee], as a bride [doeth]. For [in] thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, thou shalt even now be too straitened by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away. The children of thy bereavement shall yet say in thine ears, The place [is] too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell" (vv. 18-20).

It is the harvest of joy for the chosen but guilty people, after the long sowing in tears. And now there seems no room to stow away the children. "And thou shalt say in thy heart, Who hath begotten me these (seeing I had lost my children, and was desolate, a captive, and driven to and fro)? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone, these, where [were] they?" (v. 21). It is the joining together of the dispersed of all Israel, those who had been forgotten. At the present time the Jews are the only ones clearly known to be of Israel; but those so long hidden are the ten tribes. The Jews will have the certainty that they are Israel and yet not known to them. They had been in the dark for ages. But now Jehovah signifies His will to the nations of the earth. "Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold, I will lift up my hand to the nations, and set up my ensign to the peoples; and they shall bring thy sons in [their] bosom, and thy daughters shall be carried upon [their] shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with [their] faces to the earth, and lick the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I [am] Jehovah, and they that wait for me shall not be ashamed" (vv. 22, 23). Such will be the moral state of Israel in that day. They shall wait for Jehovah and shall not be ashamed.

But, further, they will have no reason to fear their enemies. The last verse shows that the same God, Who deals in such incomparable mercy to Israel, will beat down all those who had plundered them. “Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captives be delivered? For thus saith Jehovah, Even the captive of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: and I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children. And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine: and all flesh shall know that I Jehovah [am] thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob” (vv. 24-26). The condign vengeance of God upon the enemies of Israel is come. Such is the future that Jehovah guarantees to Israel after the rejection of the Messiah. It is impossible therefore, if so applied, to exhaust this chapter in the return from the Babylonish captivity; it beyond doubt speaks of the far more complete ingathering at the end of this age. So opens the new subject of Christ’s rejection by His people, and of their gathering in after He has been made a light to the end of the earth. But when Zion might have thought herself entirely forgotten, Jehovah turns His hand upon these little ones, and puts down the nations of the earth; when either their kings and queens become the servants of Israel, or He makes an example of them in divine judgement.

Isaiah 50

Our last chapter set forth the vast change which turns on the substitution of Christ, the true servant of God, for Israel His servant publicly and responsibly but in truth

the slave of His enemy. The new sin of the people ensued thereon, not idolatry, but rejection of the Messiah by the Jews, only consistent in their unbelief and opposition to God. They would none of Him or His law. They had followed heathen gods, they now refuse His anointed Servant. But this leads in the wisdom of God to the immediate blessing of the Gentiles in the day of grace; as it also becomes in result the basis of the ultimate restoration of Israel and the joy of all the earth in the day of glory. The chapter accordingly sketches the whole sweep of God's ways from the rejection of Christ to the triumphs of the last days.

In Isa. 50 we are in presence of little more than a single point in that great circle of events; but is it not the centre and pivot of all? The humiliation of Jesus, the Servant of Jehovah, but withal Jehovah Himself, their own Messiah, despised not of strangers merely but of His own people! Deliverance and glory were sure in the end. But so was the sad alienation of Israel meanwhile; so moreover was their sale of themselves. How was this? "Thus saith Jehovah, Where [is] the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors [is it] to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away" (v. 1). It was no churl who found his wretched pleasure in putting away the wife who displeased him; it was no selfish parent who relieved his own necessities at the expense of his children. And the proof of their rebellion appears in verses 2, 3. "Wherefore did I come, and there was no man? I called, and there was none to answer? Is my hand at all shortened, that I cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver? behold, at my rebuke I dry up the

sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stink, because [there is] no water, and die for thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering." His coming, His call was unheeded, though He had already, since the days of Pharaoh, proved what He was in behalf of His people.

Did the Jews question this? Did they say to Jehovah, as by-and-by the Gentiles will to the King coming in glory, "When saw we thee..." (Matt. 25:37-39)? Here is His answer by anticipation: "The Lord Jehovah hath given me the tongue of the instructed, that I should know how to speak a word in season to the weary. He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed" (v. 4). Nor this only. "The Lord Jehovah hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, I turned not away back" (v. 5). Jehovah had deigned to become a man on earth, and here to walk in obedience, owning God; and this Christianity alone fully explains; for Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were most truly and equally Jehovah. And He, Who came thus to do the will of God as man here below, was, as we know, the Son, Who, Himself God and Jehovah, could look up and say, "The Lord Jehovah hath opened mine ear," etc.

It is not the same truth here as in Ex. 21, where the Hebrew servant might have gone out free, but says, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free; and he is brought to the door-post before the judges and has his ear bored through in sign of perpetual service. So did Christ the true Servant and Lord of all; He too has pledged Himself to serve eternally. Again, it is not the same as Ps. 40:6, where "mine ears hast thou digged" is cited from the LXX (so in Heb. 10:5), as "a body hast thou prepared me." The

“boring” of the ear found its answer in the Lord’s willing subjection to death, in which He identified Himself with the need and interests of Master, wife, and children. The “digging” of the ear was not after He became a servant, but rather in order to it. Thus was He formed as it were to be a servant, a body fitted in which, though He were a Son, He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. For indeed He did become a man and a servant in this world. Isaiah looks at a time intermediate — neither incarnation, nor death, but His path in life, wherein the opened ear marks lowly intelligent attention to His Father’s will; as the closed ear in fallen man’s case is significant of disobedience or indifference to the communications of God.

But obedience (especially public service) in such a world as this could only be, to such a One as He, continual, and to us hardly conceivable, suffering. Hence the issue at once follows, “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting” (v. 6). How solemn the thought; and what a picture of God in the presence of man! His humiliation (which should have made Him infinitely more precious, as being the incomparable proof of His love) gave the desired occasion to man under Satan’s leading to insult Him to the uttermost, Who reviled not again.

But still He goes on — yea, to death, the death of the cross “But the Lord Jehovah will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded; therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. [He is] near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? Let us stand together: who [is] mine adversary? Let him draw near to me. Behold, the Lord Jehovah will help me; who

[is] he [that] shall condemn me? Behold, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up" (vv. 7-9).

Thus Jehovah challenges His foes and sees their ruin sealed in their momentary triumph over Him Whom, if man slew, God raised again from the dead. Notice here what has been often pointed out, that the apostle Paul cites this passage in Rom. 8:33, and applies to the Christian what the Spirit here predicates of Christ. It would be childish to deny its application to the Lord because of this; but it is hardly less childish to overlook the precious intimation that the same Spirit applies to us now what He uttered then in God's vindication of Christ rejected. Such is the Christian's blessed and present privilege — association with Christ risen after God undertakes to glorify Him Whom the Jews (and Gentiles) cast out. But this plain truth distinguishes those who now believe from Israel in their best estate. Christianity is quite another thing from Israel, though it may inherit promises; for we, being Christ's, are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise (Gal. 3:29). But the Christian is also much more, and has a relation to Christ in heavenly glory, which is far beyond Abraham or Israel Even now believers are His body, one with their Head in heaven The closing verses make this distinction yet plainer and prove its importance. "Who [is] among you that feareth Jehovah, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh [in] darkness and hath no light? let him trust in the name of Jehovah, and stay upon his God" (v. 10). For thus we have distinguished most definitely the Christian from the future Jewish remnant. The mystery was yet hid in God. Christ humbled and delivered was revealed; our place, not then revealed, is

now seen in Him risen and glorified. They on the contrary, walking in darkness and wanting light, will be called to trust in Jehovah and stay on their God, when there is nothing else to lean on. But these, who have no light yet, walking in darkness yet confidingly in hope, shall find a glorious deliverance when He appears. We are children of light now, children of day before it dawns upon the earth; we follow Him in spirit where He is, yea, are brought to God and free of the holiest while here. They must pass through an unequalled tribulation because of Jewish apostasy, but shall be blessed at the end.

As for the apostate mass of the Jews, their portion plainly follows. “Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass [yourselves] about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks [that] ye have kindled. This shall ye have of my hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow” (v. 11). It is always vain for a sinful man to trust his own devices or the remedies of men to better his condition before God, or to enjoy enduring comfort. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the Father of mercies and the God of all encouragement. But in the day that is at hand the folly and the madness of unbelief will be made apparent. Judgement will demonstrate what it is to confide in self, not in Him to Whom God directs those who hear His word. “Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him,” the Son.

But among the Jews, as in Christendom, men will turn from Christ to every idol and abomination Satan puts before them. Then also the day will come, in contrast with the day of salvation now, when He will break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel. Rev. 2:26, 27 is express, that this judicial

dealing will only be when the church is glorified, not in the day of grace. “Now therefore be wise, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve Jehovah with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish in the way, for his wrath will soon be kindled. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him” (Ps. 2:10-12). This is very different from the gospel now, but it is equally of God in its due season, and will surely go forth when the dealings of divine judgement on man begin. And the wicked among the Jews must suffer more than the Gentiles, and professing Christians more severely than the Jews, as is most righteous.

Expiation is not foreshown here as in Isa. 53, but the divine power that belonged to Him Who came into the humiliation and need of His people, only to prove the depth of His love and of their evil heart of unbelief. In these circumstances of unfathomable trial Christ’s entire and lowly submission was proved, and Jehovah’s vindication of Him Who, being God, became the Servant of His will and for His glory, with its results for friends and foes.

Isaiah 51

In Isa. 50 we have seen the divine Messiah in the depths of humiliation, but the Lord Jehovah helping and justifying Him. In Isa. 53 (which really begins at Isa. 52:13) we shall see Him “wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities,” when Jehovah “laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Cp. Ps. 22. and Ps. 69) Between these everlasting foundations of blessing for Israel (or for any), the Holy Spirit gives us awakening appeals of the utmost force, interest, and beauty. It is a complete whole, consisting of seven

distinct parts (Isa. 51:1-3; 4-6; 7, 8; then, 9-16; 17-23; Isa. 52:1-10; lastly, 11, 12), which trace the gradations of the godly Jewish remnant from their deep distress, fearing Jehovah and obeying the voice of His Servant, though in darkness as yet and having no light, but gradually advancing till they stand in the full glory that was promised them.

The first remark to be made is one of no small importance as affecting the interpretation or rather application of this prophetic strain. It is not under the head of Babylon, but of a rejected Messiah. And in fact the attempt to apply to their state after the return from Babylon either the calls of righteousness to them, or the answers of the Spirit in them, and the final word as of a priest to Jehovah abandoning their old seats of impurity, is not worth a refutation — hardly a notice. Isa. 48 closed the old part of the subject. Isa. 49 opened the new complaint and ground of judgement God lays against His people — not the idolatry judged by the captivity in Babylon, but the refusal of Christ, the ground of their dispersion and distresses under Rome, the fourth Gentile empire. Therefore was Israel divorced from Jehovah; but a remnant, poor in spirit, by grace obey the voice of His humbled Servant. Their moral restoration and final triumph are here brought before us in as orderly a way as is compatible with the sublimest of prophets.

The first appeal to hear is to them as following after righteousness and seeking Jehovah. Such will be few indeed at first. They may feel themselves alone, the mass of Israel being apostate like the Gentiles. But they are exhorted to look to Abraham and Sarah. “Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek

Jehovah: look unto the rock [whence] ye were hewn and to the hole of the pit [whence] ye were digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah [that] bare you: for when he was alone I called him, and blessed him, and made him many" (vv 1, 2). Then faith must count on no less but more manifest blessing, after all their sorrow now at its worst. "For Jehovah will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of Jehovah: joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody" (v. 3).

The next goes farther and calls them Jehovah's people and His nation. "Listen unto me, O my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall go forth from me, and I will make my judgement to rest for a light of the peoples. My righteousness [is] near, my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the peoples: the isles shall wait for me, and on mine arm shall they trust. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner; but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished" (vv. 4-6). "Listen," etc. (the word being a different one from the more general term in verses 1, 7, and implies attention). It is a total mistake in Bishop Lowth to think the address in this case is made not to the Jews but to the Gentiles, "as in all reason it ought to be"! It was the more required as a comfort for the Jews, because they have been so long called Lo-ammi. (Compare Hosea 1 - 2) "The peoples" are distinguished, for whose light His judgement should be established, as His arms should judge them, while His righteousness

and salvation made good for ever should be the portion of Israel.

The third calls them to hear, as knowing righteousness and having Jehovah's law in their hearts. Why should such fear the reproach and revilings of men whom the moth and the worm, little and feeble as they are, should devour? "Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart [is] my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye dismayed at their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation unto all generations" (vv. 7, 8).

Similarly the Spirit now answers, as it were, in the remnant. First, they call for the power of Jehovah to assert itself against their mighty foes, as of old against proud Egypt. "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of Jehovah; awake, as in the ancient days, the generations of old. [Art] thou not he that cut Rahab in pieces, [and] wounded the monster? [Art] thou not he who dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?" (vv. 9, 10). They predict their deliverance in verse 11, and Jehovah's reply to their trembling hearts in terms as full of pathos as of grandeur in verses 12-16. "And the ransomed of Jehovah shall return and come to Zion with singing; and everlasting joy [shall be] upon their heads: they shall obtain gladness and joy; sorrow and sighing shall flee away. I, I, [am] he that comforteth you: who [art] thou, that thou art afraid of weak man [that] shall die, and of the son of man [that] shall be made [as] grass; and thou hast forgotten Jehovah thy Maker, who stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of

the earth; and thou fearest continually all the day because of the fury of the oppressor, when he maketh ready to destroy? And where [is] the fury of the oppressor? The captive exile shall speedily be loosed, and he shall not die [and go down] into the pit, neither shall his bread fail. And I [am] Jehovah thy God, which stirreth up the sea, that the waves thereof roar: Jehovah of hosts [is] his name. And I have put my words in thy mouth, and have covered thee with the shadow of my hand, to plant the heavens, and to lay the foundations of the earth, and to say unto Zion, Thou [art] my people" (vv. 11-16).

Next, the Spirit of God summons Jerusalem to arise and stand up, with a most vivid description of her reeling under Jehovah's judgement without one of her sons to guide or help, and of His taking the cup from her hand, not here to drink it Himself, but to put it into the hands of their oppressors. "Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of Jehovah the cup of his fury; thou hast drunk — hast drained out the bowl of the cup of staggering. [There is] none to guide her among all the sons [whom] she hath brought forth; neither [is there any] that taketh her by the hand of all the sons [that] she hath brought up. These two [things] are befallen thee; who will bemoan thee? desolation and destruction, and famine and sword; how shall I comfort thee? Thy sons have fainted, they lie at the top of all the streets, as an antelope (or, oryx) in a net; they are full of the fury of Jehovah, the rebuke of thy God. Therefore hear now this, thou afflicted and drunken, but not with wine: thus saith thy Lord Jehovah, and thy God [that] pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold, I have taken out of thy hand the cup of staggering, the bowl of the

cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again: and I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee. who have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over: and thou hast laid thy back as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over" (vv. 17-23). It is no wonder that interpreters should be much divided who apply these appeals and answers of increasing earnestness, either to the past history of the Jews or to the time of the first advent. Neither at all corresponds to the language of the Holy Spirit, Who really looks forward to the gradual progress of Jehovah's dealings with the future remnant and His working in their souls as they rise from their degradation or apprehend their calling.

Isaiah 52:1-12

Thirdly, Zion is now called on. "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake thyself from the dust; arise, sit thee down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion. For thus saith Jehovah, Ye were sold for naught; and ye shall be redeemed without money. For thus saith the Lord Jehovah, My people went down at the first into Egypt to sojourn there: and the Assyrian oppressed them without cause. Now therefore, what have I here, saith Jehovah, that my people is taken away for naught? their rulers make them howl, saith Jehovah, and my name continually all the day [is] blasphemed. Therefore my people shall know my name: therefore [they shall know] in that day that I [and He that saith, Beholds [it is] I" (vv. 1-6). The days of Egypt

and of Assyria should never return: no more the oppressor should be known. Jehovah's people shall know His name, Himself as revealed in it, as unchangeable in His mercy to them as in His own being.

Beautiful then in their eyes, as in His, are the feet of him that brings good tidings and publishes peace. Before (Isa. 40:9) the cities of Judah were told, "Behold your God." Now Zion hears, "Thy God reigneth!" The watchmen lift up their voice, singing, not warning; the very wastes of Jerusalem, so long forsaken, sing together in their irrepressible joy. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! The voice of thy watchmen! they lift up the voice, together do they sing; for they shall see eye to eye when Jehovah bringeth again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for Jehovah hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. Jehovah hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (vv. 7-10).

Lastly, the strain closes with the peremptory call to act consistently with the holiness of Jehovah and of His sanctuary. "Depart, depart, go out from thence, touch no unclean [thing]; go out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of Jehovah" (v. 11). Babylon is pointedly dropped: a larger sphere is meant. It should not be, as of old, in haste or in anxiety, however they were guided and delivered then. The greatest triumphs of their fathers fade in the glorious intervention of Jehovah which the children now know. "For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight; for Jehovah will go

before you, and the God of Israel [will be] your rearward" (v. 12). It is in truth and in its fullest display the day of Jehovah, when Israel for ever leave the unclean Gentiles, henceforth to be a richer blessing to them than their evils had been a snare and ruin to Israel.

Now that Zion is thus summoned to awake out of ruin and suffering and degradation through her sins, and is by grace bidden to rise and stand forth in the righteousness and beauty Jehovah puts on her, the end of the chapter introduces once more and more fully than ever Him through Whom so blessed a change could come to pass. But it also, to make it adequate, demands that His vicissitudes should be set out distinctly; and this was the more needful, because it seemed unaccountable that One, so infinitely worthy and glorious, should have passed through them, when one thought either of Jehovah on the one hand, or of the Jewish people on the other. This demand gives rise, therefore, to the opening out of the great hidden necessity for Messiah's atoning sufferings, if the divine nature were to be vindicated respecting sin and Israel (or any others) were to be purged and blessed. As we of the church behold Christ glorified on high in answer to His cross, so will Israel see Him set on the summit of earth's universal glory for the same reason.

Isaiah 52:13-15

The section, of which this passage is the preface, assumes the truth already before us in chap. 1, pursues it farther and more profoundly, and thus completes the foundation of all that follows. It embraces all the nest

chapter which forms part of it and is of the profoundest interest and importance.

The elder Jewish interpreters did not contest the application to the Messiah. Thus Jonathan Ben Uzziel expressly speaks to this effect in the Chaldee paraphrase (given in the Antwerp, Paris, and London Polyglotts). So the Talmud Babyl. (in Tr. Sanhedrim, cap. helek, fol. 98) applies to the Messiah, Isa. 53:4. Again, the book of Zohar confirms this in the comment on Exodus (fol. 95 col. 3), and the Mechilta (according to the Jalkut Shimoni, part 2. fol. 90, col. 1) is no less distinct, as even Aben Ezra, Abarbanel, and other distinguished men among their later authors confess. I am indebted to another (who has supplied some of these references) for the striking fact that even now, in the prayers of the synagogue used universally, there is the clearest witness to the same truth. For instance, at the Passover they pray in these terms: “Hasten and cause the shadows to flee away. Let him be exalted and extolled and be high, who is now despised. Let him deal prudently and reprove and sprinkle many nations.” Again, in the prayers for the day of Atonement, there is as plain an allusion to the righteous Anointed bearing the yoke of iniquities and transgression, wounded because of it, and men (or Israel at least) healed by His wound. The translator (D. Levi) tries to turn part of the prayer aside to Josiah, as do some of the Rabbis; but the prayer expressly alludes to the Messiah in one of these references to Isaiah 53 just cited, even according to the same person.

The more modern writers, who dread the ancient application of the prophecy to the Messiah by their fathers, have invented a double means of escape, either

by applying it to some distinguished man like Josiah or Jeremiah, or to the Jewish people elsewhere styled “My servant” in the prophecy. But in vain. This section is so punctually and exclusively applicable to our Lord that these efforts only prove the will of unbelief and its failure. In the beginning of chap. 49. we have already seen Christ, the Servant substituted for Israel who had been altogether wanting. We have seen in chap. 1. that the godly Jews are exhorted to obey the voice of this Servant of Jehovah, humbled though He has been among men, but vindicated of God, and indeed He Himself is God.

The three closing verses of 52 open the new and full view of Messiah suffering and exalted in connection with Israel; for this last qualification needs to be borne in mind, lest man should look for that which it is no part of the Spirit’s work here to reveal. The union of Jew and Gentile in one body, as well as Christ Head over all things to it, His church, is, as the apostle tells us, a mystery, that is, a secret not revealed in Old Testament times (Eph. 1:22, 23; Eph. 3:1-11). Many points true of the church and the Christian are revealed in this prophecy as in others; but nowhere is heavenly union mentioned until after Christ’s rejection and ascension, and is not fully made known till the apostle Paul was entrusted with the administration of it.

The exalted Messiah of Israel is then before us, who erst was covered with shame and bent to such humiliation as was never before nor since the portion for any son of man. Hence many were dumb through astonishment, or rather perhaps abhorrence — “shocked” at Him: they had looked for Messiah far otherwise. His lowly mien and surroundings of life and labours first disappointed;

His meek acceptance of insult and suffering next drew out all their malice and aversion.

“So shall He sprinkle many nations.” The Septuagint translates, “So shall many nations regard him with admiration” that is, it would seem, in contrast with Jewish vexation and hatred; but this supposes a different verb in their Hebrew copies, though differing only very slightly in form. Some of the ablest Jewish critics take it as meaning that the Messiah will drop the word in that manner and so teach if not refresh many Gentiles. Certainly what is said of kings implies a reverent and subject silence before Him. Thus ver. 15 may be considered to stand in antithesis to ver. 14: the one presenting the bitter unbelieving disappointment of the chosen; the other the beneficent dealing with the Gentiles, so that their kings are mute with awe in His presence. This accordingly cannot, save generally, apply at this time, but joins on the effects of His advent in glory in contrast with the days of His flesh (ver. 14), and in unison with the opening words of ver. 13. The apostle only uses the principle of the last words (ver. 15) for his own going out with the gospel where no other had preceded, and no sound of Christ might have yet reached (Rom. 15:21); but he in no way treats this as the fulfilment of that oracle.

“Behold,” says God now through His prophet, “my servant will deal prudently [or rather, prosper], he shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. As many were astonished at thee (his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men), so shall he sprinkle22 many nations; kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see, and that which they had not heard shall

they consider" (vv. 13-15). What can be less congruous with this prophecy than the facts of Josiah, Jeremiah, or the Jewish people? Neither the king nor the prophet had any such destiny as could be fairly brought into this remarkable contrast of, first, deep shame, then wide and lofty glory before subject nations and kings. And though it is true, as we have often noticed in this prophet, that "my servant" sometimes applies to Israel, there are always definite contextual marks which render the decision by no means difficult or doubtful. This is made evident and certain from chapter 53, where there is the most obvious distinction between the Individual in question and the people who esteemed Him not. For He bore their griefs and carried their sorrows, yea, was wounded for their transgressions, and brought healing to them by His stripes when bruised for their iniquities. To identify this suffering One with the people from whom and for whom He thus suffered, and to whom He afterwards brings such signal blessing, is the grossest confusion on the face of the matter. But let us turn to the wondrous words of our God from these unbelieving and biased vagaries of men.

The humiliation of the Messiah ran so counter to every preconceived thought and wish of the Jew that one can readily understand the advantage which Satan found in urging on the people, leaders and all, to their fatal unbelief and rejection of Him. But there was a deeper ground of aversion in the heart than disappointment in their national ambition, and this charge of dislike to His Person takes in man universally, and not Israel only: "For he was despised and left alone of men." They shrank from One Who sounded and laid bare man's iniquities and enmity to God, Himself the perfection of

obeying God and loving man. Hence, notwithstanding the attractiveness of moral beauty and lowly grace, with power that proved itself superior to all the sickness and misery of man, there arose the hatred that grew more intense and deadly as He brought in God to deal with their conscience. To interpret what is predicted of Him as being the state of “that wicked generation” is beyond measure absurd.

It is not here the remnant of the Jews distinguished from the mass by hearkening to the voice of Jehovah’s Servant, as in Isa. 50:10, but many nations and kings in astonishment at His exaltation Who was once so humbled. The inspired word puts every thing and every one in the just place.

Isaiah 53

Here we have the confession and wondering complaint over the unbelief of men, yea, over their own unbelief; for Israel, now broken down in sense of sin, acknowledge that it was not merely those without who heeded little the report of the Messiah, but that they too themselves had been hard and rebellious against Him. “Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of Jehovah been revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender sapling, and as a root out of dry ground; he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we see him, [there is] no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and shunned of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom they hide [their] faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he [it is] hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, and we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he [was] wounded for

our transgressions, [he was] bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace [was] upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (vv. 1-6).

The close of the last chapter (vv. 13-15) gave us Jehovah's contemplation of His Anointed, once put to shame, and now on the summit of glory before every eye. His deity introduced His humiliation in Isa. 50, here His humiliation leads to His glory: expiation was the divine aim in that humiliation. Then in Isa. 53 His people trace, in view of Him, their past and most guilty blindness, as they think of His wondrous humiliation, their misjudgement of His life and death, and their present perception of its cause in their sins and misery from which He had come to save them. When they had of old beheld His path of shame and sufferings from first to last, they understood neither the grace which brought Him down so low nor the glories that should follow. They now justly feel and own (vers. 1-3) the power of unbelief in the chosen people: a far more humbling fact in them than among the nations sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. Israel had ample testimony; yet what scepticism! The very humiliation of the Messiah which should have endeared Him only drew out aversion. They misread Himself utterly, as if He were under ban like another Gehazi or Uzziah. But now (vers. 4-6) being taught of God, they avow before Him and men that underneath all that humiliation, and, as they wrongly thought, personal obnoxiousness or liability to God's judgement a deeper work was being done: first, the fullest identification with their burden on His own heart, as He went up and down the land, Immanuel's land,

entering into the weight of all that He healed (v. 4); and finally atonement before Him (v. 5). They had regarded Him, on the contrary, as an object of God's displeasure, and justly cast out and trampled on. But it was a total misconception of all His marvellous grace, a negligent oversight of their own deep necessities, both in the life that now is, and yet more for that which is to come. Hence Matt. 8:17 justly applies the first part of verse 4 to the Lord, as He relieved the afflictions of the Jews, and healed their diseases in His ministry, never bringing in bare power merely, but bearing all in spirit before God, while He cured them; as 1 Peter 2:24, 25 applies verse 5 to His work for our sins on the cross. This recognition of the truth opens the mouth in lowly confession of sin; as the heart will then feel its past evil ways, and each judges himself before God.

In vers. 7-9 Jehovah expresses His delight in the moral beauty which shone in the suffering One, affirming on His part the explanation of the enigma of the cross, though up to His death of shame man was allowed his way in disposing of Jesus. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and was as a sheep dumb before her shearers, and he opened not his mouth. He was taken from detention and from judgement: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And they made his grave with the wicked, but [he was] with the rich in his death,23 because he had done no violence, neither [was there] guile in his mouth" (vv. 7-9). The plague stroke was upon Him for the transgression of the people of Jehovah. It was not the outward fact simply of a rejected Messiah to

which He was pleased to submit, the awful proof of man's and Israel's moral state; but there is this divine key, and the far more wondrous meeting of a more hidden and a deeper need, even expiation. Yet even in His ignominious death God wrought so that by His resurrection from among the dead He should have honour unexpectedly.

Israel then reiterate the blessed truth with their Amen, pursuing the glorious consequences as far as it is theirs to see them. "Yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise him; he hath put [him] to grief: when thou shalt make his soul (or, when his soul shall have been made) an offering for sin, he shall see a seed, he shall prolong [his] days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand" (v. 10). Here the atoning work, in the suffering of the Lord for sin, is dwelt on with its issue as far as was suitable then to speak. It is blessedly true that the death and blood-shedding of the Saviour must be for propitiation; but it is as false a thought as any that the enemy of souls ever insinuated that this propitiation or atonement is or could be, according to God and His word, without His sufferings specifically, yea, that suffering which was the deepest expression of God's judgement of our iniquities, when He Who knew no sin was made sin for us and forsaken of God. His blood and death when viewed as expiatory, and not as the evidence simply of man's wickedness, are the blood and death of Him Who really bore our sins in His own body on the tree, and endured the to us unfathomable judgement of God, when not the Jews only but God hid His face from Him. Can a Christian slight this divine abandonment of Him Who suffered, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God? He may, but only as he may be guilty of grievous, not to say

fatal, error.24 God's part in atonement is and must be the deepest.

"1. He bare sin as a heavy burden: so the word of bearing in general, ἀνήνεγκεν, and those two words, particularly used by the prophet to which these allude are the bearing of some great mass or load, and that sin is. For it hath the wrath of an offended God hanging on it, indissolubly tied to it; of which who can bear the least?... Yea, to consider in the present subject where use may best read what it is, it was a heavy load to Christ, where the psalmist, speaking in the person of Christ, complains heavily, 'Innumerable evils have compassed me about. Mine iniquities' (not His, as done by Him, but yet His by His undertaking to pay for them), they 'have taken hold of me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head: therefore my heart faileth me.' And sure that which pressed Him so sore, who upholds heaven and earth, no other in heaven or earth could have sustained or surmounted, but would have sunk or perished under it. Was it, think you, the pain of that common outside of His death though very painful, that drew such a word from Him, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken Me? Or was it the fear of it beforehand, that pressed a sweat of blood from Him? No, it was this burden of sin, the first of which was committed in the garden of Eden, that then began to be laid upon Him, and fastened upon His shoulders in the garden of Gethsemane, ten thousand times heavier than the cross which He was caused to bear that might be for a while turned over to another, but this could not. This was the cup He trembled more at, than that gall and vinegar after to be offered Him by His crucifiers or any other part of His external

sufferings. It was the bitter cup of wrath due to sin that is rather put into His hand and caused Him to drink the very same thing that is here called the bearing our sins in his body.'... Jesus Christ is both the great high priest and the great sacrifice in one. And this seems to be here implied in these words, 'Himself bare our sins in his own body'; which the legal priest did not: so 'He made his soul an offering for sin.' He offered up Himself, His whole self. In the history of the Gospel it is said, His soul was heavy and chiefly suffered; but the bearing in His body and offering it, that is oftenest mentioned as the visible part of the sacrifice, and in His way of offering!, not excluding the other. Thus we are exhorted to give our bodies in opposition to the bodies of beasts, and they are therefore called a living sacrifice, which they are not without the soul. Thus His bearing in His body imports the bearing in His soul too." — The Works of R. Leighton, Jerment's edition, 1805, i. 370-376 It may be added that this was a point of objection by Cardinal Bellarmine to Calvin who maintained the same doctrine as is carped at now-a-days, and not merely by rationalist speculators, such as Mr. F. D. Maurice and his friends. It seems rather a peculiar mind which could cite 1 Peter 3:18 in a paragraph designed to prove that reconciliation or atonement is never in connection with Christ's sufferings specifically. It is false that the statement they oppose separates His sufferings from His blood and death; on the contrary while distinguishing the other points, the object was to insist on the inseparableness of His sufferings with His blood and death for atonement. The admission that they are not separated in the Spirit's mind for atonement is the true thesis, which is yielded. But it is wrong to say, "the two are never separated." It is merely inattention to

scripture (which distinguishes them), and it claims no answer.]

The chapter closes with Jehovah's confirmation, repeating the glorious results of both grace and government, and in each case connecting them with the work of salvation. "From (or, of) the travail of his soul shall he see, he shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant instruct the many in righteousness; and he shall bear their iniquities" (v. 11). Such seems the simple, true, and exact sense of the verse which has been lost sight of often by translators, and still more by preachers, as well as (through a very different influence) by Jews. There is no need of importing an evangelical sense, which really misleads as if by the knowledge of Himself," meant the knowledge respecting or concerning the Messiah.25 The broad facts in the Lord's history are before us: His ministry, when through His knowledge He instructed the mass in righteousness; His death when He bore their iniquities on the tree. The order is quite clear and sound; and there is no need for taking the copulative in a causal sense, or in any other than its own strict meaning.

It was thus the Lord taught on the mount as well as in other places and times during His sojourn on earth. Then came another and mightier work which could be shared by none. Others might suffer in love or in righteousness; He not merely in both, but He alone for the sins of others at God's hand, as we were expressly told in the verse before. But the Spirit never tires of the wondrous fact, and loves to present it on all sides, from God to man, and from man to God. Dan. 12:3 proves irrefutably that the Hebrew will bear the sense of "instruct in righteousness" as well as of "justify": which

of the two senses depends on the contextual necessity. There indeed it must mean the former; for, first, teachers cannot “justify” in the forensic sense (which is the true doctrinal force of the word, when thus employed as to the soul of a believer); and, secondly, as it is there a question of the many (the apostate mass of the Jews, which is the technical value of the words in Daniel), it must mean “instruct in,” rather than “bring to, righteousness,” for they do not bring them. Hence I doubt not it means similarly in Isaiah, though it may be here not so clear that “the many” has the same force. Still the burden of proof would lie on such as contend for a difference in the usage of the two prophets. To most minds their coincidence lends a mutual confirmation.

But sinful souls need far more than instruction, were it ever so perfect, as the Lord’s surely must be. Hence it is added, “And he shall bear their iniquities.” He suffers for them according to the scriptures, and His suffering for sin is efficacious. The change to “for” was due to the supposition that justification was meant in the previous clause, for which His bearing iniquities was the ground. Abstractly this is true, as all believers admit, according to abundant scripture; but the question here is, whether the text does not convey another truth, apt to be overlooked, in its plain unforced meaning with emphasis on “He.”

Jehovah closes His answer with the assured triumph that awaits Messiah, based as it is, for Him alone of conquerors, on His sacrificial death so long misread, and His gracious use of it on behalf of the transgressors with whom malice had confounded Him. “Therefore will I assign him [a portion] with the great (or, many), and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured

out (or, bared) his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors; and he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (v. 12).

The notion of the later Jews, (represented by Dr. Philippson for instance), that it is Jacob as a whole is a mere subterfuge, or that Israel's sufferings conduce to the happiness of the nations. "They are become the martyrs of the acknowledgment of the ONE, and by their exaltation the nations will be directed with the strength of conviction to the sole and only God. This view of the prophet is truly sublime.... The doubts, therefore, which the Jewish commentators (Redak and Abarbanel) have raised here, that this procedure would be opposed to the justice of God, which must allow every one to bear the punishment of what he has himself committed, can only be applied to individuals, while the prophet had in view the whole development of mankind." Now the fact is admitted, even by the Rabbis who brought in the idea, that the ancient Jews referred the suffering but righteous Servant of the passage to the Messiah, and this is the admission not of some but of the elders with one mouth. However, not any such confessions are cited as authorities in the least, but scripture only. Here all is light. The "we" of this section, as elsewhere is unquestionably Jewish, not Gentile; as unquestionably distinct from the One Whose position and relation to God they confess had been so fatally misconceived. To understand the "we" of the Gentiles is an impossibility; to take both "we" and "he" as Israel, or the prophetic body, is too absurd and self-contradictory. "He" is a real individual Who suffers from and for Israel, instead of being the same.

Then also, to notice another plea, the interchange of tenses is no more difficult here than elsewhere. It is habitual with the prophets, and with Isaiah no less than others. That Israel was viewed as the servant is true; and Israel failed as such. Then comes Messiah the Servant, Who glorifies God, yet suffers and dies, but, as here we learn, it was for Israel, though not for Israel only; and then Israel, sifted and repentant and believing in Him, are viewed in consequence as servants for His glory by-and by. Such is the scope of these later chapters of Isaiah.

But the idea of Israel being here meant by the suffering One is as false morally as exegetically. For it supposes that the Gentiles will yet acknowledge that Israel had to bear this hard fate solely for their redemption out of their sinful state (vv. 4-6); so that Israel through the patience which they exhibit notwithstanding all their sufferings, since they never departed from the only God, shall be placed on a yet higher eminence (vv. 7-9). Assuredly the Gentiles will yet confess their sins, not only their sins against God, but their cruel persecution and jealousy and envy of Israel. Assuredly they will yet trust with the real faith that is to be, but alas! is not yet, Israel's. But a more flagrant mistake was never made than that Israel can take the ground of unswerving righteousness like the suffering Messiah here. Take alone the very first chapter of Isaiah: we see there Israel suffering; but is it for righteousness? Is it not for their own appalling sins? And if it be said that such they were of old but that all is changed when we arrive at a later day such as in Isaiah 53, I answer let them see their divinely-painted portrait in its neighbourhood, in Isa. 57-59, and let them say where is the conscience which

can so trifle with the word of God and the facts of their own hearts and ways.

No; reading Isa. 53 we find ourselves in the midst of sacrificial imagery, of atonement for sin, of intercession for sinners; and these sins are pre-eminently Israel's, as will be the blessedness. We heartily admit this last, and rejoice and give God thanks for the grace He will yet extend to His ancient people. But they by grace will justly prove its genuineness by the confession of their own sins, above all against their own Messiah, not in self-righteousness pretending to have been a suffering Messiah themselves for the Gentiles. There is indeed vicarious suffering here, a holy substitute atoning for the guilty before God; but it is Messiah for Israel expressly, though not exclusively. For His death embraces every creature to be delivered from evil; and from first to last, not even the most distant hint of Israel suffering for the Gentiles. Jews suffered from them far, far too much; but they will never suffer for them. Jesus, the only spotless Lamb of God, Immanuel, died for that nation, for Israel, though — thanks be to God — for us also (John 11:51, 52). Worthily therefore is He now exalted, and we are in living union with Him Who sits on the throne of God. This however is not the point here, but His exaltation over the earth and the nations when Israel come to own their sins in the recognition of their suffering but then glorified Messiah. Thus it falls in with the general bearing of Old Testament prophecy, though it contains also the most luminous testimony to His humiliation and atoning work.

The language of the last verse presents no real difficulty save to those who read the first clause in connection with the gospel; whereas it looks on to the day of the

world-kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ, when He will come forth before every eye as the Lord of lords and King of kings, sharing with others the fruits of His victory. What gave occasion to the mistake is that the ground laid in the later clauses is His humiliation, atoning death, and intercession. This beyond doubt is the basis and the boast of Christianity. Only it is an inexcusable error to confine it to us who are now called from Gentiles as well as from Jews. The day hastens when the fullness shall have come in; and so Israel shall be saved. Then will this vision (Isa. 52:13 — Isa. 53:12) be fulfilled, and not as a whole till then.

Isaiah 54

How beautifully seasonable is the voice of the Spirit calling on Jerusalem to sing after His own clear and full prediction of Messiah rejected of Israel and bruised of Jehovah in atonement! Indeed the last section of the prophecy gave us a most striking and instructive rehearsal or dialogue between God and His people about Messiah, His sufferings, and the glories that should follow. Fitly therefore follows the invitation to her who had sorrowed so long and so justly now to rejoice because of her new blessing in His grace.

“Exult, thou barren, [that] didst not bear; break forth into singing, and shout aloud, thou [that] didst not travail with child: for more [are] the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith Jehovah” (v. 1). Never ought it to have been a question who is meant. The reference undoubtedly is to the heavenly and not to the earthly Jerusalem. As usual however, the commentators have confused what is plain, and agreed in scarce anything but departure from the

true sense and aim. The occasion of stumbling they have in general found, partly by their habit of excluding the Jews from the prophets and so judaising the Christians (limiting themselves to the past and present without taking in the Suture), partly from a misunderstanding of Gal. 4:27 through mixing it up with the “allegory” of Sarah and Hagar. But who does not see that the citation of the prophet connects itself rather with Jerusalem which is above, in contrast with Jerusalem which then was? When the prophecy is fulfilled in the millennial day, God will count those who now believe to be Jerusalem’s children, as well as the race to come in that day. Doubly thus it will be verified that more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife. For what fruit of the most flourishing times, say under David or Solomon, could compare with the gathering-in of the Christian saints since the Jews lost their place as the recognised witness and wife of Jehovah; or, again, with the vast progeny which Jehovah will give her after her long desolation, when His reign shall be displayed over the earth? (Consult Isa. 49:13-23; Isa. 60:8, 20-22).

It is important to see, on the one hand, that though it is according to scripture to regard Christians mystically as the children of desolate Jerusalem far outnumbering those of her married estate of old, the church, on the other hand, is not yet presented by God’s word as being in the relationship of the wife, either desolate or married. The marriage is future and on high. The bride, the Lamb’s wife, will not have made herself ready till she has been caught up to heaven glorified, and the harlot Babylon, the anti church, has been judged of Jehovah God. The real position of the church meanwhile is that of one espoused; her responsibility is to keep

herself as a chaste virgin for Christ. The marriage will be in heaven, just before the Lord and His glorified saints appear for the destruction of the Antichrist and all his allies. (Compare Rev. 19)

On the other hand, it is undeniable that the Jews, or Zion if you will, had the place of nearness to Jehovah which is represented under the figure of the marriage-tie, that she had been faithless and played the whore with many lovers (even the idols of the Gentiles), and that in consequence she was divorced, becoming a widow and desolate under the righteous dealing of God. Adultery was her sin, rather than fornication. No one in the least familiar with the prophets can have failed to notice this and more said of Israel. Then it was she became barren and did not bear. Praise is still silent for God in Zion; but the vow shall yet be performed to Him (Ps. 65:1); and the barren one shall sing and be no more barren but bear, astonished to find during those days of literal barrenness such an abundant offspring in the saints glorified on high, whom grace has been the while actively bringing in.

Nor is this all. “Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitations; spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall possess nations, and make desolate cities to be inhabited” (vv. 2, 3). The land, the earth, must be filled with a suited seed; for Jehovah shall be king over all the earth; in that day shall there be one Jehovah and His name one. Yea, Jehovah deigns to be the husband of Zion, not now a mere testimony and display of responsibility of man under law, but in the efficacy of grace when glorying is no more in the flesh

but in Jehovah. “Fear not, for thou shalt not be ashamed; neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker [is] thy husband: Jehovah of hosts [is] His name, and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall he be called. For Jehovah hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when rejected, saith thy God” (vv. 4 6).

Thus, and thus only, our chapter flows in its own proper channel: the exclusion of Israel by-and-by and the appropriation of it to the church as its intended scope produce nothing but violence and confusion by that interpretation. It is not true that God has forsaken the church even for a small moment, nor that in a little wrath He hides His face for an instant from the Christian: such and so great is the efficacy of redemption. Of the Jew as such it is precisely the present fact: as surely will He yet gather in His mercy His ancient people for ever. “For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In overflowing wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith Jehovah thy Redeemer. For this [is as] the waters of Noah unto me; since I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I will no more be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall my covenant of peace be removed, saith Jehovah that hath mercy on thee” (vv. 7-10).

No doubt the application to the Maccabean epoch falls incomparably short of the terms of blessing, and such views cast no small slight on the character of the word of God. But this is the fault, not of scripture, but of its misreaders. A people are in question who, having once stood in full favour and near relationship to Jehovah, forfeited it for a season, and finally are restored more than ever and for ever. There is but one such people: impossible that God should fail to have mercy on Israel. Guilty Christendom is doomed to destruction, and has no promise of restoration. Strong is the Lord God Who is to judge the Babylon that is now, worse and guiltier far than her of old (Rev. 17 - 18).

“O afflicted, tossed with tempest, not comforted! behold I will set thy stones in antimony, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy pinnacles of rubies, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy border of pleasant stones. And all thy children [shall be] taught of Jehovah; and great [shall be] the peace of thy children. In righteousness shalt thou be established; thou shalt be far from oppression, for thou shalt not fear, and from terror, for it shall not come near thee. Behold, they shall surely gather together, [but] not by me: whosoever gathereth together against thee shall fall because of thee. Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. No weapon that is prepared against thee shall prosper; and every tongue [that] riseth against thee in judgement thou shalt condemn. This [is] the heritage of the servants of Jehovah, and their righteousness [is] of me, saith Jehovah” (vv. 11-17). Thus the prophecy is not only of everlasting mercy reinstating the ancient people, but

along with it are images of beauty and glory with which Jehovah will adorn them. Truth will be theirs, for they all shall be taught of Jehovah; peace too, great peace, will be enjoyed; and, established in righteousness, they shall be far from oppression and fear, though not from hostile intention (as we know from Ezek. 38 - 39 at the beginning of the millennium, and from Rev. 20:7-9 at its end). But Israel will have hoped in Jehovah, and not in vain: for with Jehovah is mercy, and with Him plenteous redemption.

See on the two sides the frightful perversion to which all are exposed who allegorize the prophecies, as is the popular fashion of so-called high church and low church and no church; for it is hard to say who is most guilty in this path, ruinous to all faith and practice characteristic of Christianity. “To take an example” (said the late Matthew Arnold) “which will come home to all Protestants, Dr. Newman, in one of those charming Essays which he has of late rescued for us, quotes from the 54th chapter of Isaiah the passage beginning, I will lay thy stones with fair colours and thy foundations with sapphires, as a prophecy and authorisation of the sumptuosities of the Church of Rome. This is evidently to use the passage in the way of application. Protestants will say that it is a wrong use of it; but to Dr. Newman their similar use of passages about the beast, and the scarlet woman, and Antichrist, will seem equally wrong. But as to the historical substratum, the primary sense of the passage which Dr. Newman quotes, what dissension can there be? Who can deny that in the first instance, however we may apply them afterwards, and whether this after-application be right or wrong, the prophet’s words apply to the restored Zion?”

Now, without profitless wrangling on primary or secondary application, it is certain to faith that the Romanists have corrupted God's word to justify the lusts, vanities, and pomps claimed as her due by the great harlot of Rome, through the same insubjection to scripture which leads others at the opposite pole to make the best of both worlds; whose judgement is alike just. For they are verily inexcusable. The Christian, the church, is called to set the mind on things above, not on things on the earth, where we are called to walk by faith, not by sight, and to suffer both for righteousness' sake and for Christ's, in view of the heavenly glory into which He is gone before, while we await His coming to enjoy it with Him. For Israel it is altogether different. When brought into known relationship with Him, it is in earthly honour and glory; and nothing in nature will be too precious for the adornment of Zion. Beyond doubt they too will be born anew; but the days of the kingdom displayed in power (no longer in patience during the prevalence of evil) account for the radical and evident difference. Then will be the days of restored Zion, as much denied by the rationalist as by the superstitious who both look to man and present things. And thus is God's word made of none effect through man's traditions.

Without faith it is impossible to please God; and there is no real faith where God's great object of faith, the Lord Jesus does not arrest, command, and satisfy the heart. We speak now of those to whom He has been announced by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, rather than of the saints who waited for redemption before His first advent. We must not be deceived by or about such as find an entrancing interest, literary or even moral, in the

scriptures, without faith in Christ or the gospel. For this may be in the vilest of mankind where intellectual and aesthetic force is strong. Take another instance, to which we are referred in the same page of Mr. Arnold. “Admirably true are these words of Goethe, so constant a reader of the Bible that his free-thinking friends reproach him for wasting his time over it: ‘I am convinced that the Bible becomes even more beautiful the more one understands it; that is, the more one gets insight to see that every word which we take generally and make special application of to our own wants, has had, in connection with certain circumstances, with certain relations of time and place, a particular, directly individual, reference of its own.’“ Sadly true in its measure, say we; for God dealing with the soul, and hence with the life, by the truth in Christ, and meeting the sin-convicted with the fullness of His grace, was distasteful yea, despised and hated. He, who was never weary of talking about “the good of evil” (a sentiment worthy of Mephistopheles) had God in none of his thoughts, and was as far as possible from the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 55

Our chapter does not, after these remarks, call for many words. Its connection with what goes before is plain and makes its own bearing evident. The call is to Israel, but in such largeness of language as to warrant an aspect to the Gentiles. “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye weigh money for [that which is] not bread? and your labour for [that

which] satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye [that which is] good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live: and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given him [for] a witness to the peoples, a prince and commander to the peoples" (vv. 1-4). Here plainly some outstanding One is referred to, as to Whom no believer need hesitate. It is the Lord Jesus in royal relation to Israel (v. 3), and withal a witness and commander to the peoples of the earth (v. 4).

The thoughtful mind — at least if taught of God — will not overlook the divine application of verse 3 to the resurrection of our Lord, contra-distinguished from the use of Psalm 2:7, in Acts 13:33, 34. It had been indeed implied in Isa. 53:10, as in Ps. 16:10, 11; Ps. 21:4. His resurrection is both the security for the accomplishment of what was promised to Israel, and the occasion for the outflow of the grace which calls and shall yet call Gentiles into a share of God's blessing, and of the knowledge of Himself. Before death and resurrection, though He could never deny His deeper glory or His grace to the faith that saw either, He was not sent save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Crucified and risen, Christ is the attractive object for all indiscriminately. And the spirit of this wide grace breathes fragrantly through this chapter. "Behold, thou shalt call a nation thou knowest not, and a nation [that] knew not thee shall run unto thee, because of Jehovah thy God and the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee. Seek ye Jehovah while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his

way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto Jehovah, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts [are] not your thoughts, neither [are] your ways my ways, saith Jehovah. For [as] the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall accomplish that for which I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap [their] hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress, and instead of the nettle shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to Jehovah for a name, for an everlasting sign [that] shall not be cut off" (vv. 5-13).

Certainly the language rises into bright figures, expressive of a joy and blessing incomparably beyond human experience since sin came into the world, and with all the firmness given by Christ's coming to blot out sins by His blood, to establish everlasting righteousness, and to display the mercy and the glory of God here below. But can anything be more unreasonable, to say nothing of the ingratitude of unbelief, than to misuse such modes of expression to get rid of the truth and reduce the living word to inanity? Apply the grace of the chapter as much as can be done truly to the need and comfort of souls now by the gospel; there still remains

the clear intimation of “the times of refreshing” reserved for Him Who died and rose, when He comes from heaven to reign over the earth. Doubtless Christ is exalted to the highest in heaven; He sits on the Father’s throne; but He is coming to sit on His own throne, and will make His enemies His footstool. This He is not doing, but sitting on high till that moment be arrived. Now He is converting souls, as well as baptising believers into one body by the Spirit. Then He will break the nations with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel. How monstrous to pervert such words to the work of the gospel! It is that execution of divine judgement which inaugurates the Lord’s taking His own throne. He is now seated on His Father’s throne. When He reigns over the earth, we shall reign with Him, instead of suffering with Him, as we are called to do now.

Even to apply, yet more to restrict, such glowing language and such glorious hopes for Israel, the peoples, and the earth, to the restoration from the Babylonish exile, must always have been an extreme assumption, and it evidently tends to bring on scripture the charge of exaggeration. Yet more than ever in our day men claiming to be critics would reduce it to a promise that the homeward journey of the exiles should be pleasant and comfortable! Truly faith is not the portion of all, least of all, one might sorrowfully say, of critics. It is also flagrant ignorance of the Book they essay to interpret, and of its structure; for we have done with Babylon since Isa. 48 and Isa. 49 has begun the new theme of the rejected but glorified Messiah and the everlasting consequences. This fact alone dissipates all such delusions.

Isaiah 56

The next two chapters carry on the same line of truth we have seen since the rejection and atoning death of Christ came distinctly into view, and pursue the consequences of that infinite fact. As far as a natural division goes, one might be disposed to close the first subject treated in them with Isa. 56:8, and then to take from verse 9 to the end of Isa. 57 as completing not the second only but the entire section, which began with Isa. 49. According to this we should have here, first, the ways of Jehovah founded on the Messiah's death for sin in respect of the godly, even outside Israel; and, secondly, His ways, when He was displeased with the ungodly, not merely outside but in the midst of Israel. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.

Some have drawn from the Lord's citation of a clause of this section, that He intimates its then approaching accomplishment in the Christian church. Now it is not denied that as we have broad moral principles of grace on God's part in Isaiah 55, so too in its flowing out to the Gentiles in Isaiah 56, which are now realised in the gospel and the church, even more fully than anything here developed. But we ought not to overlook the fact that neither in Matthew nor in Luke is the Lord represented as quoting the reference to all the nations: an omission the more notable inasmuch as in both these Gospels, above all others though in each for a special reason, we have more respecting the change of dispensation then at hand, and the call of grace going out to the Gentiles than anywhere else. One cannot but gather thence, that, though in fact, as the full citation in Mark shows, the Lord did quote the words of our prophet without abridgement, yet this marked exclusion

of “all nations” in the two Gospels which most insist on the change from Israel to the Gentiles, is meant to intimate that no such application was then in His mind, but simply the gross perversion of Jehovah’s house of prayer into a den of robbers before His eyes, even as Jeremiah reproached the Jews of his day. There is nothing therefore, if this be correct, to turn aside the fulfilment of this blessed fruit of the cross from the future, however large the terms may be, and this not without purpose on God’s part.

The chapter then opens not with a call to sinners, as such, to repent and believe the gospel; but to the people of God to keep judgement and do justice, though the reason assigned is in no way the law given by Moses, but “My salvation is near to come, and My righteousness to be revealed.” When the apostle unfolds the glad tidings, he says that God’s righteousness is being revealed in the gospel; that it is manifested apart from law. Clearly this goes farther. Salvation is come, as we find in Eph. 2:8. “For by grace are ye saved through faith”; though, in view of our resurrection and glory, we as truly say that it is nearer than when we believed. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith (Gal. 5:5). The righteousness is established, and we are justified in virtue of this already; but we await through the Spirit the hope, the glorious issue, proper to that righteousness, when even in the body we shall be conformed to the image of God’s Son: “whom He justified, them He also glorified.” But this is the language of the New Testament apostle, not of our Old Testament prophet, who is occupied with the earthly people and their hopes, but in God-given terms of such

comprehensiveness as to justify the largest ways of grace.

“Thus saith Jehovah, Keep ye judgement and do righteousness: for my salvation [is] near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed. Blessed [is] weak man [that] doeth this, and the son of man [that] holdeth fast by it; that keepeth the sabbath from profaning it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil” (vv. 1, 2). The following verse (3) is even more express: the most distant, “the son of the stranger,” and the most desperate, “the eunuch,” were not beyond the reach of God’s merciful and mighty blessing. And this is repeated in the most forcible language as to both classes in the subsequent verses, concluding with the expression of Jehovah’s mind to be known and read of all men, that His “house should be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” “Neither let the son of the stranger that hath joined himself to Jehovah speak, saying Jehovah hath entirely separated me from his people; nor let the eunuch say, Behold, I [am] a dry tree. For thus saith Jehovah, Unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose [the things] that please me, and hold fast by my covenant, unto them will I give in my house and within my walls a memorial and a name better than of sons and of daughters; I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. Also the sons of the stranger that join themselves to Jehovah, to minister unto him and to love the name of Jehovah, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from profaning it, and holdeth fast by my covenant — even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices [shall be] accepted upon my altar: for my house shall be called a

house of prayer for all the peoples. The Lord Jehovah who gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather [others] to him, with those of his that are gathered" (vv. 3-8).

The second part (from Isa. 56:9 to Isa. 57:21) stands out in startling contrast at first sight; but it flows, without doubt, from the same principle as the first. The grace which goes forth ever so actively to the most miserable is of all things the most intolerant of evil; and its dealing is ever most delicate and jealous with those that are near enough to be so much the more responsible to reflect Jehovah brightly. "All ye beasts of the field, come to devour, all ye beasts in the forest. His watchmen [are] blind, they are all without knowledge; they [are] all dumb dogs, they cannot bark, dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, the dogs [are] greedy, they can never have enough; and these [are] shepherds [that] cannot understand: they have all turned to their own way, each one to his gain, from every quarter. Come ye, [say they,] I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to-morrow shall be as this day, [a day] great beyond measure" (vv. 9-12).

The Gentile oppressors are first invited to lay waste (v. 9). Those who ought to have watched and tended the beautiful flock of Jehovah not only slept, but they awoke to their own greed of gain and love of present ease, as indifferent about God as about His people (vv. 10-12). It is a vivid picture of that living to self and the things that are seen, which at a later date characterised the Sadducees who denied not only the resurrection but angel or spirit. The origin of their name is of small moment, their materialism was ruinous. If, as is said they derived their title from pretension to righteousness,

or even claimed to be a sacerdotal aristocracy from the eminent priest who in early days superseded Abiathar, either origin matters little. High-sounding representations among the Jews, as elsewhere, are commonly put forward to cover ungodliness and sensualism. And this frightfully evil state is here declared to have been conspicuous among the watchmen and shepherds of the chosen people. Such corruption laid the people and their leaders open, as we shall see in the chapter that follows, to yet worse, beneath which depth is none lower, idolatry leading the way.

Isaiah 57

On the other hand the Shepherd of Israel neither slumbered nor slept, and if the righteous perished without a soul's laying it to heart, it was but His hand after all taking the righteous away from the evil to come.

The growing apostasy of Judah made it no longer a desirable thing to live long on the earth, though normally it was a special promise for those obedient to the law. Now says the prophet, "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth [it] to heart; and merciful (or, godly) men [are] taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from before the evil. He entereth into peace: they rest in their beds, [each] that hath walked [in] his uprightness" (vv. 1, 2).

Next, the prophet under various figures of uncleanness arraigns the idolatrous Jews. "But draw near hither, ye sons of the sorceress, the seed of the adulterer and the whore. Against whom do ye sport yourselves? Against whom make ye a wide mouth, [and] draw out the tongue? [Are] ye not children of transgression, a seed of

falsehood, inflaming yourselves among the oaks (or, with idols) under every green tree; slaying the children in the valleys under the clefts of the rocks? Among the smooth [stones] of the valley [is] thy portion; they, they [are] thy lot: even to them hast thou poured a drink-offering, thou hast offered an oblation. Shall I be appeased for these things? Upon a high and lofty mountain hast thou set thy bed: thither also wentest thou up to offer sacrifice. And behind the doors and the posts hast thou set up thy memorial: for thou hast uncovered [thyself] apart from me, and art gone up; thou hast enlarged thy bed, and made thee [a covenant] with them; thou lovedst their bed, thou sawest their nakedness. And thou wentest to the king with ointment, and didst increase thy perfumes, and didst send thine ambassadors far off, and didst debase [thyself] unto Sheol" (vv. 3-9).

The sketch is most energetic, and the general scope is plain. The only allusion which strikes one as calling for particular notice is found in verse 9, "And thou wentest to the king with ointment." This will be the climax of Israel's heartless desertion of Jehovah, and rejection of the Messiah. They received not Him Who came in His Father's name; they will receive another who is to come in his own name. The spirit of this has been often verified, doubtless; but it awaits its full final signature in the Antichrist of the last days. He is "the king," as abruptly (but so much the more strikingly) brought in here as he is in Dan. 11:36-40. Unbelief as blindly acquiesces in the false and evil, as it ignores the truth and hates righteousness and grace. "The king" is not "the woman," "the great whore," but with those that work the destruction of Babylon, though only the more audaciously opposed to God and the Lamb. The Jew will

play a solemn part during this last struggle in the end of the age. “The king” will be in Judah and Jerusalem, the land and city destined for the Messiah; the centre of the Babylonish system is the great city of the west, Rome: but God will destroy the one, and the Lamb vanquish the other. The Beast and the false prophet, or “the king,” perish together.

As the Jews are thus shown persevering in wickedness and going from bad to worse, only destruction awaits them he alone should inherit the land who put his trust in Jehovah; for a remnant there ever is. “Thou wast wearied with the length of thy way; thou saidst not, There is no hope. Thou didst find a quickening of thy strength; therefore thou wast not faint. And of whom hast thou been afraid and in fear, that thou hast lied and not remembered me, nor laid [it] to thy heart? Have not I held my peace even of long time, and thou fearest me not? I will declare thy righteousness; and as for thy works, they shall not profit thee. When thou criest, let them whom thou hast gathered deliver thee; but the wind shall take them, a breath shall carry [them] all away: but he that putteth his trust in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain” (vv. 10-13).

Thus in the midst of this harrowing description of coming wickedness and woe Jehovah contrasts, with the hopeless destruction of the apostate, him that trusts in Himself as destined to possess the land (so long the prey of one usurping stranger after another) and to inherit His holy mountain (even to this day the boasted spoil of the Gentile infidel). “And it shall be said, Cast up, cast up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling-block out of the way of my people. For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name [is] Holy, I

dwell in the high and holy [place], with him also [that is] of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls [which] I have made. For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways and will heal him; and I will lead him, and will restore comforts to him and to those of his that mourn. I create the fruit of the lips: peace, peace, to [him that is] afar off and to [him that is] near, saith Jehovah, and I will heal him. But the wicked [are] like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, and whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (vv. 14-21).

"Except those days should be shortened, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matt. 24:22). Yea, Jehovah will heal, lead, and comfort. He creates thankful praise. Peace is His word, peace to him that is far off and to him that is near; but as for the wicked, like the troubled sea that casts up mire and dirt, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." Let the Jew take heed. Certainly the wicked of that people shall not escape. Of all nations, none then so favoured, and therefore were they beyond all responsible; and as they failed to the uttermost, who so guilty? Christendom, favoured much more than the Jew, then, is of all conditions of mankind far the most guilty. Before its eyes Jesus Christ is openly set forth crucified. Yet has it fallen from grace, and gone under law, and turned back again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto they desire once more to be in bondage. Nay,

the spirit of the apostasy sets in rapidly, and antichrists multiply far and wide. “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” But the Lord is at hand. Behold, the Judge standeth before the doors.

Let it be observed that it was “saith Jehovah” as against idols. Now that the deeper evil of rejecting God in Christ is discussed, the word is “saith my God.” Fancied Elohist or Jehovistic authors have nothing to do with it here or anywhere else. It depends on the nature of what is conveyed by the same writer. This principle of underlying purpose superficial and unbelieving readers failed to see, and betook themselves to the hypothesis of distinct authorship, partly out of their own lack of intelligence, and partly to unsettle and lower the scriptures. Familiar as we are with the rationalistic craze which denies to Isaiah the deep, lofty, and tender closing volume of his prophecy (Isa. 40-66), it would be hard to find a respectable name bold enough to demand an author for Isa. 57 different from him who wrote Isa. 48. In truth the hypothesis is everywhere a baseless dream, mischievous to a high degree, and shutting out the divine light afforded by an intelligent discrimination of those instructive names.

22 This phrase has tormented the critics. The fathers in general apply it to the spiritual work of Christianity; the ancient Jews for the most part to the judicial effect of Messiah’s kingdom in dispersing or casting away the Gentiles. Some of the old versions took the word as expressive of amazement. Gesenius (in his Thes) comes pretty much to the same thing considering the word to mean the effect in starting from their seats those who suddenly see some great personage when it was least expected. But “sprinkling” Is the literal meaning

however we may apply it. Some think it simpler to take it that He, Jehovah, will sprinkle many nations on Him the Messiah. But it is hard to see the superior propriety of such a sense to the common view that the very humiliation for the gracious work of redemption then achieved answers the surprise of many of old at the cleansing of many nations by-and-by.

23 The phrase used here is most expressive and points to the intensive and exceptional death of the Holy Sufferer as concentrating many — countless — deaths in that one. Henderson takes the phrase to mean “after his death.”

24 It is notorious that Jesuit preachers are wont to draw moving pictures, as of the physical torments of the lost, so of the external sufferings of our blessed Lord (i.e. the human rather than the divine side) Nor does one deny the substantial truth of what they reason is obvious. Unspiritual themselves, they appeal to that which strikes the senses and can excite the feelings or the fears of their least spiritual auditors. But men of a different stamp have always recognized that the word of God reveals a far deeper truth, not of what was before the eye or by the hand of man, merely, but of what passed unseen between God and Christ in that awful hour. So, to take an instance from one of the better sort, Archbishop Leighton rightly distinguishes this: “In that outside of His sufferings there was an analogy with the end and main work which was ordered by the Lord with regard unto that, being a death declared accursed by the law, as the Apostle Paul observes, and so declaring Him that was God blessed for ever to have been made a curse, that is accounted as accursed for us, that we might be blessed in Him, ‘in whom,’ according to the

promise, all the nations of the earth are blessed. But that wherein lay the strength and main stress of His sufferings was this invisible weight that none could see that gazed on Him; but He felt more than all the rest. In this are three things: 1. The weight of sin. 2. she transferring of it upon Christ. 3.His bearing of it.

25 Even Dr. Henderson, who is often free enough from popular prejudice gives this straining of the phrase.

Section 7: Isaiah 58 To 66

Isaiah 58

To Isa. 58 and Isa. 59 one might add Isa. 60 as completing the series. This is the opening of the last section of the prophecy (chaps. 58 - 66). The Spirit had closed both His counts against God's ancient people, their idolatry, and their rejection of the Messiah, with the consequences in the certainty of judgement, and not peace, for the wicked on either side. We have now a sequel or appendix, consisting of moral argument and appeal to the people, with a positive revelation of Jehovah's intervention and their establishment in glory and blessing. For no prophecy of scripture is of isolated interpretation; each links itself with the kingdom of Jehovah in the last days, however it may apply to lesser and passing circumstances in the prophet's days, or in the times that succeeded. Prophetic scripture does not interpret itself apart from that day, but forms a united system. Though it may be verified in particulars now and then, here or there, it looks onward to the final scenes, and connects what was wrought in the past with the state of things which will necessitate Jehovah's appearance on the scene to introduce His own day. The state of the Jews at the time called for this unveiling of their sins. "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and declare unto my people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that doeth righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous ordinances, they delight to draw near unto God.

Wherefore have we fasted, [say they,] and thou seest not? [wherefore] have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find [your own] pleasure, and exact all your labours" (vv. 1-3). It is the spirit of Pharisaism.

The notion of some26 that Protestantism is in question is as unfounded as the unbelief of an older day which turned aside the prophecy from Israel because no part of the blessing has as yet been accomplished in them as a nation. The quotation from this prophecy (Isa. 59:20), as employed by the apostle in Romans 11:26, appears clearly to refute both, by giving as the divine key the future salvation of that Israel which is now the most blinded and has stumbled at the Stumbling-stone. The time too is rendered certain; it is unquestionably not present any more than past, but future. For, as the Spirit there interprets the prophecy, we are not to look for its fulfilment in the salvation of all Israel (Isa. 59:20) till after the fullness of the Gentiles is come in; whereas this is only going on now and therefore is not complete. Hence the moment is not arrived even for commencing to apply to Israel. But faith can profit by it at any time.

Jehovah then deals with the exceeding hypocrisy of this people in their holy things. It was not that they failed to approach His temple, not only professing delight in His ordinances, but fasting and afflicting their souls. In vain! "Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure and exact all your labours. Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness; ye fast not [this] day to cause your voice to be heard on high" (vv. 3, 4). Nothing of the kind could be acceptable to Jehovah, Who will have truth in the inward parts, with things fair and good in the sight of all men. Hollow and

sterile religiousness is abominable in His eyes; and compels Him to judge themselves if He cannot sanction their sin. Hence the expostulation in vers. 5-7. “Is such the fast that I have chosen? the day for a man to afflict his soul — that he should bow down his head as a rush, and spread sackcloth and ashes [under him]? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to Jehovah? [Is] not this the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? [Is it] not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor wanderers to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?” (vv. 5-7).

Were there a response to His own goodness, in the practice of mercy which became the people of Jehovah to the oppressed and destitute, how would He not bless them! Were they to heed the sabbath, calling it a delight, and honouring Jehovah, how should they not delight themselves in Him, riding in the high places of the earth, and fed with the heritage of their father Jacob! “Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy healing shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee, the glory of Jehovah shall be thy rearward. Then shalt thou call, and Jehovah shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I [am]. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and the speaking vanity; and [if] thou proffer thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall thy light rise in darkness, and thine obscurity [be] as the noonday: and Jehovah will guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make strong thy bones; and thou shalt be

like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters deceive not. And [they that shall be] of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called Repairer of the breach, Restorer of paths of habitation. If thou turn back thy foot from the sabbath, [from] doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy [day] of Jehovah, honourable; and thou honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking [idle] words, then shalt thou delight thyself in Jehovah; and I will make thee to ride upon the high places of the earth; and I will feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of Jehovah hath spoken" (vv. 8-14).

Isaiah 59

"Behold, Jehovah's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor his ear heavy that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid [his] face from you, that he doth not hear" (vv. 1, 2). And what a picture follows in verses 3-15! "For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips are speaking lies, your tongue muttereth wickedness. None sueth in righteousness, none pleadeth in truthfulness. They trust in vanity, and speak falsehood; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity. They hatch serpents' eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper. Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works; their works [are] works of iniquity, and the act of violence [is] in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they make

haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts [are] thoughts of iniquity; desolation and destruction [are] in their paths. The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgement in their goings: they have made them crooked paths; whosoever goeth therein knoweth not peace. Therefore is judgement far from us, neither doth righteousness overtake us: we look for light, but behold darkness; for brightness, [but] we walk in obscurity. We grope for the wall like the blind, yea, we grope as having no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the twilight; among the flourishing we [are] as dead [men]. We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves: we look for judgement, and there is none; for salvation, [but] it is far off from us. For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions [are] with us, and our iniquities, we know them: in transgressing and lying against Jehovah, and turning away from following our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. And judgement is turned away backward, and righteousness standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and uprightness cannot enter. And truth is lacking; and he [that] departeth from evil maketh himself a prey. And Jehovah saw, and it displeased him that there was no judgement." Hands and fingers, lips and tongues, all polluted and perverse; justice not called for, truth unpleaded; vanities and lies, mischief and iniquities; subtlety of evil and ever-increasing virulence; active but vain corruption and violence. What sanguinary feet! what iniquitous thoughts! What wasting and destruction in the crooked paths where peace is unknown! Hence, without judgement, they walk in darkness, grope like the blind, and are (? in desolate places) as dead men, whether

raging as bears or mourning as doves. Salvation is far off, because of multiplied transgressions and departure from God, with truth fallen in the street, and equity unable to enter, and the godly a prey, so that Jehovah held it evil in His sight that there was no judgement. The Spirit guides into confession and hides nothing.

But such utter moral chaos, hopeless for man, was the call for Jehovah's intervention. "And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; and his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. And he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on garments of vengeance [for] clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak. According to deeds, accordingly he will repay: fury to his adversaries, recompense to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompense" (vv. 16-18). It is the picture of the mighty intervention of God for His people in the last days, though not at all resembling what He will do for the heavenly saints. These He will remove from the scene of their pilgrimage to heaven, His earthly people He will deliver from their enemies by judgement in that day. Thereby He will teach the nations wisdom, or at least the beginning of it in His fear. "And they shall fear the name of Jehovah from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the adversary shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of Jehovah shall lift up a standard against him" (v. 19). It is not by the gospel, but by the execution of judgement on the Gentiles. Can any conclusion be plainer? Our translation to heaven is purely of grace.

It is not, on the one hand, a mere outward interference, but the power of the Spirit will accompany it. On the

other hand, here is not the action of the Spirit in the absence of the Lord, as now in Christianity. “And the Redeemer will come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith Jehovah” (v. 20). The apostle (Rom. 11:26) cites it27 as His coming out of Zion. Doubtless both are true and each appropriate in its place. The Redeemer must come to that mountain of royalty in the Holy Land in order to come out thence; and He will come to the righteous remnant, the Israel of God, even to such as turn from transgression in Jacob, as He will also turn away ungodliness from Jacob. There will be conversion of heart before Jehovah appears in the extremity of their distress and to the destruction of their foes; but that appearing will deepen all their feelings toward Himself and bring them into peace and blessing fully and for ever. “And as for me, this [is] my covenant with them, saith Jehovah, My spirit that [is] upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith Jehovah, from henceforth and for ever” (v. 21).

Now when the same apostle was opening out to the saints in Rome the gospel of God, he cites weighty and withering words from the early verses of our chapter to convict of sin and ruin, and thus to prove the abject need of grace (Rom. 3:15-17, 19, 20). But this he follows up with God’s justifying freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, Whom God set forth as a mercy-seat through faith in His blood. This is truly good news to the sinner, Jew or Gentile. But the prophet follows up his unveiling of the sins of the people with the intervention of Jehovah in garments of vengeance, rendering fury to His adversaries, recompense to His

enemies. This is not what He is doing now, nor is it in any way the gospel of grace. It is His coming in the displayed kingdom. Then indeed will the Redeemer come to Zion, as He will identify Himself with His people Israel; and He will come out of Zion, as manifestly espousing their cause, to tread down their foes.

The Epistle to the Galatians gives no countenance to the prevalent error that all believers now, the church, are the Israel of God. The apostle does apply the phrase only to such Jews as now confess Jesus to be the Christ. They and they only are now acknowledged as the Israel of God; but they are distinguished in the same verse from the general mass of the saints, “as many as walk according to this rule” — the rule not of circumcision or of uncircumcision, but of a new creation in Christ Jesus. And the Epistle to the Romans adds, to the full assertion of the gospel and its effects, the distinct intimation that, when the fullness of the nations, now being called out, shall have come in, all Israel shall be saved. The teaching of the apostle is largely lost by those who do not see the present indiscriminate grace shown to the Gentiles as well as Jews, and the future recall of Israel which shall be “life from the dead.”

Isaiah 60

As we have had the failure and guilt of Israel in idolatry and the rejection of the Messiah traced down to their reception of “the king” as well as of idols in the last days, so now we have not a pledge or promise of covenanted blessing under the Redeemer King, but the scene of joy and blessing and honour for Zion, when the hour arrives for His glory to be revealed here below. There is no ground for doubting that, as before we had

the dark picture of God's earthly people, so here we are permitted to behold the sure anticipation of the brightness in store for them. The church is not here in question.

"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of Jehovah is risen upon thee. For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples: but Jehovah will arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And nations shall walk in thy light, and kings in the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons come from far, and thy daughters are nursed upon the side. Then thou shalt see and be brightened, and thy heart shall throb and be enlarged; for the abundance of the sea shall be turned unto thee, the wealth of the nations shall come unto thee. A multitude of camels shall cover thee, dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense, and they shall show forth the praises of Jehovah. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall serve thee; they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will beautify the house of my magnificence" (vv. 1-7).

But there is another picture which sets out the change among men by divine goodness. The ships of the Gentiles play their part now in serving Israel's sons with honour. "Who [are] these [that] fly as a cloud, and as doves to their dovecotes? Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from afar, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of Jehovah thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, for he hath glorified thee. And the sons of strangers

shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee. Therefore thy gates shall be open continually (they shall not be shut day nor night); that [men] may bring unto thee the wealth of the nations, and [that] their kings [may be] brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, [those] nations shall be utterly wasted. The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the cypress, the pine (or, plane), and the box-tree together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious. The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, The city of Jehovah, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel" (vv. 8-14).

There is no thought here of God's glory revealed in the face of Christ on high and made known by the Spirit to the heart (2 Cor. 4:6); the earth itself is the theatre of this divine display. Another point to be noticed is that, immediately before the time arrives, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples. Plainly therefore it is a false interpretation of prophecy that light is to be diffused universally when the time of earthly glory for Israel, as well as the heavenly glory of the church, dawns on the world. Zion is to be visited in the mercy of God when the Gentile lands are enveloped in the grossest ignorance of God. So the apostle predicts the apostasy before that day (2 Thess. 2).

Again, in ver. 3 there is a point of striking contradistinction to the present dealings of God. For now the fall of the Jews has been the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles

(Rom. 11:12); but here all is in contrast: the Gentiles are blessed after Israel is restored to Jehovah's favour, so indeed Rom. 11:15 teaches us that their reception shall be to the world life from the dead. Hence, when Jehovah's glory shall be seen on Zion, the nations shall come to that light and kings to the brightness of its rising.

The gospel now goes out freely and its light is diffused far and wide, though only as a testimony; for it admits not of the power which binds Satan and changes the face of creation. But in our chapter Jerusalem has its proper central place, as the metropolis of the earth when all shall be settled and governed according to God. Nor is it only sons and daughters that thus come to Zion from far, but strangers too. For there is then to be no such state of things on earth as the church of God, one body, Christ's body. On the contrary Gentiles and Israel, though both blessed by Jehovah, will be distinct and kept so, however harmonious in their relations. So too it is the day when outward things are to be no unmeet offering to Jehovah: camels and dromedaries, flocks and herds, land and sea, shall pour their tribute before His feet. To think now of serving God thus would be to go back to beggarly elements from the revelation of heavenly and eternal things in Christ; whereas gold and incense will be in season, and sacrifices will be then acceptable for His altar and the house of His glory. But no such joy shall be for the isles and the nations and creation generally, till the Holy One of Israel glorifies Zion, rescuing her from the stranger that now treads her down to her sorrow and his own loss. But He shall arise and have mercy on that royal hill, and His servants take pleasure in her stones and favour her dust. Not till then

shall the heathen fear His name, and the kings of the earth His glory, as is here described so variously.

But when Jehovah builds up Zion, all shall be turned to Him. God will make this favour to Jerusalem felt universally in due time, after punishing those who think to gain all by the overthrow of His people. All nature will join to adorn the sanctuary of Jehovah; and those who by-and-by represent the nations that once afflicted Israel will then be abject in their homage and prostration when Zion is exalted. Many images here used to mark the glory of the earthly Jerusalem are employed in a more glorious way for the new Jerusalem of Rev. 21-22. But the attentive reader will not fail to mark the essential differences also. Take this one in particular. The nation and kingdom that will not serve the restored earthly Jerusalem shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted (ver. 12). The glorified church, the heavenly Jerusalem, on the contrary, is true to her mission of grace even in the day of glory. For as to her not only is there no word of this judicial character, but there is the witness of beneficent and unfailing grace. The tree of life is there, on either side of the river of life. No other tree is seen to threaten death. But the tree of life, while it bears its full and varied yet constant fruits for those within, affords its gracious succour also to the need of those without: its leaves are for the healing of the nations (Rev. 22:2).

For anything like such heavenly grace as this, Babylon (proud, corrupt, cruel) had no eyes, ears, or heart; she, the false church, did and does arrogate the claims which are alone true of Jerusalem by-and-by. She even ignored and hated the reality of grace which the bride of Christ is called to show. And no wonder; for she is a harlot, and

detests Him that is Holy, Him that is True, indulging in lusts and lies and blood, till divine judgement fall.

But the prophet says of Zion, “Instead of thy being forsaken and hated, so that no man went through [thee], I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations. Thou shalt also suck the milk of the nations, and shalt suck the breast of kings; and thou shalt know that I Jehovah [am] thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob. For bronze I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood bronze, and for stones iron; I will also make thine officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise. The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but Jehovah shall be unto thee an everlasting light; and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for Jehovah shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended” (vv. 15-20).

Here is evidence overwhelming, were more wanted, that the church on earth or in heaven is not represented here, but the ancient people of God blessed according to His promise and prophecy. For righteousness dealing according to an earthly measure is the rule; and it is the day also not for an elect witness, but “thy people also [shall be] all righteous,” and this in prosperous power, instead of knowing the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings, being made conformable to His death. “They shall possess the land for ever — the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. The little

one shall become a thousand, and the smallest a strong nation: I Jehovah will hasten it in its time" (vv. 21, 22).

The main source of erroneous interpretation among the orthodox is the obliteration of Israel to bring the church into their place of promised earthly glory. Therefore minds at all spiritual revolted from these visions of worldly honour, material prosperity, long life, and the like, and sought to make them figures of higher things. But the Christian and the church have their spiritual blessings in heavenly places, as is distinctly set forth in the New Testament; while the Old Testament predicts these wondrous changes in the land and the earth for Israel and the nations, when the kingdom is set up in visible power and glory. There is therefore not only no justification for getting rid of the plain meaning of the prophets, but we wrong God's ancient people, to say nothing of the nations, of that bright prospect which is revealed for the earth. And good men are guilty of bad reasoning and worse exegesis who dislike to admit the glorious state predicted as a simple literal fact in honour of the Second man, the last Adam. Far be it to accuse such unbelieving believers of Manicheeism; but their speculations deprive them of entering into that immense counsel of God which will put the entire universe under Christ's headship, and bind the earth beneath and the heavens above in united blessedness to His own glory, as we may read in Eph. 1:10; of which Rev. 21 - 22 is the New Testament display prophetically.

Isaiah 61

This forms the beginning of a section (Isa. 61 — Isa. 63:1-6 which embraces Jehovah-Messiah in His first advent as well as His second for the blessing and glory

of Israel and the destruction of their enemies. We have the Lord's own warrant in Luke 4. for declaring that the early portion He read applies to His then presence in grace here below. It has been often and justly observed how He stopped after the first clause of verse 2, closing the book, and in due time saying, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. He cites what portrays His character as it was (or about to be) displayed on earth at that time in ways of divine mercy, but forbears even to finish the sentence where the part following alludes to His exercise of judicial wrath. Such was in no way the object of His first coming; and so, if strangely in appearance, with divine wisdom He read no more. "The day of vengeance of our God" awaits the epoch of His appearing in power and glory. "The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah [is] upon me, because Jehovah hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek. He hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and opening of the prison to the bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of Jehovah, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, that beauty be given them instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of the spirit of heaviness" (vv. 1-3).

The richest mercy will then indeed be the spring of God's way with Israel. For Jehovah, while He executes earthly judgement, will comfort those that mourn, especially mourners in Zion, giving them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, "that they might be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of Jehovah, that he might be glorified. And they shall build the old wastes,

they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations. And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and aliens' sons [shall be] your ploughmen and your vine dressers. But ye shall be named Priests of Jehovah: they shall call you Ministers of our God. Ye shall eat the wealth of the nations, and into their glory shall ye enter. Instead of your shame [ye shall have] double; [instead of] confusion they shall rejoice in their portion: therefore in their land they shall possess the double; everlasting joy shall be unto them. For I Jehovah love judgement, I hate robbery with iniquity; and I will give their recompense in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. And their seed shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they [are] a seed Jehovah hath blessed" (vv. 3-9). Restoration of past decayed places shall go forward; strangers shall serve Israel, who shall themselves be called priests of Jehovah. For their shame they should have not merely reinstatement of what had lapsed but double, like Job; and Jehovah, Who as fully loves judgement as He hates robbery with wrong, will make an everlasting covenant with them; so that all who see them will acknowledge that they are indeed the blessed of Jehovah.

Nay more, Jehovah Himself becomes the centre of all joy and the giver of all beauty, causing righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations. "I will greatly rejoice in Jehovah, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh [himself] with

the turban, and as a bride adorneth [herself] with her jewels. For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord Jehovah will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations" (vv. 10, 11).

We see how the Holy Spirit, having testified to the Messiah and His character which was of the utmost value for souls at His first advent, passes by His rejection and going on high which brought in the church, and hastens on to His establishment of the kingdom in Zion at the latter day. So it is here, as with prophecy in general. They look on to Israel restored in the land when Christ reigns publicly. The fundamental principle of neology, that we have no more than a forecast of what was at the door, is a daring lie against inspired prophecy, the great body of which is on the magnificent and holy reign of the Messiah not yet begun. Hence the desire to treat it as "ideal"; hence indifference to the bright and assured prospects of Israel under Him and the new covenant, not in principle only, but in its fulfilled terms to the joy and blessing of all the nations and of the earth itself.

Theodoret in his comment, like others, saw the church, not the future restoration of Israel and the Lord reigning in Zion after receiving those that now believe to heavenly glory. And such is the prevalent view of Christendom still. They overlook the plain testimony which the New Testament renders to the setting aside, as of the Jew in the past, so of the Gentile in the future, because of failure to continue in the goodness of God. Yet that failure is a fact over which every God-fearing soul mourns; and the apostolic warning of it is set forth

beyond doubt in Romans 11, while the judgement of Christendom and the habitable earth is declared in many scriptures from Matthew to the Revelation. When that judgement of the quick is executed, Israel shall be saved, and these bright promises for the earth fulfilled, not before nor otherwise.

Isaiah 62

The Spirit of Christ in the prophet is importunate in intercession for Zion, as we see in the beginning of this chapter. For He it is that praises Jehovah in the name of the people and their capital. He speaks for the Bridegroom and for the earthly bride, so perfectly now in the expression of joy, as once in that of unfathomable grief and infinitely gracious suffering for sin. But it is not now in view of sin and weakness and unworthiness, but that Zion may henceforth shine brightly in her light of righteousness and salvation before the nations and all kings. “For Zion’s sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp [that] burneth. And the nations shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory; and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of Jehovah shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of Jehovah, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken, neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah; for Jehovah delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married” (vv. 14). Land and people are bound up in the plans and affections of Jehovah the latter called, My delight is in her; the former, Married. And this mark of favour will

prove a divine ground of patriotism for Israel. “For [as] a young man marrieth a virgin, shall thy sons marry thee; and with the joy of the bridegroom over the bride shall thy God rejoice over thee” (v. 1), a still higher source of joy.

The Spirit of Christ working in the prophet also bears witness of the unceasing cry to Jehovah to effect His glorious counsels as to Jerusalem. “I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace all day and all night: ye that put Jehovah in remembrance, take ye no rest, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make, Jerusalem a praise in the earth” (vv. 6, 7). at is of great interest to observe the place of watchmen here. And blessed the day when it will be not so much their warning men against evil in treachery or violence, as their loudly reminding Jehovah of the mercy that endures and of the reversal of all past sin and shame in Jerusalem established and made a praise in the earth. “Jehovah” on His part “hath sworn by His right hand, and by the arm of His strength, Surely I will no more give thy corn [to be] meat for thine enemies; and sons of the alien shall not drink thy wine, for which thou hast laboured; for they that have garnered it shall eat it, and praise Jehovah; and they that have gathered it together shall drink it in the courts of my holiness” (vv. 8, 9). Assuredly this oath infallibly secures Israel on the earth.

Hence the animation of verse 10: “Go through, go through the gates; prepare the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones, lift up a standard for the peoples” (v. 10). The day of Jehovah is there; He the Messiah is there for the salvation of Zion’s daughter — His reward with Him, and His work before

Him. So Jehovah proclaims to the end of the world as His message to her. “Behold, Jehovah hath proclaimed unto the end of the earth, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward [is] with him, and his recompense before him” (v. 11). “And,” on the other hand, “they shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of Jehovah: and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken” (v. 12).

“Happy people that is in such a case; happy people whose God is Jehovah.” He will rejoice over Jerusalem, as a bridegroom over a bride. No more shall His people be called Azubah (Forsaken), no more the land be called Shemamah (Desolate), but Hephzibah (My delight is in her) the one, and Beulah (Married) the other. The blessing henceforward rests on Jehovah-Messiah, Who never did nor can fail; not on the worm Jacob who neither could be, nor ought to have been, relied on. Henceforward it is not the first covenant which claimed but could not find fulfilment fit for Jehovah from sinful Israel. It will be for ever the new covenant, founded on an infinitely better sacrifice which brings the remission of sins, and Jehovah’s putting His law in their inwards and writing it in their hearts, Himself their God, and they His people. Messiah’s prime interest then will be Israel and Jerusalem, but all the nations and the earth shall be blessed in divine goodness.

Some find a difficulty, because the Revelation (Rev. 19:21, 22) clearly teaches that the church is the bride, the Lamb’s wife; whereas Isaiah says it of Israel, and of their land with Jehovah. But there is really none; for the one speaks of what is for heaven, the other for the earth. And what hinders there being an object especially dear on high, and another here below in that day? But there

is no confusion of the two in scripture; still less room for that truly carnal method of interpretation which by a strange hallucination the divines call spiritualizing, the essence of which system is to identify the Jew with the Christian, to metamorphose the land into heaven, to swamp long-suffering grace into the reign of righteousness, and imagine a kingdom of the Spirit to the denial of Christ's world-kingdom, heralded by prophets of old, sung by psalmists, and sealed by the Saviour and the apostles. Both are true, but their spheres are as distinct as the objects themselves, as the character of the relation which Christ bears to each, and even as the languages in which they are respectively revealed. To confound them is to deny the future hopes of Israel, and to lose the heavenly place of the church.

The church has never been forsaken of God; while Zion unquestionably has; nor have we as members of the glorified Christ another fatherland but heaven, which cannot be termed desolate. Apply the language to Israel, and all is clear and unequivocal, without doing violence to a single expression.

Isaiah 63:1-6

These verses connect themselves with the close of Isa. 62, following up the coming of the Messiah (as the Deliverer of Zion no longer forsaken but sought out, and all her dispersed children now gathered in) with a most vivid sight, as it were, of His return from executing vengeance on their Gentile foes. The scene of the slaughter is laid in the land of Edom and the city of Bozrah. Horsley seems inconsistent in denying any mention of these places here, while admitting them in Isa. 34:5, 6. He would translate the proper names as

appellatives thus: “Who [is] this that approacheth all in scarlet, with garments stained from the vintage? This [that is] glorious,” etc. But that able man had overlooked the chapter just referred to, where the scene demands the proper names. This consideration, in my judgement, gives conclusive support to the ordinary translation.

But commentators in general contradict each other without being able to discern the divine light in the words of the prophet. Thus Origen and Theodoret, Tertullian and Jerome, may illustrate views which have too long prevailed, so far as to lead the compilers of the English Common Prayer Book to read it for the Epistle on the Monday before Easter. They actually regard the scene as prophetic of the Saviour suffering for our sins, instead of seeing in it the Avenger of His long-oppressed Israel; as a pledge of mercy, not as a threat of judgement. Hence the good Bishop of Cyrrhus thinks the prophet here points out Jehovah’s ascent to heaven, lays stress on Edom as the red land, connects the pierced side and blood and water with the blood-stained garments, and sees the destruction of the devil and all his host in the treading of the winepress.

Calvin justly objects to such a perversion of the prophecy; but he is quite as far from the true mark as any when he proceeds to apply it not to Christ, but simply to God Himself as such in His dealings of old with the Edomites, and other enemies of His people, when He broke them by the Assyrians of old. This is to make the word of private or isolated interpretation, dislocating it from its true aim and scope in the illustration of the glory of the Lord Jesus, not at His first advent, but when He comes again.

Luther's notion is strange enough: he regards it as a prediction of the punishment of the Jews or Synagogue, not an infliction on their enemies for their rescue in the latter day. The Jew, as is commonly known, conceives that the divine wrath which impends over Rome, as the full meaning of the enemy here named Edom, is the real thought. Bishop Lowth rightly combats Grotius' hypothesis that Judas Maccabeus and his victories make the subject of it; or the subsequent exploits of John Hyreanus, his brother Simon's son. "It may be asked [he adds], to whom, and to what event, does it relate? I can only answer, that I know of no event in history to which, from its importance and circumstances, it can be applied, unless perhaps to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish polity; which in the Gospel is called the coming of Christ and the days of vengeance. Matt. 16:28; Luke 21:22."

This suffices to prove the bewilderment of Christian writers down to our times, which is yet more confessed by some, like the last, owning that "there is no necessity of supposing that it has been already accomplished."

Vitringa, as usual, is more erudite than the mass; but there seems to be no good reason for treating, as he does, the local references as mystical. For when the great day arrives, the world will behold a wonderful reappearance, not of Israel only, but of their ancient rivals and enemies, whom, like the ten tribes, men of the world assume to be for ever extinct. It will be the day of reckoning for the nations, and the end will righteously answer to the beginning. At any rate there is nothing valid enough to set aside the plain mention of these localities, nor the fact of an utter overthrow of the Gentile enemies of Israel there.

But the great fact, overlooked by almost all, is that it is here no question of the heavenly church, but of the earthly people, Israel. The church is removed from the scene by grace to meet the Lord, and be with Him in the Father's house, though surely also to appear with Him in glory and to reign with Him over the earth. But not such is the character of the deliverance of Israel; and of this Isaiah treats, like the Old Testament in general. It is by the execution on earth of judgements, which have for their object the salvation of the Jews and the destruction of their enemies. This object accordingly accounts for terms, which are hard indeed to be explained when men think of the church in these verses. Believe that Israel is there, and what more proper than such a description of their Deliverer, as "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save," or "The day of vengeance is in my heart"? Is this the way we think of His love to us, or His attitude even to the world while we are passing through? How can vers. 5, 6 apply to Him as Head of the church? Bring in the question of Israel delivered for His kingdom here below, and all is consistent and clear.

It is then the Lord, Jehovah-Messiah, Who is here seen in the prophetic vision, returning victorious from the spot which more than one prophecy declares to be the theatre of the wrath which shall be poured out unsparingly on the foes of His people. "Who [is] this," asks the prophet identifying himself with the people, "that cometh from Edom, with deep-red garments from Bozrah, this [that is] glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?" His answer (for it assumes the form of a dialogue) is, "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." "Wherefore," asks Isaiah again, "[art thou] red in thine apparel, and thy garments

like him that treadeth in the wine-vat?" "I have trodden," answers He, "the wine-press alone: and of the peoples not a man was with me; and I have trodden them in mine anger, and trampled them in my fury; and their blood is sprinkled upon my garments, and I have stained all my raiment. For the day of vengeance [is] in my heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: and mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me. And I have trodden down the peoples in mine anger, and made them drunk in my fury, and I have brought down their strength (lit. juice) to the earth" (vv. 1-6).

Manifestly it is no picture of Christ forsaken of God nor even rejected of man, but of His treading down the opposed nations, as grapes in a wine-press. It is not infinite love suffering infinitely that sin might be judged, and God glorified about it, and thence able to justify the believer from all things. It is One trampling down in wrath, and the blood of His enemies sprinkling His garments, not His blood washing them in divine grace. It is not the day of grace but of vengeance, though along with it the year of His redeemed is come when the scattered and peeled people shall be brought to Zion with everlasting joy on their heads. Now it is the day of salvation for the Gentiles who believe, while wrath to the uttermost is come on the Jews who believe not.

The reference is plain to Isa. 61:2 with the notable difference that here "the day of vengeance" precedes "the year of my redeemed"; whereas in the previous chapter "the acceptable year of Jehovah" takes precedence of "the day of vengeance of our God." And this latter order had a beautiful propriety in the Lord's

own application of that part only which illustrated His first advent. For if we have eyes to see according to God, we shall not fail to discern the admirable way in which the Holy Spirit, while looking onward to the day of manifested glory even for Israel and the earth, does not omit to prepare for the grace and humiliation on which that glory is based, that it should have the deepest moral grounds, not mere power or even wisdom. God must intervene for the heart to know Him; and man, believing man, must be cleansed from every sin and all unrighteousness.

Here however it is Jehovah-Messiah executing unsparing judgement on earth, treading the peoples in His anger and trampling them in His wrath. Those who cavil at this as inconsistent with His holy goodness betray their own rebelliousness and the bad conscience which dreads His day at length, when He summarily puts down the iniquity which has so long destroyed the earth. When divine vengeance has done its necessary and righteous work with the peoples and enemies of Israel, the ways of God succeed in goodness, and the godly remnant, His people, testify to them with praise, as we shall next hear.

Far different is the gospel era. It is truly a time of acceptance, and a day of salvation, quite apart from judgements on either Jew or Gentile. It is based on an incomparably deeper and more mysterious judgement, when God availed Himself of the rejection of the Messiah by both Jews and Gentiles, and wrought the amazing work of His grace toward ungodly and lost man in the sacrifice of His Son, the Lord Jesus, for our sins, and for the redemption of all who believe. In the gospel there is no difference: all sinned; and the same Lord of all is rich toward all that call upon Him (Rom. 3:23;

Rom. 10:12). In the kingdom there will be a difference, at least in honour; Zion and Israel shall have a position beyond every other place and people under their King, Jehovah of hosts. The church glorified has at that very time a still higher and nearer relationship beyond question; as we are now called to walk in faith and hope. For it is always the special and proper revelation for any given time which is intended of God to act on souls, not merely the general principles of divine truth which apply necessarily from first to last. The coming of our Lord brought this out in the strongest relief as He personally was the truth in all its fullness, His finished work removed all impediments and led to the revelation of the light of God's glory in His face, and the Holy Spirit was thereon sent forth to be in the believer and in the church a spirit of communion, such as never could be before, and never is nor can be again.

Isaiah 63:7-19

The last section brought together at its beginning the Lord's first advent, at its end His second advent, with Jerusalem as the special object here contemplated in His earthly plans. We now enter on the closing part of this great and varied prophecy. There are two divisions in it. The first, that which affords us our present theme (from Isa. 63:7 to the end of chapter Isa. 64), consists of a most urgent intercession by the Spirit in the mouth of the prophet on behalf of Israel with Jehovah, after recalling His grace toward them. The second is His answer, which carries us to the end of the book.

Even the least enlightened of modern commentators admits that we open with what seems designed as a formulary of grateful recognition of Jehovah's loving-

kindness and tender mercy, but also of humiliation for the Israelites in order to their restoration. “I will record the loving-kindnesses of Jehovah, the praises of Jehovah, according to all that Jehovah hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving-kindnesses. And he said, Surely they [are] my people, children [that] will not lie; and he became their Saviour. In all their affliction he was afflicted and the Angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bore them and carried them all the days of old” (vv. 7-9).

Nothing is more suitable than this exordium, whether one thinks of Jehovah first or of His people next. Mercies acknowledged lead to fresh mercy. He was not changed in His loving-kindness, nor they in their deep need of it, as only He could show it to them. Hitherto His love had received no return, nothing but bitter disappointment.28 Yet what could exceed His tender care? “But they rebelled and vexed his holy Spirit: and he turned to be their enemy, himself, he fought against them. But he remembered the days of old, Moses [and] his people, [saying], Where [is] he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? where [is] he that put his holy Spirit in the midst of him, his glorious arm leading [them] by the hand of Moses, dividing the waters before them, to make himself an everlasting name, who led them through the depths; as a horse in the wilderness [that] they stumbled not? As cattle go down into the valley, the Spirit of Jehovah gave them rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a name of glory” (vv. 10-14)

It is evident then that God will work morally in Israel. No external deliverances for themselves nor execution of vengeance on His and their foes will suffice for His great purposes, any more than for His own glory or their real good. Hence the Spirit will exercise them in confession and in supplication before Him. As the verses already looked at set out their ingratitude and self-will in presence of His unmerited goodness, so the next take the form of prayer. “Look down from the heavens, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory. Where [is] thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies? Are they restrained toward me? For thou [art] our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Jehovah, [art] our father; our Redeemer, from everlasting [is] thy name. O Jehovah, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways — hast thou hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants’ sake, the tribes of thine inheritance. The people of thy holiness have possessed [it] but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary. We have become of old [like those] thou never ruledst, those not called by thy name” (vv.15-19).

They are broken in heart and turn in affiance or trustfulness of spirit to Jehovah. Had He of old said, Surely they are My people, children that will not lie? Now they say, Surely Thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not. Yet do they own that there had been judicial hardening over them as erst over Pharaoh and his people.

How deep and persevering the sins that could turn Jehovah against His own people as against their enemies

of old! and this too how long! for Israel had enjoyed their inheritance but a little while. Long, long had their adversaries trodden down Jehovah's sanctuary, and Israel had been as those on whom His name was not called, who knew not His rule.

Isaiah 64

This leads out the heart in still more earnestness. "Look down from heaven" suffices no more. "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down — that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, as fire kindleth brushwood, [as] fire causeth the waters to boil — to make thy name known to thine adversaries, [that] the nations may tremble at thy presence! When thou didst terrible things we looked not for, thou tamest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence. Ever since the beginning of the world they have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, a God besides thee, who will act for him that waiteth for him" (vv. 1-4).

It is interesting here to note the great difference for which the accomplishment of redemption gives occasion by the gift of the Holy Ghost. (Cp. 1 Cor. 2:7-10) We see that God now does reveal the things He has prepared for them that love Him. We do not wait for the emergence of the great High Priest to know our blessedness; for while He is still in the holiest, the Holy Spirit, as the gospel teaches, has come out and given us to enter in as anointed of God and made free to go boldly within the veil. Indeed for us the veil is rent, and all things hidden are revealed. But Israel (and the prophet speaks of Israel) must wait till they see Him Whom their fathers so guiltily pierced, though undoubtedly their heart will be

then converted to Jehovah-Messiah. They are born again but not in peace till they actually behold Him, and even then what searchings of heart, what self-reproach!

Hence we have in what follows the language of true repentance. “Thou meetest him that rejoiceth to work righteousness, [those that] remember thee in thy ways (behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned): in those is perpetuity, and we shall be saved. But we are all as an unclean [thing], and all our righteousnesses as filthy rags; and we all fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee; for thou hast hid thy face from us, and made us melt away through our iniquities But, now O Jehovah, thou [art] our father; we [are] the clay, and thou our potter; and we all [are] the work of thy hand. Be not wroth very sore, O Jehovah, neither remember iniquity for ever. Behold, see, we beseech thee, we [are] all thy people. Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire; and all our pleasant things are laid waste. Wilt thou refrain thyself for these [things], O Jehovah? wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?” (vv. 5-12).

The truth is that we must leave room in our faith for others to be blessed in the grace of God, when the saints called to a distinctively heavenly portion are no longer on earth. God will prepare Israel, His firstborn son here below, to be His destined chief among all the families of the earth, whom He will surely bless according to promise, and in honour of His Only-begotten Son. And thus it is that the Jew must, after his long and varied

failure, undergo so searching a spiritual process to fit him for his assigned post as the most honoured nation. For this he is kept now, the standing witness (in spite of his present heart-unbelief) of divine chastening, in order to obtain mercy in “that day,” when he renounces self-confidence, confesses his sins unreservedly in truth, and hails in Jehovah’s name Him Whom heretofore he slew by the hand of lawless men. It was a grand discovery for faith, that Jehovah’s honour was concerned in their blessing; and that the desolation touched Him at least as much as them, though the sins were theirs and the grace was His.

There is a remarkable form of expression in the Hebrew of ver. 9, where the substantive verb occurs and is repeated, contrary to the well-known Hebrew usage which ordinarily omits it. As its insertion cannot be without a sufficient reason, we are entitled to infer that the revealing Spirit had in His mind by the preterite form employed a continuous state of desolation from a past act of judgement. This entirely agrees with the facts, not so much of the Babylonian infliction but of the more permanent ruin which followed the destruction by the Romans. For God was marking His sense, not only of the national defection of His people in idolatry, but of the returned remnant’s still more heinous and fatal rejection of the Messiah. All hope therefore turns on His mercy and faithfulness to His gifts and calling. All must be vain, unless Jehovah rent the heavens and came down in the person of Him Who had already come to suffer for all their iniquities and all their transgressions in all their sins, banishing and effacing their guilt for ever. This, we know from other scriptures, He will assuredly do for His

own great name, and in virtue of the atonement already effected.

Isaiah 65

This chapter begins the answer of Jehovah to the appeal of His people, in which He explains not only what is now an accomplished fact, but also what still goes on. “I am sought out of [them that] asked not [for me]; I am found of [them that] sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation [that] was not called by my name. I have stretched out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, who walk in a way [that was] not good, after their own thoughts” (vv. 1, 2). The last two verses of Rom. 10. leave no ground for hesitation as to their bearing. They furnish an inspired comment on our opening verses, and prove beyond controversy that the first intimates the call of the Gentiles which is now proceeding, as the second is the aggrieved witness on God’s part of that which gave occasion to their call — the rebelliousness of His ancient people Israel. It is an enemy’s work to slight the New Testament use of the passage, as is done by rationalists in order to limit the prophecy to the Jews of the times before and after the Babylonish captivity. Besides, what can be more inconsistent with the evident contrast at the same epoch between verses 1 and 2? The inspired application we might never, unaided, have discovered; but, once made, it approves itself to the spiritual understanding as exactly tallying with notorious facts.

Grace is sovereign and goes out now to those who never so much as looked for it — to the ungodly Gentiles who had till now stood in no recognised relationship with God. But in turning from Israel God was entirely

justified by their iniquities: after all their advantages, His name had been blasphemed among the Gentiles through the chosen people. Most gracious was He then in calling from among the Gentiles; most righteous in discarding the Jew. This Jehovah proceeds to prove by a detail of Israel's insulting wickedness in verses 3-5: "The people that provoke me to anger continually to my face; that sacrifice in gardens, and burn incense upon the bricks; who sit down among the graves, and lodge in the secret places, who eat swine's flesh, and broth of abominable [things is in] their vessels; who say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These [are] a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day."

It has been objected by some that these idolatries and superstitions, covered over with hypocritical affectation of holiness, did not occur after the return from Babylon. But we must not forget that the Holy Ghost in prophecy deals with the evils then existing or in progress, the judgement of which was not met by providential chastisement, such as the conquest of Nebuchadnezzar. Just as the idolatry of the wilderness was only checked from time to time, but not judged duly till the nation was carried into captivity beyond Damascus (Amos 5:27); so these evil ways which Isaiah describes did not meet with adequate condemnation till God turned the stream of His calling into other channels. The principle indeed is fully confirmed by the use our Lord (Matt. 13:14, 15) and the Spirit (Acts 28:25-27) make of Isa. 6:9, 10. The judicial sentence so long suspended from the days of the prophet only fell adequately in gospel times. It is just so here. Also we must bear in mind what we have seen already, that idolatry is to revive in the latter days, when

the Jews settle themselves in their land before the Lord appears, judging the evil and establishing the good in order to His millennial reign.

One cannot but think too that the closing words of this divine censure intimate the long patience of God; so that, flatter themselves as they might that He like themselves did not heed the character of their misdeeds, judgement would at length demonstrate that, however loath to break silence, He will recompense the iniquities of both fathers and children. “Behold, [it is] written before me: I will not keep silence, but will recompense, even recompense into their bosom, your iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers together, saith Jehovah, who have burned incense upon the mountains, and outraged me upon the hills: I will measure their former work into their bosom” (vv. 6, 7).

Thus might seem to threaten total and hopeless ruin to the ancient people. But no: God had promised; and the unfaithfulness of the people, however surely judged, cannot make void the promises of grace. Hence in verses 8-10 God proceeds to make known, not the bringing in of the Gentiles during Israel’s temporary excision from the olive-tree of promise and testimony on earth, but the reservation of a portion, the germ of a nation, blessed and a blessing, from Jacob and Judah, according to His early pledges to their fathers. “Thus saith Jehovah, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and it is said, Destroy it not; for a blessing [is] in it: so will I do for my servants’ sakes, that I may not destroy [them] all. And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah a possessor of my mountains; and my chosen shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there. And the Sharon shall be for a fold of flocks and

the valley of Achor a couching-place of herds, for my people that have sought me." His chosen, the remnant, are here definitely distinguished from the rest of the people, or "the many" as Daniel describes them in speaking of the same time.

Then in vers. 11-16 Jehovah contrasts the apostates and the elect of the people, the idol-worshippers and His own servants, with their respective destinies. "But ye that forsake Jehovah, that forget my holy mountain, that prepare a table for Gad,29 and fill up mixed wine unto Meni, I will even number you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down in the slaughter: because I called and ye did not answer; I spoke, and ye did not hear; but ye did the evil in mine eyes, and [that] wherein I delight not ye chose. Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry; behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty; behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed; behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit. And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen; for the Lord Jehovah will slay thee, and call his servants by another name: so that he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles shall be forgotten, and because they shall be hid from mine eyes" (vv. 11-16). The old evil will be judged at the close; just as inquisition for all righteous blood shed will then be made. It is a time of judgement which ushers in days of unparalleled enjoyment for this earth: that is, it is the end of this age and the dawn of a new one when former

troubles are forgotten. Yet in ver. 16 “the land” may be meant rather than the wider sense of “earth.”

“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be glad and rejoice for ever [in that] which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice over Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying” (vv. 17-19). The true key to this is that the predicted change from present things begins at the commencement of the day of the Lord, and is only complete before that day gives place to eternity. This alone, as is plainly revealed, will be found to reconcile all the scriptures which treat of the subject. So in Christ the Christian can even now say that “old things are passed away: behold all things are become new”; while in fact this will only be literally verified when he is changed into His image at His coming. Just so the beginning of the day of the Lord will be an incipient accomplishment of “new heavens and a new earthy when Jehovah creates Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy; but the absolute fulfilment awaits the close of the millennial day, when to the fullest all things shall be made new, the earth and heavens that are now being not shaken only but dissolved, the sea for ever gone, and a new heaven and a new earth appearing, wherein righteousness shall dwell, and God shall be all in all. The New Testament naturally dwells on the full issue ultimately involved in the prophecy, as we may see in 2 Peter 3:12, 13, and in Rev. 21:1-8. But the Jewish prophet, as naturally, was led of the Spirit to dwell on the earliest pledge of this blessing in its dawn on the land and capital and people of Israel.

That Isaiah does embrace this earlier phase as bearing on the Jews and Jerusalem will be manifest to every attentive reader. For the entire description here suits the millennium rather than eternity. The special place of Jerusalem and her people has been already pointed out. Now this of itself suffices to prove it; for though the new Jerusalem possesses an abiding character of special glory, the New Testament is explicit that on the new earth all such distinctions as an earthly city or people melt away for eternity.

Next, ver. 20 is decisive against the notion. “There shall be no more thenceforth an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not completed his days; for the youth shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner [being] a hundred years old shall be accursed.” Thus death is not wholly extinct in the state of things prominently before our prophet. It is exceptional, but still exists as an instrument of judicial infliction. Man will then fill his days, which he has never yet done — not even before the flood — no, not even Methuselah himself. Not one as yet has stretched across ten centuries. This will be the rule for the righteous who are found alive on earth when the Lord reigns for the thousand years. So thoroughly will death be not the rule but the exception, that one dying a hundred years old will be but a youth; and even so he that dies at a hundred years will be a sinner under some express curse. In eternity death does not exist.

Again, it is written here, “And they shall build houses, and inhabit [them]; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree [shall be] the days of my people, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They

shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they [are] the seed of the blessed of Jehovah, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed as one, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox: and dust [shall be] the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith Jehovah" (vv. 21-25).

Now, sweet and worthy of God as all this is, it is not heavenly nor eternal in the full sense, though an earnest of final blessedness. It is God's vindication of His character on earth and of His faithful promises to Israel there, when power shall be on the side of righteousness, and the works of the devil shall be manifestly destroyed here below. Not even disappointment shall be known for before men call, Jehovah will answer and will hear while they speak. And the long-groaning earthy freed from its travail, shall yield her increase. The very beasts shall share the general joy, with one solemn and marked exception. Did the enemy of God and man choose one animal to be the vehicle of his temptation with the mother of all men? Even in the otherwise universal joy God cannot forget this, and would have men also to remember it when that active spirit of evil is debarred from his ravages. So if "the wolf and the lamb shall feed together," and the lion shall eat straw like the ox, none the less shall dust be the serpent's meat. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith Jehovah." There emphatically, and not there only, is the power of evil broken to the glory of God.

In a Christian effort to defend the Messianic interpretation of these prophecies (with the aim of

which one cordially agrees), it is sad to read such incredulity as could say, “The lion could not eat straw like the bullock, and continue to be a lion… And even were this change possible, nothing would be gained by it. A lion so transformed would be a defect in creation” (R. P. Smith’s At6th. and Mess. Interp., 260, Oxford, 1862). What is the value of such reasoning against the positive word of God?

The New Testament is even more distinct than the Old with regard to the new creation; because apostolic doctrine lays down what the prophets present in the elevated style of poetic prose. Not the Holy Spirit but the Lord Jesus is the revealed Restorer of fallen creation. For He is the Heir of all. As the heavens have now received Him, He will surely come again, not for the destruction but for the restitution of all things. It was on earth that the grace of God appeared in Him; here was accomplished redemption, here will the glory of God be manifested, though on high it will shine more brightly in the glorified. On the cross Satan was defeated before God, though seemingly he defeated the Saviour; and what the believer knows by faith will be manifested to every eye when the Lord appears again in glory. Meanwhile the dead and risen Christ is received up in glory, and all the angels of God worship Him. But the day comes when the earth shall be full of His glory, though this cannot be without a judgement of the living ungodly, in the most marked contrast with the gospel of His grace which now goes forth to all the world. Those who fail to believe this immense change, being most defective in their apprehensions of the revealed future, set up to prophesy smooth things of man and his progress. Who can wonder that they prophesy falsely?

Scripture is direct and express that creation is to be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of glory (Rom. 8:20, 21); and the Lord Jesus, Who will make it all good in its season, is worthy to receive all "glory and honour and power."

Isaiah 66

The concluding chapter of our prophet pursues what was begun in Isa. 65. — the answer of Jehovah to the supplication which precedes them both.

"Thus saith Jehovah, the heavens [are] my throne, and the earth [is] my footstool: what [is] the house that ye will build unto me? and where [is] the place of my rest? Even all those [things] hath my hand made, and all those [things] have been, saith Jehovah" (vv. 1, 2). It is not that God did not accept the house which king David desired, and his son Solomon was given, to erect for His glory. It is not that He will not have a sanctuary in the midst of Israel in the glorious land; for He has revealed it minutely, with the feasts, sacrifices, priests, and appurtenances, by Ezekiel (Ezek. 40 - 48).

But it is another thing when His people, despising the only Saviour and Lord, their own Messiah, rest in the sanctuary, as of old in the ark to their own shame and discomfiture before their enemies. So it was when the Lord left the temple — no longer God's house but theirs, and left to them desolate, Himself its true glory being despised and rejected. So Stephen charged home on them these very words (Acts 7:48-50). It was not he nor Luke, but Isaiah who declared that the Most High dwells not in temples made with hands: and this in full view of the "exceeding magnifical" temple which Solomon built. Heaven is His throne, earth is His footstool. What can

man do worthily for Him to rest in? He needs nothing of human resources. His own hand has made all these things, in comparison with which man's greatest exertions are puny indeed.

Once more among the Jews at the end of the age shall be the state of things which draws out this rebuke of their own prophet. Trusting in the house that they are at length allowed to build in Jerusalem, they must prove afresh that an unbelieving idolatrous heart desecrates a temple, and that not thus can sin be settled between God and the sinner. Earthly splendour in such circumstances is but gilding over iniquity. It is real hypocrisy. They may seek in unbelief to restore "all these things that have been"; but God has a controversy with the people about idolatry and the rejected Messiah not yet judged; and His elect own their sins and look for the new estate He will create in honour of Messiah. The heart must be purified by faith in order to worship acceptably.

"But to this [man] will I look, to the afflicted and contrite in spirit, and trembling at my word" (v. 2). Thus the line is drawn here as before between a godly remnant, and the people apostate as a whole. Hence their oblations are vain. "He that killeth an ox slayeth a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb breaketh a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation [is as] swine's blood; he that burneth incense [is as] he that blesseth an idol. As they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations, I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did the evil in mine eyes, and chose [that] wherein I delight not" (vv. 3, 4).

The English Bible follows the Septuagint, Syriac, Vulgate, and Arabic, as well as the Chaldee paraphrase. Houbigant, Bishop Lowth, Horsley, De Wette, etc., omit the terms of comparison (inserted in italics in the A. 5), which in their judgement mar the true sense. Their translation makes the verse to intimate the combination of ritual observance with open wickedness and Gentile abominations. Otherwise the statement is that their impiety made their acts of worship to be so many horrors.

In either view the people of Israel had chosen their own path of self-will and disregard of God for the evils they loved; but God's retribution would not be wanting. No delusions among the nations were more complete than Israel's have been and are yet to be; and the evils they dreaded, and sacrificed all to avoid, were just what befell them, and must till the end come. Did they refuse the Messiah? They have been a prey to false Messiahs, and shall yet bow down to the Antichrist. Did they own no king but Caesar? In Caesar they found a destroyer. Did they fear the Romans would come and take away their place and nation? All the world knows how punctually their fear was accomplished; and yet the end is not. Greater abominations shall be seen in them; greater delusions, greater fears, and a greater fulfilment. The abomination of desolation of which the Saviour spoke in Matt. 24:15 (citing not Dan. 11:31, which was then past, but Dan. 12:11, which is still future) must yet be set where it ought not, in the sanctuary at Jerusalem; and then there shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

It is impossible to interpret of the past Roman siege either Matthew 24, or Daniel 12, or our chapter; but the days for the due fulfilment of all these prophecies are at hand, and the effect of every vision. “Hear the word of Jehovah, ye that tremble at his word, Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name’s sake, said, Let Jehovah be glorified; but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed” (v. 5).

But hark, what is this that breaks on the ear? “A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of Jehovah that rendereth recompense to his enemies. Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man-child. Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall a land be made to bring forth in one day? shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children. Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith Jehovah: shall I cause to bring forth, and shut [the womb]? saith thy God. Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her; rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn over her; because ye shall suck and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations, because ye shall drink out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory. For thus saith Jehovah, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like a flowing stream and ye shall suck, ye shall be borne upon the side, and be dandled upon the knees. As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem. And ye shall see [this], and your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like the grass: and the hand of Jehovah shall be known toward

his servants, and indignation toward his enemies" (vv. 6-14).

Thus no longer by testimony to the heart, but by manifest judgement will Jehovah decide between cattle and cattle. The infidel scoff, which so long harassed the heavenly people, will then be put to shame before the poor in spirit of the earthly people. It is not the gospel that is here described, but the effect of the Lord's taking His great power and reigning, according to Rev. 11:15 18. It is the world-kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ actually come. Hence judgement is executed on the living destroyers of the earth. Jehovah will be glorified to the joy of such as trembled at His word before He appears and to the eternal infamy of those who knew Him not and doubted His interest in His despised confessors here below. For Christ and for the church, they were raised or changed and taken on high, leaving the world without a blow or even a notice. But it will not be so for the Jew by-and-by: "A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of Jehovah that rendereth recompense to his enemies." The Roman destruction of Jerusalem was no adequate fulfilment of this: but it shall be fulfilled to the letter of many prophecies. (Cp. Isa. 9:3-5; Isa. 18:3-7; Isa. 29; Zech. 14:1-4) And then shall follow the new birth or ingathering of Zion's children, no longer to be Abraham's seed nominally but his children in deed and in truth. As nothing of the kind followed the capture by Nebuchadnezzar, no more did it ensue when Titus took Jerusalem. No outpouring of vengeance on the guilty city followed by blessing unexampled for fullness and without sorrow has as yet appeared to satisfy the terms

of the prediction. Sudden as it will be, it will also be permanent.

It will be the day of Jehovah when man's and Israel's sad history is to be reversed; and those who loved and mourned for Jerusalem shall rejoice for her and share the rich results of her blessedness. Yet is it in no way the character of gospel joy which blends inward comfort by the Spirit's power with shame and sorrow and rejection in the world. Here contrariwise, "And ye shall see this, and your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like the grass; and the hand of Jehovah shall be known toward his servants, and indignation toward his enemies" (ver. 14). It is the future day, not of grace and salvation only as it is to-day, but of vengeance also, when Jehovah will not stop short as once He did on earth (Luke 4:20). Then He was proclaiming the acceptable year of Jehovah, and this only. By-and-by He will proclaim and accomplish both that year and the day of vengeance. For this is in His heart, and the year of His redeemed is come. Both will be fulfilled then without let or delay. It will be the introduction of His day, and of the millennial reign.

"For, behold, Jehovah will come with fire, and his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will Jehovah plead with all flesh: and the slain of Jehovah shall be many. They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves in the gardens behind one in the midst, eating swine's flesh and the abomination and the mouse, shall perish together, saith Jehovah. And I [know] their works and their thoughts: it cometh, that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory. And I will set a sign among them, and I will

send those that escape of them unto the nations, [to] Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, [to] Tubal, and Javan, [to] the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the nations. And they shall bring all your brethren [for] an offering unto Jehovah out of all the nations upon horses and in chariots, and in covered wagons, and upon mules, and upon dromedaries, to my holy mountain, to Jerusalem, saith Jehovah, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of Jehovah. And of them also will I take for priests, for Levites, saith Jehovah" (vv.15-21). The efforts of ancient and modern commentators to apply this passage, like the rest, to gospel times are desperate but vain. How unequivocally is it a day of judgement, not the glad tidings of salvation by His grace, but His revelation from heaven in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and on them that obey not the gospel! Evidently the Jews in that day will not only set up their ritual again, but be addicted to heathen abominations. The day of divine recompense shall be when old evils revive and amalgamate with novel iniquities, that all may come before Jehovah in judgement, and a new era dawn on both Jew and Gentile over the earth now purged. It will be a question then not of believing the grace of God, but of seeing the glory of Jehovah that is to be revealed. Jewish worship with its priests and Levites is restored in that day.

Vitringa's argument on verse 19 that no future call of Gentiles can be here intended, because those named have long since known the God of Israel, seems to be of no real force. For even Christendom will then be in a state of apostasy (2 Thess. 2); and, besides, the hearing

of Jehovah's fame and seeing His glory refers to the manifestation of Himself that will then be made here below. How little is the future looked for according to God's word!

Thus an unsparing divine judgement will be executed on all the gathered nations when the Jews are dealt with in their pollutions; and those that "escape of them" will be sent of God to the distant nations ignorant of what He has wrought, and Gentiles will bring back all the Jews remaining outside the Holy Land. It appears to be the detail of the prediction in Isa. 18:7. From all nations shall this offering to Jehovah be brought, and by every means of conveyance. Before this, it will have been only the Jews and not all Israel.

All this is evidently not the same as the gospel or its effects, but in the most certain and evident contrast with it. The offering now is characteristically of the Gentiles, as we see in Rom. 15:16, and as experience shows. Jews are no doubt now as ever converted, but they are comparatively rare. The prophet contemplates the day when "all Israel shall be saved," the apostates having been surprised by the divine judgement.

And any supposed difficulty of reconciling with John 4:21 Jerusalem becoming a centre for all nations is imaginary, or rather arises from the confusion of "the hour that now is" with the day that shall be. Our Lord was contemplating the time of His rejection and His approaching absence in heaven; the prophet had in view the day of His glory for the earth, which is still future. Distinguish the times, and the objection vanishes. Jerusalem has no place in the Christian system; in the coming day of Jehovah it will have a greater and holier

place than it ever had of old; and no wonder with the name of Jehovah Shammah!

Hence it is obvious that the ordinary strain of argument and interpretation, popular from the days of Origen and Jerome down to the present, is founded on a total confusion of things that differ. Christianity no doubt is very distinct; but that the new age must be a repetition of the same aims, principles, and ways, is an error quite as great as that which fancies the gospel to be only a continuation of the law with a great accession of better privileges. Israel shall be established for ever before Jehovah. “For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me, saith Jehovah, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, [that] from new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith Jehovah” (vv. 22, 23). There is no solid reason for doubting the literal bearing of the prediction. New moons and sabbaths shall once more figure in the worship of Jehovah; but it will be no more in the letter so hiding Christ or in its range so contracted as of old. For “all flesh” shall share in it, though (from other scriptures we may gather) on no such exalted ground or such dispensed nearness to the King as His chosen people. He is Sovereign, and disposes as He pleases; and our eye should not be evil, because He is good, alike in what is special and in what is common. His house shall be literally a house of prayer for all the peoples, which will in no way hinder the greatness of His name among the nations, or the offering of incense to it or a pure offering in every place.

And as His honour is thus maintained, so is His fear. Not only shall there be an awful outpouring of wrath on His

adversaries at the end of this age, but Jehovah will keep up, nigh the very spot where His glory dwells, a salutary warning against transgressors. “And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorrence unto all flesh” (v. 24). There is nothing really obscure in this, save to those who, from regarding the passage only in a Christian point of view, deny its full accomplishment in judgement at the end of the age. In its own connection it is most simple, solemn, and expressive. No doubt by Rev. 20:11 — Rev. 21:8 we are shown the still more awful sight of eternal punishment for all the wicked in its full force, when they shall be raised up from death for the second death. Annihilation is a wicked imposture, and an impossibility for all but God, Who, far from intimating any such end, declares that He will judge by His Son Jesus Christ the Lord those that shall come forth from their graves. Universalism is the still more audacious lie of the enemy.

“THE WORD OF OUR GOD SHALL STAND FOR EVER”

26 Vitringa, Horsley and Fry in modern times.

27 In the LXX it is different again from both the Hebrew and the apostle, and runs thus: And the deliverer will come on account of Zion. This also appears to be correct enough. The Holy Spirit in modifying the words by the apostle, seems to have had in view Ps. 14:7; Ps. 53:6, so that it is absolutely true. Comp Ps. 110:2.

28 It may be well to remark that verse 9 is by no means certain for the reading or sense. Our translation followed the Keri, others (as the Vulgate, the Syriac, the Targum of Jonathan, etc., and of moderns, Houbigant,

Rosenmüller, Horsley, De Wette, etc.) follow the Ketib. This would give properly, one may suppose, “in all their straits he was not straitened.” The Septuagint, followed by the Arabic, contrasts His personal interest and action. “It was not an ambassador nor an angel, but He Himself saved them,” etc.

29 These idolatrous objects have been contested not a little, some arguing for Baal and Ashtoreth, or Sun and Moon, others for the planets Jupiter and Venus as others again for Chance and Fate. Gad means troop, and Meni number.