Jeremiah: The Tender-Hearted Prophet of the Nations

William Kelly

Public domain. As published on plymouthbrethren.org.

Also online at https://plymouthbrethren.org/series/6161

KEE Ministry Library · Faithful Men
kee-ministry-library.netlify.app

Introduction to Jeremiah

The different character and style of Jeremiah as compared with Isaiah must strike any careful reader. Here we have not the magnificent unfoldings of the purposes of God for that earth of which Israel was the centre, but we have the prophecy in its moral dealing with the souls of the people of God. No doubt, judgments are pronounced upon the heathen, still the intention was to act upon the conscience of the Jew, and in order to do this we see how much the Spirit of God makes of Jeremiah's own experience. Of all the prophets we have none who so much analysed his own feelings, his own thoughts, his own ways, his own spirit.

Hence Jeremiah is the only one who gives us the Book of Lamentations. These lamentations are the outpourings of his soul to God, which approach very much the character of the Psalms, as indeed his prophecy also does more than any other of the prophets, either greater or lesser.

In this way, then, Jeremiah has quite a character of his own and one of no small importance. Practically, I think, his style is very instructive for the soul of the believer. We shall find that we have the prophet's inward experiences recorded as far as this could be according to the measure of the revelation that God had made of Himself in Old Testament times.

From the very first verse we find these features. Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. The word of Jehovah came to him in the days of Josiah, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. That is, he was called

to the work when God was working powerfully not only in the good king Josiah but in a few of the Jewish people.

Now it is clear that this partial repentance of the people was unsuited to the character of the work entrusted to Jeremiah. His was really an inward work in the conscience. But what brought out the expressions of his grief was that the effect of Josiah's reformation was merely an outward one.

Hence, therefore, this condition of the people gave occasion to the double character of Jeremiah's prophecy. They had outward pretence and profession, great appearance of good, a little real good underneath the surface with a great deal of outward show. Their condition was not precisely as shown in the fig tree that came under the Lord's curse - abundance of leaf and no fruit. In Jeremiah's day, the national state was very much what he said himself (Jer. 24). There were some good figs, and the good figs were very good; but there were very many naughty figs, and the naughty figs were very naughty. This moral character we shall find, then, in this book.

Jeremiah 1

Part 1: Jeremiah 1-25

The word of Jehovah, as we are told in Jeremiah 1, came unto Jeremiah, saying, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee: and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee." "I ordained thee," it is carefully added, "a prophet unto the nations." Why unto the nations? This special commission brings before us a peculiarity of Jeremiah's service which we shall find abundantly verified in this book. Although he was a Jew himself and even a priest and although the Jews in Jerusalem have an immense place in his prophecy, the nations also are given great prominence.

Nay, further, we shall find that when the coming judgment of the nations is declared, Jerusalem is put among them as the very first of the nations to be judged. If the Jews did not rise morally above the nations from whom He had separated them, why should God continue to treat them as His own people by a special title? If they surrendered all that was distinctive by lapsing into Gentile idolatry, God would not support them in such false pretensions.

Hence, when the cup of vengeance is in the hand of the Lord (Jer. 25), to give to the nations in His judgment, the Jews come as the first of the nations, not for blessing but for chastening and punishment. Jeremiah, accordingly, was ordained a prophet unto the nations, because the peculiar feature of his prophecy is that Jerusalem is given a priority of judgment when God takes up the world to deal with its sins. This priority is very strikingly

shown in Jeremiah 25, but the same thread of truth runs through the whole of the book from beginning to end.

This unusual commission brings out Jeremiah's timorous spirit. "Then said Jeremiah, Ah, Lord Jehovah! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child." Jehovah's answer is, "Say not, I am a child." This was not at all the question but who was sending him. If royal authority chooses a man according to its own wisdom to be its servant, its ambassador, it is of no importance to others who the ambassador is, but what is the power that sends him; and those that despise are not despising the man, but despising the authority that appointed him. Jeremiah was meant to feel that Jehovah was calling him to this office.

"Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith Jehovah. Then Jehovah put forth His hand, and touched my mouth. And Jehovah said unto me, Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant."

The meaning of this commission is that Jeremiah was chosen to be the announcer of the troubles and judgment that were coming upon all nations. God therefore, as He surely would accomplish every threat that Jeremiah pronounced upon them, speaks of the prophet as if he were pulling down and planting and building and destroying according to the prophecies that God gave him to utter.

Now this was an extremely painful task to Jeremiah. I think myself that of all the prophets, greater or smaller, that were employed, there never was one to whom it was a greater trial to pronounce judgment than to Jeremiah. He was a man of an unusually tender spirit. He shrank from the work to which he was called for the very reason he was called to it.

Jeremiah was, in a certain sense, to harden himself, not as if he did not feel, but going through the depth of the feeling of what was the import of his prophecies. He was to be the simple vessel and channel of what God put into his lips. Hence, therefore, in this prophet was a heart full of agony at all that he had to announce, but a mouth that spoke boldly whatever God put into it.

Such was the character of Jeremiah, and the first chapter shows it. Hence we find two visions together. Jehovah says, "Jeremiah, what seest thou? And I said, I see a rod of an almond tree. Then said Jehovah unto me, Thou hast well seen; for I will hasten My word to perform it," alluding to the early blooming of the almond tree.

"And the word of Jehovah came unto me the second time, saying, What seest thou? And I said, I see a seething pot; and the face thereof is toward the north." This is an allusion to the great northern enemy of Israel that was employed not only to put down Judah but also to put down the nations.

Jeremiah first to last dwells very much upon Babylon. Babylon was this northern power that is in the mind of the Spirit of God throughout. It is not the Assyrian. The Assyrian was northern too, but the Assyrian power was now destroyed, and it is only in the latter day that

Assyria will rise again. But meanwhile Babylon was the great power that overshadowed the earth, and Jeremiah accordingly draws attention to this new kingdom. "Then Jehovah said unto me, Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land."

Therefore he was to gird up his loins and arise and speak unto them: "For, lo, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, saith Jehovah; and they shall come, and they shall set every one his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all the walls thereof round about, and against all the cities of Judah. And I will utter My judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken Me and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands. Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith Jehovah, to deliver thee."

Jeremiah 2-3

Then, as we have in Jeremiah 1, his commission and his character shown and the visions that were given to encourage him in going on with the work that the Lord had entrusted to him, so Jeremiah 2 shows us the state of Israel, more particularly of Jerusalem. There the Lord rehearses what He had been to His people, and what their conduct had been, spite of His favours.

In Jeremiah 3 He says what He is going to do for them.

Now I need not dwell upon the bitter charges of the prophet - the double evil of the Jews by their forsaking the Lord - the only source of living waters, and their recourse to cisterns that could hold no water by their flying to idolatry and all its corrupting influences. But, in Jeremiah 3, we have a pleading of the Lord with them. He shows them that bad as Israel might have been, Judah that had held out for a time and gave fair promises under Josiah would turn out no better. The crisis would surely come; but when a man has sunk to the lowest, God appears in His grace.

So in this very chapter after having pressed it all upon them, he says, "Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against Jehovah thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed My voice, saith Jehovah. Turn, O backsliding children, saith Jehovah, for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: and I will give you pastors, according to Mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased

in the land, in those days, saith Jehovah, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of Jehovah: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more. At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of Jehovah; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of Jehovah, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart. In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers" (Jer. 3:13-18).

Now nothing can be more distinct than this prediction, nor more gracious; for here we have clearly the intervention of God's grace for the whole people in the latter day, after not only the Assyrian captivity which had already taken place, but the Babylonish one which was going to take place. After all that, God would recall His people - not part of them, but the whole of them - would recall Israel, would recall Judah, would bring them both back into the land, would bless them there so highly that even all the ancient blessing that they had had, namely, the ark of the covenant, which was the grand distinctive feature of David's faith, for which he had made a resting- place on Zion, and which was directly lost after Solomon (for the greater part of the nation then lost the ark, and set up golden calves). So great would be the blessing of the latter day that even what was known under David and Solomon would pass away; and be altogether eclipsed by the still brighter glory of the whole united people in the latter day; and from that time they should never depart from the Lord again.

Now it is perfectly plain that there has not been even an approach to the accomplishment of these national blessings. They are still entirely future. What was known after the Babylonish captivity was the return of a mere handful of the Jews with a few straggling Israelites. So far from that amounting to what had been known under David and Solomon, they never had so much as an independent kingdom; they never had even so much as was known under the most shameful of the sons of David - the Manassehs, the Zedekiahs, the Jehoiakims, the Jehoiachins. All these disgraceful representatives of the royal family were men of great importance, and the state, too, had a measure of independence entirely beyond what was known after the return from captivity.

Here, contrariwise, the prophet speaks of a state surpassing all that had been known under their best monarchs, and as to its being the gospel or that which we know now under Christianity, there is not the slightest resemblance. "At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of Jehovah" (Jer. 3:17). Now that is not the gospel. The gospel is not the throne of Jehovah. The throne of Jehovah means the governmental power, according to His name, Jehovah, put forth over the whole earth. Jeremiah promises this, and Zechariah (Jer. 14) also shows us very distinctly the character of that throne. There are to be no idols; there are to be no rivals: the name of Jehovah is to be the one universal name owned and honoured over the whole earth.

At that time, Jeremiah says, Jerusalem shall be called the throne of Jehovah. Further, "all the nations shall be gathered unto it." What popery has sought under the gospel, namely, to set up a universal spiritual monarchy, will be really done under the only one that is entitled to

it, namely, the Lord Jesus. He will have this kingdom upon the earth, Jerusalem His centre, and all the nations His sphere. At the same time, He will have the heavens, and the new Jerusalem will be the metropolis. His will be the renewed universe of God, that is, the heavenly city and glory above, while the earthly Jerusalem will be the centre upon the earth.

Thus, we see that the peculiarity of that glorious time will be not the heavens only for the soul, nor the earth only for men in their bodies, but the heavens and earth both put under the reign of the Lord Jesus, and Christ the acknowledged Head of all things heavenly and earthly, the church reigning with Him in the heavens, and the Jewish people placed under Him here below.

This is what is described here, at least, the latter part. We must have recourse to the New Testament in order to see the former part of it, that is, the heavenly part. The earth is always the grand subject of Old Testament prophecy, and indeed of all prophecy in general, but the New Testament shows also the heavens as they are to be under Christ.

Jeremiah 4

Jeremiah 4 pursues the moral pleadings with the people. "If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith Jehovah, return unto Me." And then comes the call that God could not be satisfied with outward forms. "Circumcise yourselves to Jehovah, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest My fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it." You observe the peculiarity. It is the Jew particularly that comes into the scope of the prophet with regard to his moral unfitness for the blessing of God.

So he says later on in the chapter, "The lion is come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way"; - (referring to Nebuchadnezzar) - "he is gone forth from his place to make thy land desolate; and thy cities shall be laid waste, without an inhabitant." "And it shall come to pass at that day, saith Jehovah, that the heart of the king shall perish, and the heart of the princes; and the priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall wonder." No power will be found anywhere because God was forsaken.

"Then said I, Ah, Lord Jehovah! surely Thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have peace; whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul." In verse 14, he appeals to Jerusalem to repent: "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?" Then later (verses 19, 20), he shows his intense grief over these troubles and destructions that were accumulating against Jerusalem: "My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh

a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Destruction upon destruction is cried."

So mighty are the coming disasters that in the vision before him we are reminded of the chaotic state of the world set out in the very beginning of Genesis. "I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of Jehovah, and by His fierce anger." All this was a vision of the trouble that was hanging over the Jews, and, in fact, over the nations generally. This prophecy goes far beyond what Nebuchadnezzar inflicted, and includes retributive judgments still future.

Jeremiah 5-6

This subject of judgment is pursued in Jeremiah 5, while the prophet still shows the frightful moral condition of Jerusalem, and he warns them of the penalties about to come: "How shall I pardon thee for this? thy children have forsaken Me, and sworn by them that are no gods: when I had fed them to the full, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses. They were as fed horses in the morning: every one neighed after his neighbour's wife. Shall I not visit for these things? saith Jehovah" (verses 7-9).

And the worst phase of the national evil was that not merely a certain portion of the people were guilty, but "a wonderful and horrible thing," he says, "is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and My people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" (verses 30, 31).

Thus all the springs of moral rectitude were corrupted; and consequently it was plain that nothing but judgment could come to them from the Lord.

This subject is continued to the end of Jeremiah 6. Jeremiah calls upon the nations to hear his message: "Therefore hear, ye nations, and know, O congregation, what is among them. Hear, O earth: behold I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto My words, nor to My law, but rejected it. To what purpose cometh there to Me incense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country?" Their ceremonies were vain hopes to stay the judgment. "Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor

your sacrifices sweet unto Me. Therefore thus saith Jehovah, Behold, I will lay stumbling-blocks before this people, and the fathers and the sons together shall fall upon them; the neighbour and his friend shall perish." At the same time, the prophet's heart is full of sorrow for the nation. "O daughter of my people, gird thee with sackcloth, and wallow thyself in ashes: make thee mourning, as for an only son, most bitter lamentation: for the spoiler shall suddenly come upon us" (verse 26).

Jeremiah 7

In Jeremiah 7 he begins another strain. He takes up the temple itself, and shows that the tide of evil in Judah had completely polluted the very sanctuary of Jehovah. Moreover, in the midst of their peril, they were trusting not in God nor in His word, but in lying words of their own that the outward forms would be a sufficient stay against the destroying Gentile. "Trust ye not" therefore, he says, "in lying words, saying, The temple of Jehovah, The temple of Jehovah, The temple of Jehovah, are these. For if ye throughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye throughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever" (verses 4-7).

And he shows them that their boast in an uninterrupted succession of national privilege was a vain trust. This false confidence was quite as strongly the notion of the Jews as it has ever been of papists and others in Christendom. The delusion was equally destructive to them as it will be to Christendom. There is nothing more certain to bring destruction upon Christendom than the notion of an indefectible security.

I do not mean security for the soul, for the believer. This assurance is quite right. We cannot too strongly hold the eternal life of the believer; but to apply to the state of Christendom the notion that it will go on indefectibly when God, on the contrary, has warned us in His word

that Christendom will fall just like the Jewish state before it is to be caught by the wiles of the wicked one. Such a notion is precisely the delusion by which Satan brings about its total departure from God.

What is perfectly true for the soul in Christ is thoroughly ruinous for the general collective state in religion. There is nothing finer than the faith that gives God credit for grace to the soul; but there is no greater pit of delusion than to predicate generally of the apostate state of things in Christendom what is only true of and for the individual soul; because the one is real genuine faith, and the other is most arrogant and lofty presumption, which God will judge.

Now this is precisely the moral of Jeremiah 7. And the prophet makes his text, so to speak, to be the fact that Shiloh had lost its prestige. Shiloh was the place where the tabernacle was originally set up in the land (verse 12). What was Shiloh now? God had profaned it: and God would do the very same thing where the ark was now placed, where the sanctuary was in Jerusalem. Impossible that God should bind Himself to maintain an empty form. He would no longer sustain what was a beautiful figure of His truth, when the state of the people and of the priests was the most offensive evil under the sun in His eye. The greater the truth, the blessing, or at any rate the privileges, that had been accorded to the Jewish people and their priests, the greater the wickedness of their insults to His holiness in His own temple.

Hence, therefore, so far from the temple being their strong fortress against the judgments of the king of Babylon, the temple would be the main point on which

all these judgments would converge, and if the city of Jerusalem, in general, would be destroyed by him, the sanctuary would suffer most of all. And we find that the house of God was precisely the great object of the invader's desire; for there was an instinctive feeling of animosity among the Gentiles against this temple where Jehovah had placed His name. They knew right well what Jehovah had done in times past by the overthrow of the nations. The question was whether Jehovah would allow His temple to be plundered now, and the name of Jehovah, as it were, to be razed from the earth.

The campaign by Babylon against Jerusalem was a great venture. What had Jehovah not done to Pharaoh? What had He not done to the kings who attacked the children of Israel in the wilderness and in the land? Thus, no doubt, there was a certain tremor and qualm in the midst of the enemies of Judah. The destruction of the ten tribes by the Assyrian, no doubt, encouraged the king of Babylon to go forward, but still there must have been a certain anxiety till the thing was done.

And it was precisely this vain confidence in the past that supported the Jews. They assumed that such a thing as the conquest of Jerusalem could never be, and that whatever might be their faults God would never allow them to go completely down into the ditch. But this Jehovah did, and He allowed the Gentile to triumph thoroughly over them and over His own sanctuary. But then the very prophets that show the judgment that was coming proclaim the deliverance and restoration that will certainly follow in due time.

Now we live in a state of things where this ultimate recovery is not believed. The reason why men in general

in Christendom do not now believe in the restoration of Israel - there are individuals of course who believe it - but the reason why there is general scepticism about the return and restoration of Israel and the rebuilding of Jerusalem as a scene of glory for the Lord, is this: there is an instinctive sense that the blessing of Israel supposes the judgment of Christendom; for if Christendom goes on it is impossible that this reinstatement can take place.

And this view is quite true. There cannot be the restoration of the Jews without the complete judgment of Christendom, because God cannot have two corporate witnesses at the same time on the earth. And if the present witness becomes apostate then God will judge it, and when the judgment has taken place, then He will restore His ancient people. Such is the declared order of Scripture.

Well, naturally, those who consider this judicial overthrow of Christendom an impeachment of their honour, and who shrink from the unwelcome thought of the judgment of the present state of things, are reluctant to hold that God has such a bad opinion of what is being done in Christendom now. Consequently, they fight against this truth to the last, and the way in which their opposition shows itself is by denying the coming of the Lord to the earth in judgment, and consequently the restoration of the ancient people of God.

But the New Testament is perfectly explicit that what these prophets of old maintain is true and divine. What the Old Testament declares, the New Testament does not weaken, but establishes and seals. And the moral

reason why the Old Testament will in due time be verified is because the New Testament also discloses that the final result of the gospel will be the setting up of the man of sin (2 Thess. 2). This will be, of course, the result of the gospel abused, perverted, corrupted.

Now this conclusion of the present day of privilege is nothing at all harsh on God's part. Many say, "What an awful end!" No doubt it is. But the corruption of the best thing is always the worst corruption, and therefore it is of necessity that if the corruption of the law of God ended in such a state as God judged by the Assyrian of old and the Babylonian, sweeping both parts of the people into captivity, the result of the corruption of the gospel in Christendom will end in a still more fiery judgment, still more sorrowful to contemplate.

This judicial period is what is spoken of in scripture as the great tribulation when both Jew and Gentile must endure a retributive dealing by God, when, finally, He will put down the pride of man both in Judaism and Christendom and then bring in a blessing - a time of blessing when the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters cover the sea.

When a dispensation is diverted from its proper character because the people of God are unfaithful to their responsibility, it is no longer a question with them of maintaining its outward forms in their original integrity, because they are invalidated in practice by this departure from the truth. And with the faithful, it is a question of falling back not upon something new but upon whatever is harmonious with the confession of the ruined state.

We must always be in the truth of a state of things, as before God. For instance, if I am a sinner I cannot be blessed unless I take the place of a sinner; and, in like manner, if the outward dispensation is ruined I cannot be fully blessed unless I recognise and feel the ruin. If I think that everything is prosperous when God is preparing to judge, it is plain that I am out of communion with Him, perhaps not as regards my own soul but as regards the general state of things.

The moral difference involved is that when things are all right and smooth at the beginning of a dispensation the duty of a man is faithfully to throw himself into everything when everything is good; but when things are corrupted it is his duty to separate himself from what is corrupt and only to continue with what bears the stamp of the Spirit of God upon it. That is the difference. You will find that in every dispensation outward forms always fall into the hands of deceivers, because an outward form is easily copied and easily maintained. Hence the priests and the false prophets were the persons in Judah and Jerusalem that kept up the name of zealousness for the law, and on this ground they claimed the allegiance of the people.

These are the persons against whom the faithful are warned by Jeremiah and the prophets. So, in the same way, there is no doubt at all that supposing Christendom is to continue uninterruptedly as a religious system the people that have the greatest claims are the Papists, and therefore if Christendom is indefectible we ought all to be Papists. But it is plain that the conscience and spirituality of every believer revolt against such an appalling thought. We all feel that it is impossible that

the God of truth and grace should bind us to worship the Virgin Mary or the saints and angels and so on.

We feel that the Papists are idolaters, and we are quite right. They are idolaters, and they are worse idolaters than pagan idolaters, for if it is a bad thing to worship Jupiter and Saturn it is a far worse thing to worship the Virgin Mary. I cannot take knowledge of the Virgin Mary unless I know that she is the mother of the Lord, and knowledge of the Virgin Mary supposes the knowledge of Mary. Therefore I have the knowledge which ought to guard me against worshipping the Virgin. The very fact of knowing that the Virgin Mary was the mother of Christ ought to preserve me from Mariolatry. Therefore, I think that, of all idolatries that have ever been under the sun, the idolatry of the Church of Rome is the vilest.

It may be asked whether the ruin of the church is generally known and considered. It is not, because a great many of God's children have never fairly faced the matter. They think when they hear of the ruin of the church, or of Christendom, that it means somehow that God has not been faithful to His promises, whereas it is no question at all of fidelity to promises. Fidelity to promises goes with faith not with forms; but so far from despising forms the reason why I never could stand the kind of thing that is common in Christendom now was that I would not give up the forms of God's word.

For instance, take a congregation choosing a minister. Well, I never could be a Dissenter for that reason, because that is the invariable plan. I know there are many Dissenters who think the same thing; Isaac Taylor who wrote The Natural History of Enthusiasm and other

books was one. He was a congregational deacon, and he wrote a book on this subject.

Scripture provides for the choice of a person to distribute funds. You ought to have confidence in the person who distributes funds or you will shut up your purse, but there is no such idea in God's word as choosing a man to preach. All the great denominations do so; not merely Dissenters, but all sorts of sects.

The whole scheme is out of course. It is wrong in principle. The principle is that he chooses who gives. I give the money and I am allowed to choose a person to be the distributor of it, but I do not give the Holy Spirit to the church, and therefore I must not choose the minister. If God supplies gifts without asking me I am not acting in a proper and becoming way as a Christian in choosing them among my spiritual brothers and sisters.

I own every spiritual person as a brother and sister, and desire grace to behave as such myself. This is perfectly plain, but, of course, just as the relationship of spiritual brothers and sisters is all settled by God's grace and God's will, so much more the appointment of persons to rule or teach or preach. We are not competent to choose. No one is competent. There never was a pretension even on the part of the apostles to do that. The apostles did appoint elders, but it is a mistake to suppose that elders are the same as gifts in the church. There were a great many elders who were not gifts. An elder you cannot have now, for an elder is a direct appointment from the Lord.

I mention this to show that for my own part I am a decided stickler for apostolic forms, and I do not

therefore at all hold that one can set up new forms according to his own will. One of the reasons that makes me feel the present ruined state of Christendom is that not only is there unbelief in the authority of the word but there is also an unlawful exercise and assumption of authority without the Lord's having warranted it.

The exercise of man's will in such matters has the deepest possible moral influence on the Christian profession. If you have not the authority of the Lord, you have man's will. I consider that man's will in the things of God is nothing but sin. The whole business of the church and of the Christian is to do the will of God upon the earth. Indeed, there is no reason for us to be on the earth except simply to be the servants of God, and thus we are called to do His will all our life from the time that we are redeemed by blood of Christ. We are not, therefore, allowed by God to do one single thing out of our own heads. I am persuaded that in himself man is incompetent to act aright, and that we need to be guided by the word and by the power of the Spirit of God continually.

Now where the human will is allowed, every evil thing may be the result. When once you bring in the principle of man's will in any one single thing - take, for instance, the choice of a minister by a congregation - you may by the same system vote a cardinal or you may vote a pope. It all rests on the same false principle.

There is, however, ample authority for the present day. There is the standard, and the only one - the word of God. I go upon the assurance that God foresaw the end from the beginning and also every want of the Christian and of the church upon the earth, and that He provided

in His word not only for what was then wanted but for all that would be wanted until the Lord comes to receive us up into glory. Then, having confidence in the word of God our first business is to find out what the will of God really is. I discover what His will was when things were right, then I find the direction that He gives when things are wrong. I learn what is the right state of things in what I call the wrong state of the church.

I know that it is thought by some that God has left the mode in which the church is to be governed an open question and that they can change the procedure according to the country or the circumstances. I deny this policy as a first principle, and I say it is false, and not only false, but that it results in the most serious consequences, because the result of it is that I am not divinely guided but I am humanly guided.

I thoroughly hold ministry to be a divine institution, and I do not believe that the ruined state of the church touches ministry in the smallest degree. There are persons over us in the Lord, but the moment you touch the source of ministry, that moment you separate ministry from the principles of the word of God. Now I believe that both the church and ministry are divine institutions, but in order to preserve their divine character they must be regulated by the word of God and not by men's new inventions and shifting ideas.

I contend for the highest antiquity: Irenæus and Justin Martyr are too low for me; that is, they are too modern. To me, everything is modern except the apostles; that is, I hold that genuine antiquity is what is divinely revealed. So far from thinking that the church of God is a thing according to men or a thing to be shifted with new

fashions, I hold for the true, remote, and only divine antiquity. I believe that is what we all ought to do, but then that is a matter for each one to learn from God. I would not force any brother on such a point.

The term, "the ruin of Christendom," grates on many ears. Perhaps the Lord means it to grate. It is well to pull persons up when they are wrong. I grant that if one could explain the term more fully that would soften what after all is just the converse of what Jeremiah tasted. It is bitter to the taste but it is sweet to the soul to be with God and have the certainty of doing His will.

Jeremiah 8-9

The prophecy delivered by Jeremiah in the gate of Jehovah's house is continued from Jeremiah 7 to the end of Jeremiah 10. In Jeremiah 8, the Lord reproaches His people that they were more dull than the very animals and birds which are not remarkable for their wisdom. "Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of Jehovah" (Jer. 8:7).

The people did not know the time: they did not know His judgment; they were going on in self-security. They thought that perhaps things were not quite as right as they appeared to be, but were not so bad as this troublesome man, Jeremiah, said. And so they were crying "Peace, peace," where there was no peace. They were not even ashamed when they had committed abominations. The prophet could only give himself up to sorrow over them. "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered? "

In his grief, Jeremiah desires (Jer. 9) that his head should be a fountain of tears. "Oh, that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" (Jer. 11:1)

Jeremiah felt the ruined state of Israel. It was the complete moral ruin of the nation before the judicial ruin came. This state is exactly where we are morally in Christendom now. It is remarkable, but it is easier to prove the moral ruin in Christendom than when it was in

Judea. If I ask a Roman Catholic what he thinks of religious affairs, he declares it very deplorable that there are so many systems and divisions and that everyone does not belong to the true church. If I ask a Protestant, he thinks that the state of the Western Church and the Greek Church is deplorable, and, moreover, if he is a strong denominationalist he naturally does not like the rivalry between the sects that is going on so actively; and, except an optimist who is always fancying every time the best, and except a few persons of a very sanguine temperament, almost everybody would allow that the general condition of the Christian profession is very far from God, and a shattered ideal.

But then, this prevalent condition of departure from the truth has a very serious aspect to faith's judgment. What is the consequence? It is not Nebuchadnezzar that is coming: it is not the Assyrian that is coming: it is the Lord Himself that is coming. This raises, therefore, the solemn question whether we can face the Lord about the terrible failure. If I cannot face the Lord morally now, I ought not to be comfortable in expecting the Lord to come. The Lord will judge what is wrong, and woe, woe, to those who are found promoting and helping on what is wrong when He does come.

Jeremiah 10

So Jeremiah 10 calls them to hear the word which Jehovah speaks unto the house of Israel. "Thus saith Jehovah, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good. Forasmuch as there is none like unto Thee, O Jehovah; Thou art great, and Thy name is great in might. Who would not fear Thee, O King of nations? "

Their idols are nothing; the only one to fear is God Himself. And here you observe that not only was the prophet Jeremiah a prophet to the nations, but the Lord Himself is called "King of nations" - another peculiarity of the Book of Jeremiah. The nations have their place in a broad scale in this prophecy; and I may observe here that this is the true idea in Revelation 15:3. There "King of saints" ought to read "King of nations."

There is no such notion in the scripture as King of saints. The relation that the Lord bears to saints is not King but Head, or Lord. He is never King, except in relation to Israel or to the nations.

The phrase in Rev. 15:3 is a quotation from Jeremiah 10:7. All the most ancient copies have the true word, namely, "King of nations." I only mention this in passing.

It is more important to note as a distinction in Scotland than in England, because there the idea that the Lord Jesus is King of the church, or King of the saints, is exceedingly prevalent, and has been ever since the assembly of divines at Westminster committed themselves to that error. In my opinion it is a mistake of the most lowering character. It falsifies the present relation of the Lord Jesus Christ to His saints.

It is not that He is not Lord over them - that He is not their Lord. Not so. He is Lord, most surely, just as, no doubt, Sarah was quite right in calling her husband by that term. It is clear that the Spirit of God thinks so and records her reverence (1 Peter 3:6) for the consideration of others, but, nevertheless, it would have been a very poor and miserable thing if Abraham had been nothing to her but lord. No: Abraham was her husband, and Abraham had responsibilities towards Sarah, instead of Sarah merely having duties towards him. It is a very meagre way of looking at relationships if we only see one side of them, and that the side that suits us. No: relationship always implies moral duties, and the relationship of the Lord Jesus towards the saints is one not only of authority, which is perfectly true, but of love, of care, of cherishing, even as a man his own flesh.

Well now, such is not the case with a king. A king is not bound to cherish all his subjects as his own flesh. A king is not to give a portion to every subject in his kingdom. That would be ridiculous to expect. A king does give a worthy portion to his own daughters and his own sons. This is quite right and becoming, because of the family relation of the closest kind, and so there is between Christ and the saints. If I reduce the church merely to a nation, to a people, I make but a distant connection

between them and Christ instead of the greatest intimacy, that exists according to all the counsels of God.

Thus in my judgment, therefore, you sap and mine the peculiar blessedness of the Christian if you make the relationship to be one of a king to a people instead of a head to a body. If I can look up to Christ as the Bridegroom of my soul and of the church; if I can look at Christ as not only my Lord but the Head from Whom every member derives nourishment, and upon Whom there is a claim of dependence to think for it and care for it and guide and direct it - such a view brings the greatest possible confidence in my love; and the more simple the faith, the greater the strength that results to the soul.

Whereas if I merely make Christianity a distant relationship - that of a people to a king, I sacrifice its choicest element. It is plain I may look for defence against foreign foes, but I must shift for myself for the most part in my own matters. The king does not think much about me or you and we cannot expect him to do so. I have no personal claim of nearness to the throne, and this distinction everybody understands. But in divine things, it has evil results. The idea of remoteness from Christ goes well with the idea of our being free to arrange our plans to our own liking, of our being left to arrange our own forms of government in the church.

Jeremiah 11

We come now to Jeremiah 11, and there we find a new and very solemn warning to the men of Judah and Jerusalem. As a rule, in all the prophets of Israel progress may be observed in their messages; there is increasing depth in the appeals of the Spirit of God to the people. Here, then, we have "Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant, which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Obey My voice, and do them according to all which I command you: so shall ye be My people, and I will be your God: that I may perform the oath which I have sworn unto your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as it is this day. Then answered I, and said, So be it, O Jehovah" (verses 3-5).

Their disobedience is solemnly brought home to them. "Therefore thus saith Jehovah, Behold, I will bring evil upon them." The time has now come to execute the curse - the curse that was pronounced in the days of Moses was executed in the days of Nebuchadnezzar. Consequently, a vast change took place in the relation of the people before Jehovah. They now came as distinctly under the curse as up to that time they were simply under chastening. It was a new thing; they had broken the covenant.

Jeremiah 12

And then in Jeremiah 12, Jeremiah says "Righteous art thou, O Jehovah, when I plead with Thee: yet let me talk with Thee of Thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit: Thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins. But Thou, O Jehovah, knowest me: Thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward Thee: pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter. How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? the beasts are consumed and the birds; because they said, He shall not see our last end.

"If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with the horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan? For even thy brethren, and the house of thy father, even they have dealt treacherously with thee; yea, they have called a multitude after thee: believe them not, though they speak fair words unto thee. I have forsaken Mine house, I have left Mine heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies. Mine heritage is unto Me as a lion in the forest; it crieth out against Me: therefore have I hated it. Mine heritage is unto Me as a speckled bird, the birds round about are against her; come ye, assemble all the beasts of the field, come to devour. Many pastors have destroyed My vineyard, they have

trodden My portion under foot, they have made My pleasant portion a desolate wilderness, They have made it desolate, and being desolate it mourneth unto Me; the whole land is made desolate, because no man layeth it to heart.

"The spoilers are come upon all high places through the wilderness: for the sword of Jehovah shall devour from the one end of the land even to the other end of the land: no flesh shall have peace. They have sown wheat, but shall reap thorns: they have put themselves to pain, but shall not profit: and they shall be ashamed of your revenues because of the fierce anger of Jehovah. Thus saith Jehovah against all Mine evil neighbours, that touch the inheritance which I have caused My people Israel to inherit, Behold I will pluck them out of their land, and pluck out the house of Judah from among them. And it shall come to pass, after that I have plucked them out I will return, and have compassion on them, and will bring them again, every man to his heritage, and every man to his land."

Jeremiah 13

Having said that Judah would come under this judgment of Jehovah, in Jeremiah 13 symbolic action is introduced; that is, a sign to show what is coming. "Go and get thee a linen girdle, and put it upon thy loins, and put it not in water. So I got a girdle according to the word of the Lord, and put it on my loins. And the word of Jehovah came unto me the second time saying, Take the girdle that thou hast got, which is upon thy loins, and arise, go to Euphrates, and hide it there in a hole of the rock. So I went, and hid it by Euphrates, as Jehovah commanded me. And it came to pass after many days, that Jehovah said unto me, Arise, go to Euphrates, and take the girdle from thence which I commanded thee to hide there. Then I went to Euphrates, and digged, and took the girdle from the place where I had hid it: and, behold, the girdle was marred, it was profitable for nothing" (verses 1 -7).

And the word of Jehovah then explains this sign. "Thus saith Jehovah, after this manner will I mar the pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem. This evil people which refuse to hear My words, which walk in the imagination of their heart, and walk after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, shall even be as this girdle, which is good for nothing. For as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto Me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, saith Jehovah; that they might be unto Me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory: but they would not hear. Therefore thou shalt speak unto them this word; Thus saith Jehovah God of Israel, Every

bottle shall be filled with wine: and they shall say unto thee Do we not certainly know that every bottle shall be filled with wine? "

So now the people are bidden to heed the warning. "Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud: for Jehovah hath spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God, before He cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and while ye look for light, He turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness. But if ye will not hear it my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because Jehovah's flock is carried away captive. Say unto the king and unto the queen, Humble yourselves, sit down: for your principalities shall come down, even the crown of your glory. The cities of the south shall be shut up, and none shall open them: Judah shall be carried away captive all of it, it shall be wholly carried away captive. Lift up your eyes, and behold them that come from the north: where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock? What wilt thou say when he shall punish thee? for thou hast taught them to be captains, and as chief over thee: shall not sorrows take thee, as a woman in travail?" Thus, in striking language it is made known that woe is coming upon Jerusalem to the full.

Jeremiah 14-15

In Jeremiah 14, there is the positive infliction of a dearth, causing death and destruction, as a mark of God's displeasure. "Judah mourneth, and the gates thereof languish; they are black unto the ground; and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up." Their nobles are all in sorrow, but above all the prophets were wicked (verses 14, 15). Those who ought to have been the best in Israel were really the worst. God's displeasure was most strongly expressed against the false prophets.

This condemnation of the people is so strong that in Jeremiah 15. the Lord declares that the state of things now in Jerusalem and in Judah was such that even if the best men that had ever lived and those most known for their prayers of intercession were to appear in the land, they could not alter His fixed determination to judge the land. "Though," says He, "Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of My sight and let them go forth" (Jer. 15: 1).

And what then was the righteous to do? What could the righteous man seek? We find the answer given by Jeremiah himself: "Thy words," says he, "were found and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart; for I am called by Thy name, O Jehovah God of hosts" (Jer. 15:16). This was his resource, and that of all the faithful in a day of apostasy.

The words of the Lord always become more precious to the pious heart in a day of ruin when judgment is about to fall. So the apostle Paul when warning the elders of Ephesus pointed out this resource. "Now," says he, "I

commend you to God and the word of His grace" (Acts 20:32). Seducers, wolves, and perverse men, all these he anticipates will be spoilers among the flock, but his counsel is, "I commend you to God and the word of His grace." So in Timothy where Paul speaks of the last days and of perilous times coming, he says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God," conveying particularly this value for the Old Testament Scriptures. "All scripture" includes the New Testament as well as the Old.

Then again Peter points to the same feature of God's word. Peter was about to depart; he had this intimation from the Lord. He was soon to let slip the earthly tabernacle. In view of his absence as an apostle, he reminded them to keep in remembrance the words of truth they had heard (2 Peter 1). The word of God is always to be the distinguishing mark, and the anchor of hope for the believer in God.

I remember that the famous Bishop Horsley some years ago made some good remarks about this very thing. He had a strong sense of the ruin of Christendom that was at hand, and he ventured to think that when the things God wrought amongst His people came completely into the hands of men without His fear, God would awaken in the hearts of His people such a sense of the value of His word as would bring them to a degree of intelligence unknown in the previous state of the church.

This conviction is a remarkable statement of what, I believe, has always been true in the dealings of God. It was so in the days of our Lord. Destruction was impending over Jerusalem then, and the Annas and the Simeons and those who looked for redemption and the destruction of Jerusalem were those persons that

Malachi prepares us for in the last words of his book: "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another," and the Lord holds them in special remembrance. And I have no doubt that in like manner the Lord does and will do for those who value His word until judgment falls upon Christendom.

In verse 19, this love of God's words is followed up: "Therefore thus saith Jehovah, If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before Me, and if thou take forth the precious from the vile thou shalt be as My mouth." The great concern of believers in an evil day is not to be meddling with the vile but to be seeking to do good to the precious.

The gospel seeks the vile because it is God's way of making the vile to be precious. But, the people of God are not to occupy ourselves with what is bad, except to reject it. They are to seek what is good, to proclaim it. This is precisely what is pressed upon Jeremiah: "If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as My mouth." That is, you will be enabled to utter My truth and My grace. You will be the vessel of My mind, which the mouth is. "Let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them"; that is, do not meddle with them, but if you love My mind, My words, My truth, you will be made a blessing to them.

The great point is the selection of the precious from the vile.

"And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brazen wall: and they shall fight against thee but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee." The unfailing protection of God is with

His testimony as long as He sends one, and He Himself is with His witnesses.

Jeremiah 16

So in Jeremiah 16, the coming woe is pronounced, still more distressingly. It is not only dearth now, but death, and the word to Jeremiah is: "Enter not into the house of mourning, neither go to lament nor bemoan them." The time would not permit of it. When deaths are few there may be time to mourn with one and another, but when death is in every house it is too late.

"Enter not into the house of mourning, neither go to lament nor bemoan them: for I have taken away My peace from this people, saith Jehovah, even loving-kindness and mercies. Both the great and the small shall die in this land: they shall not be buried," so numerous would they be, "neither shall men lament for them, nor cut themselves, nor make themselves bald for them: neither shall men break bread for them" (verses 5-7) It is "tear themselves" in the text, but it seems to me to be what is actually said in the margin, "break bread."

This practice of breaking bread in connection with death seems to be the origin of what the Lord Jesus consecrated into the grand memorial of His remembrance. "Neither shall men break bread for them in mourning, to comfort them for the dead; neither shall men give them the cup of consolation." There you have the Supper, in both its parts. It was a familiar custom among the Jews, but the Lord gave a unique significance to it, and stamped new truth upon it. It was connected with the passover, for, as we know, that was the time of its institution. There was a particular reason for its establishment at that and at no other time, because it was to mark the impressive change from the great

central and fundamental feast of Israel. A new and different feast was begun for the Christians.

Then, in this chapter (Jer. 16:14, 15), a promise of future restoration is given. "Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that it shall no more be said, Jehovah liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, Jehovah liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither He had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers." Thus, the same chapter that brings in such a solemn denunciation of judgment gives the pledge of their final deliverance, for this will take place after the Babylonish captivity, Babylon being "the land of the north" spoken of here.

Jeremiah 17-18

In Jeremiah 17 the prophet says that it was not only Israel's sin but Judah's, that was so tremendous. Moreover, their danger was in trusting in man and the arm of flesh (verse 5). When the state of things becomes thoroughly evil and corrupt, the only object of trust is God. We must look to Him, and such is the blessing of the Lord that if we only confide in Him no day is so dark but what God can give us the richest blessings and the light of His presence. This subject is pursued in a very striking manner in the context.

In Jeremiah 18 we have the potter's house brought before us as a prophetic sign. The house of Israel was, of course, the clay to be moulded by the potter; "as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in Mine hand, O house of Israel." So the Lord shows the desperate case of this people, with whom He had taken such trouble. The effect of sending His precious words to them was their anger and hatred of His servant. Jeremiah was the great object of their animosity. "Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet." They were extremely jealous of him as an intruder. "Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words."

Jeremiah 19-20

In Jeremiah 19 we have the sign of the potter's earthen vessel further developed. Now the valley of the son of Hinnom is brought forward, which is always significant of judgment. "Therefore, behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that this place shall no more be called Tophet, nor the valley of the son of Hinnom, but The valley of slaughter." Tophet indicates the great judgment which the Lord will execute when He Himself comes. It is not merely the place of execution by man. Plainly, the judgment of Jerusalem is the topic.

Then we have an historical passage (Jer. 19:14 - Jer. 20:18), dealing with the persecution of the prophet by the priests. Now Pashur, the son of Immer the priest, was extremely vexed, and he used personal violence towards the prophet. Jeremiah tells him that his name should be called Magor-missabib, that is, Fear round about. This man who was so bold against Jeremiah would soon be humbled and filled with fear because of what was about to come to pass upon him. This attack by Pashur leads Jeremiah to an unfolding of his deep inward feeling. His language is very beautiful to my mind. There was no kind of steeling his heart against the persecution. His mouth was like one of steel, no doubt, but his heart was very soft indeed, and experienced deep agony on account of what he was obliged to utter against his adversary. So the very man that seemed as if nothing could bend him in truth was bound in the greatest grief before God, and at last he vents it to the Lord. "Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be

the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad."

Jeremiah, however, is in wonderful contrast with the blessed Lord, Who, when most rejected, was most happy in a certain sense. The reason was that He sought not His own things, but, as He said in Spirit, "The reproaches of them that reproached Thee are fallen upon Me." He was here simply to magnify God. If the greatest suffering would magnify God the most, He was ready to receive it. He could not pray for what was worst of all; He could not desire that God should forsake Him. Such a plea was impossible. It would show real hardness, and not perfection; but the Lord Jesus was perfect in everything, and in every way.

Jeremiah 21-22

Jeremiah's prophecy was continued. In Jeremiah 21 the denunciation of Jehovah is directed particularly against the royal house of David. The sin of Zedekiah was still more serious. The guilt of the people and the priests and prophets has already been exposed, but now the responsible head of the nation is condemned. There was no exception; the ruin of Judah is complete.

Royalty was always the last stem of blessing in the history of Israel. If only the king had been right, though the people and the prophets were ever so wrong, God would still send blessing to Israel. Everything depended upon the king, the seed of David. God might have chastised the prophets and priests and people, but He would have held to them for His servant David's sake. But when not only they went astray but the king himself was the leader of the wickedness, it was utterly impossible to hold to them, and it was the sorrowful task of Jeremiah to pronounce this divine decision. This responsibility resting on Zedekiah's shoulders gives its true importance to what he says: "Touching the house of the king of Judah, say, Hear ye the word of Jehovah; O house of David, thus saith the Lord; Execute judgment in the morning, and deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, lest My fury go out like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings" (Jer. 21: 11, 12).

In Jeremiah 22 the sin of the representatives of the house of David is dwelt upon in further detail. Beside Zedekiah, Shallum (Jehoahaz), the son of Josiah (verse 11), Jehoiakim, also son of Josiah (verse 18), and Coniah

(Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim, verse 24) are all arraigned as evil rulers in the critical times when the monarchy was drawing to its close.

The kings named are out of their chronological order, but the purpose is to bring the separate prophecies against the separate kings of Judah all into a cluster for the moral object of showing that virtually there was no difference. Some might be a little more pronounced in their violence and gross iniquity, but they were all faithless and godless. Hence, the solemn sentence was uttered by Jehovah: "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of Jehovah. Thus saith Jehovah, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days; for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah." It is implied, not that the line of David should fail, but that this man's line should.

Jeremiah 23

Jeremiah 23 pronounces a woe upon the pastors in general. By the pastors, the prophet means the kings who ought to have provided protection and provender for the people. But they scattered and destroyed the sheep of Jehovah's flock. However, He would raise up a competent Ruler and Shepherd-King for His sheep. "Behold the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is His name whereby He shall be called, JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer. 23:5, 6).

It is plain this prophecy points to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus. But the Messiah is the Lord Jesus not so much in relation to us as to Israel. This is important to hold fast. We do not lose by doing so. Many persons have the idea that if these prophecies are not applied to Christians and the church we lose something. Honesty is always the best policy. You cannot take something from your neighbour without losing far more than your neighbour loses. No doubt he may have a little loss, but you will have a terrible one. As this is true in natural things so much the more is it true in spiritual things. You cannot defraud Israel of one fraction of their portion, without impoverishing yourself immensely.

It must be remembered that the character and kind of blessing that Israel will have is of another sort from ours. This difference is due to the Lord Himself. The Lord Jesus will be the Head of the heavens as well as of

the earth, and while it is a very precious thing to be blessed on the earth, it is better to be blessed in the heavens. And there is just this distinction made between a Jew and a Christian. The Jew's proper blessing is upon the earth under Christ. The Christian's proper blessing is in the heavens along with Christ. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ Who hath blessed us" - not them - "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1:3).

Hence, the effect of Christian people appropriating the blessings of Israel as the blessings of Christians is that they lose sight of their own distinctive heavenly blessing and lapse more or less into the mere measure of a Jew's blessing. I grant you that if a person takes up the broad principle of the thing it is all quite right but to do this without overstepping the mark requires both care and discrimination. Unfortunately, the persons who confuse the Christian with the Jew have neither care nor discrimination. Consequently, the common interpretation I might truly characterise as a jumble of Scriptural doctrines, by which all real power of truth is lost.

The whole force of truth upon conscience and conduct depends upon its distinctness. When you blunt the edge of the truth, when you make the sharp two-edged sword to have no edge at all, it seems to me that its proper value for the soul is wellnigh gone. Now this destruction of value has been the effect of mixing up Jewish and Christian things. The fact is God made the distinction between the two very plain. He has written one set of truths in one language and the other in another language. The Holy Spirit wrote not merely the Old Testament in Hebrew but the New in Greek. For man to

make both revelations mean the same thing is an error of the first magnitude.

If you say both Testaments are divinely inspired, I agree with you, and rejoice in the belief; and I hope you will always hold fast this truth. Indeed you can never be too tenacious in holding fast the inspiration of every word of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, always making allowance for errors of copyists. I am no enemy to research in these particulars. I grant you there are a few words here and there that have been interpolated by the carelessness of scribes; but they are very few and they are all well known. They do not affect the divine accuracy and authority of Scripture, both Old and New.

Each of the two volumes has its own special point of view. The Old Testament looks on man in the flesh - the Jew and the Gentile. The New Testament looks at those who are called out from the Jew and Gentile - the church of God. Those composing the church fill the gap between the ancient recognition of the Jews-and the future recognition of the Jews. We steal in, as it were, between the two periods - the past and the future - on the drawbridge which is made ready to receive us. We are just simply passing through, leaving the earth to go into the heavens for ever. This is our proper place according to divine calling.

Our distinctive Christian hope is that we shall not only be reigned over by Christ but that we shall reign along with Him. Therefore to take up such prophetic words as these, "I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth" (Jer. 23:5), and to apply them to the church is to lower the status of the

church from heaven to earth. It ought to be a solemn warning to souls of the danger of their interpretation inasmuch as supremacy in the earth forms a very prominent feature of the false pretensions of Popery.

Catholic expositors have been leaders in this false interpretation. They have been misled by some of the ancient fathers who assumed that these Old Testament prophecies referred to Christianity. Consequently, Popery has sought to make the church a governor among the nations, to make the Pope a King of kings, and to put all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues under the rule of the see of Rome. Worldly government has been their avowed object, and in support of this claim they apply all these promises about Israel to themselves.

But the Lord will judge these outrageous falsehoods and pretensions. Moreover, He will reserve the earth for the Jewish people at the same time that Popery, the New Testament Babylon, will be destroyed by the divine judgment. We have to take care, therefore, not to be drawn astray in interpretation, because if we take a wrong path we do not know to what confusion and error we may be led.

"In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely." Now to attempt to apply this passage to what people call spiritual things is preposterous, because Judah and Israel are all the same thing if you take them in a spiritual sense. At any rate, I should like to hear a man define the difference. Perhaps the Tractarian party could define it. They think that Judah is the High Church and that Israel is the Low Church and Dissenters.

"And this is His name whereby He shall be called, JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. Therefore behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that they shall no more say, Jehovah liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, Jehovah liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land." Plainly enough, the passage speaks of the deliverance of the whole earthly people, both the ten tribes and the two tribes, and of nothing else. We may take the principle of the promised restoration of Israel to show how good the Lord is towards us, but nothing more. The truth is that we have never been driven out of our heritage, as Israel was. We may have failed to appropriate God's gifts, we may have abandoned our proper blessings, but there never has been such a thing as God driving Christians out of their proper place in Christ Jesus.

The whole idea of spiritualising the prophecies is unsound in principle. You can never apply it in detail. The theory only lives in a mist. So long as you are in the spiritual fog, you imagine these passages can be taken in a vague sense, but the moment you observe the precision of the word of God this delusion is at an end.

In the latter part of this chapter (Jer. 23) the value of the word of Jehovah is again insisted upon very strongly, and in an interesting way. The false prophets, the profane priests, and all the other dreamers brought forward their words to deceive, but the Lord stands to His own utterances, and how? Why should they take heed to it? Upon what ground? Upon its own intrinsic power. "What

is the chaff to the wheat?" (verse 28). Nutritive value decides.

I never read a tradition that was not manifestly chaff. I never read a thought that was of man that was not worthless in the things of God. Give me something of God, and the moment my faith lays hold upon the mind of God I have got the wheat. In other words, the truth of God is not a mere question of historical investigation, but it is what suits a plain man much better and straightway. What would become of the poor and the simple if they had to conduct all kinds of long investigations to find out what the word of God was?

There is one capital way of meeting a man when he is hungry. Give him a piece of bread, and he knows right well it is bread. He may never have seen that kind of bread before, and may never have tasted it, but he is convinced it is bread. Give him a piece of board, and he knows this is not bread. Thus, judged by human learning, a man may be exceedingly ignorant, but there is a sort of practical test by which God guards even the simplest of His people. "What is chaff to the wheat?" The truth of God always commends itself to the consciences of those that hear it.

The hearers may be bitterly prejudiced. They may have their difficulties, but then those difficulties arise entirely from the strength of their will that blindly cleaves to the thing to which it has been accustomed; for no man having drunk old wine straightway desireth new, for he saith the old is better. He is grown used to what he has heard from his childhood, so that even though the Lord Jesus presents the new wine, the force of old habits and prejudice is considerable. Nevertheless man has a

conscience, and that which is of God, and which reveals Christ to his soul, always finds an answer in the heart, even though the strength of will may still lead a man unbelievingly to slight God's word, to refuse it, and even resist it.

Jeremiah 24-25

The state of the Jewish nation is portrayed in Jeremiah 24. by the two baskets of figs to which I have already referred. I need not say much about them, except to note one remark about the good figs (verse 5). "Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good."

Jehovah meant their exile to be for their eventual good. This is a very important point. In a day of ruin faith always recognises the chastening of God and bows to it. Unbelief always resists, and accounts it patriotism or perhaps religion to oppose. Jeremiah seemed to be in the eyes of the men of Judah a very false Jew for this reason. He always counselled them to submit to the king of Babylon. They accounted themselves much better Jews, because they were willing to fight against the king of Babylon.

But the question was, What had God said? God told His prophet Jeremiah that the only path of safety and the only path of honouring Him was to submit to the king of Babylon. The king of Babylon might be very wicked, but God's people were also wicked, and it was as a judgment of their evil that God gave them into the hands of the king of Babylon.

Now faith always bows to God's will. If faith tells me to resist, I resist. If faith tells me to yield, I am bound to do it. Jeremiah did not resist, but yielded. The naughty figs resisted, and rather than yield, they fell back upon Egypt to try and balance by political power and military

aid the strength of the king of Babylon. The Lord tells them that the good figs were those that had submitted, and in the days of Jeconiah had been carried away captive to Babylon.

"And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus saith Jehovah, So will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt: and I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them. And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, among them, till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers" (Jer. 24:8-10). This was the different fate that awaited those who remained until the days of Zedekiah.

Jeremiah 25 is the proper centre of the prophecies of Jeremiah, and therefore the natural place for a break in this very cursory sketch of this prophecy. "The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, that was the first year of the king of Babylon" (Jer. 25:1).

Here Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, is brought in, the great oppressor of the Jews of whom the Lord had warned. He had told His people what was coming if they did not repent, and they had not repented. Now He announces, "I will send and take all the families of the north, saith Jehovah, and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant" (verse 9).

The last is a remarkable word. It was no longer Zedekiah, My servant, but it was Nebuchadnezzar, My servant. The children of Israel and of Judah were about to lose their special place as His nation, too. It was now a question, not of being His servant, as a special honour, but merely in providence. Nebuchadnezzar, the idolatrous Gentile, could be His servant in this way as much as any other.

Jehovah recites in detail His sentence upon Jerusalem and other nations also. So He says, "Moreover, I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle. And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith Jehovah, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations. And I will bring upon that land all My words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah hath prophesied against all the nations. For many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of them also: and I will recompense them according to their deeds, and according to the works of their own hands. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel unto me; Take the wine cup of this fury at My hand, and cause all the nations to whom I send thee to drink it." Jeremiah is still regarded as Jehovah's prophet to the nations. "And they shall drink, and be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them. Then took I the cup at Jehovah's hand, and made all the nations to drink, unto

whom Jehovah had sent me." But who must receive the cup first? "To wit, Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, and the kings thereof, and the princes thereof, to make them a desolation, an astonishment, an hissing and a curse" (verses 10-18).

It is only now that the sons of Israel are included with the nations. They had, as a people, forfeited their separate place unto God. They had lost it morally, and now they lost it judicially. God never judges persons until their own consciences have first judged them. The Lord did not drive the first man out of Paradise until the man fled from His presence. Adam fled to hide himself from God, and God only sentenced him afterwards to what his own conscience had already sentenced him. The same thing is always true of every soul.

Now when divine judgment is coming upon the nations around Palestine, among the very first of the nations to be judged come Jerusalem and Judah. They all are corrupt, thoroughly corrupt. It is idle to seek for differences of guilt among them. In fact, the special privileges of Judah only result in Judah coming first into the judgment. Jerusalem is judged at the beginning of the seventy years and Babylon is judged at the end of the period. The difference is only one of time; all are judged eventually.

The chapter speaks in such wide and general terms that although these prophecies were in a measure accomplished when Nebuchadnezzar was judged, God has in full view the end of the age - the great time when all prophecy shall be accomplished.

Jeremiah 26

Part 2: Jeremiah 26 - Jeremiah 52

The second division of Jeremiah begins with Jeremiah 26, and is distinguished by its taking up special circumstances rather than the general proof of the iniquity of the Jews and of the nations which brought them all into a state of subjugation to Nebuchadnezzar.

In what follows, we find the moral ground in details. "In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah came this word from Jehovah, saying, Thus saith Jehovah." Josiah was the one in whose reign the reformation which we have noticed before took place. The reform awakened a transient hope in pious minds of a permanent change Godward in the people, but this was a delusive hope. Indeed, we are never to entertain such hopes.

Once declension has set in, there may be temporary recovery and blessing, and there may even be deepening blessing as evil deepens. The light vouchsafed of God to faithful individuals may become more and more bright, as lights in a dark place. But once evil pervades the mass of those who bear the name of the Lord, it only corrupts as a leaven more and more. Man cannot stay its progress, and God Himself does not take away the leaven. God permits the evil to develop in intensity and presumption in order that His judgment may become necessary, and felt to be so by those who have the secret of the Lord.

When the hearts of the pious are bowed under the prevailing evil, they are led like Jeremiah into the

greater desire for their own souls and for their own separateness from evil, and, on the other hand, they cry to God much more earnestly for their nation than if things went on with outward fairness and decorum. Thus, a double good is effected. The sons of God learn to hate evil with a deep and holy hatred, and, on the other hand, they distrust themselves and look away from the earth to the Lord for help and deliverance. These two effects especially are wrought in the soul by the Spirit of God in a day of evil.

The great crisis in the national history brought before us is in the days of Jehoiakim, and it could not have occurred sooner. Under Josiah, there was an outward restraint of evil. The piety of the king affected the nation and brought a blessing upon it from God, but when his son Jehoiakim was on the throne, there was no moral ground found among the people for the favour of God.

Hence, "Thus saith Jehovah; Stand in the court of Jehovah's house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in Jehovah's house, all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word: if so be they will hearken, and turn every man from his evil way, that I may repent Me of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings" (Jer. 26:2, 3).

This is a fresh commission in a modified sense given to the prophet. Jeremiah had, as we saw in Jeremiah 1, already received his great call. Now, in the beginning of the second division of the Book, he again addressed the people, and admonished them against diminishing a single word of what God had to say by him.

"Thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith Jehovah; If ye will not hearken to Me, to walk in My law, which I have set before you, to hearken to the words of My servants the prophets, whom I sent unto you, both rising up early, and sending them, but ye have not hearkened; then will I make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth. So the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of Jehovah" (verses 4-7).

We find after this warning a division occurred among the people. Some heeded the words of Jeremiah and defended him (verses 17-24); others hardened themselves against him and sought his life, the priests being the most violent. "Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that Jehovah had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die" (verse 8).

They were indignant that the prophet should pronounce ruin upon the holy temple of Jehovah. It seemed to them as if his warnings of judgment were an impeachment of Jehovah's blessing upon the nation and of His choice of Israel to be His people. Did not his words prove that Jeremiah had less confidence and less faith in Jehovah than they?

"When the princes of Judah heard these things, then they came up from the king's house unto the house of Jehovah, and sat down in the entry of the new gate of Jehovah's house. Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes, and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy to die" (verses 10, 11). The princes of Judah showed more conscience than the people or the

priests or the prophets. The priests influenced the people, as is habitually the case, and the princes, being men of more independence of mind and less influenced by the feelings of the masses, were to some extent impressed by the weight and solemnity of the prophet's warnings.

So Jeremiah speaks to all the princes and to all the people. He does not now remonstrate with the priests and the prophets; they were thoroughly hardened and sold to evil; but he does appeal to the princes on the one hand and to the people on the other, who, after all, were simple. And he says, "Jehovah sent me to prophesy against this house." He did not prophesy out of personal feeling. He was not prompted by private animosity. Surely they did not think that Jeremiah would take pleasure in the destruction of his own city and the sanctuary of Jehovah.

"Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of Jehovah your God; and Jehovah will repent Him of the evil that He hath pronounced against you." Jeremiah's prophecies are more conditional than any other, save only that of Jonah. Indeed, they are more conditionally expressed than even Jonah's. Jonah did not put forward a condition; "If you repent, God will spare Nineveh." But Jeremiah does state the condition; "If you repent, Jehovah will repent of what He means to do."

But the reason why Jeremiah's prophecies are more conditional is that, more than any of the other prophets, he alludes to the impending judgment of Israel and the nations by Nebuchadnezzar. And as this judgment was but a temporal one, a condition is attached to the prophecy. When the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and

the judgment that He will execute form the prominent topic before the mind of the Holy Ghost, no conditions of repentance are expressed. There God has distinctly before Him the consummation of the frightful apostasy of man - of the Jews, of the Gentiles, and, we can now add, of Christendom. Therefore inasmuch as the measure of the wickedness to be judged is certain, so the coming of the Lord to judge that wickedness is also certain. It is a fixed event, and so far as I know, this coming in judgment is never stated conditionally. There is no warning, such as, "If you repent, the Lord will not come." It would in fact be a kind of dishonour to the Lord Jesus.

But as only an earthly instrument was to be employed in this case to inflict the judgments, we can well understand the Lord saying, "If you repent, I will not send this Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to beat you down." This is the reason, as it appears to me, why this feature appears more in Jeremiah than elsewhere. Moreover, while it is entirely wrong to apply Jeremiah's prophecies exclusively to the days of Nebuchadnezzar, it remains true that the historical Nebuchadnezzar is more prominent in this Book than anywhere else in scripture.

"Then said the princes and all the people unto the priests and to the prophets; This man is not worthy to die; for he hath spoken to us in the name of Jehovah our God. Then rose up certain of the elders of the land, and spake to all the assembly of the people, saying, Micah the Morasthite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spake to all the people of Judah, saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; Zion shall be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a

forest" (verses 16-18). What happened to Micah? Did they treat him as a traitor? Was Micah judged to die? Not so.

Now this instance from Hezekiah's reign was the more striking and emphatic because Micah (Jer. 3: 12) had prophesied of the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple in the days of a good king. Surely, therefore, his prophecy was more surprising than Jeremiah's prediction of the same thing in the days of a bad king. The defence, therefore, of the prophet was complete. "Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him at all to death? did he not fear Jehovah, and besought Jehovah, and Jehovah repented Him of the evil which He had pronounced against them? Thus might we procure great evil against our souls" (verse 19).

Then the case of Micah was followed by another. Urijah, the son of Shemaiah of Kirjath-jearim, who in the name of Jehovah, prophesied against the city of Jerusalem and the land of Judah. "And when Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men, and all the princes, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death: but when Urijah heard it, he was afraid, and fled, and went into Egypt; and Jehoiakim the king sent men into Egypt, namely, Elnathan the son of Achbor, and certain men with him into Egypt. And they fetched forth Urijah out of Egypt, and brought him unto Jehoiakim the king who slew him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people. Nevertheless, the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death" (verses 21-24). Thus, while there was the greatest danger that Jeremiah would suffer martyrdom as Urijah had done, the Lord watched over him. It was

an honour to Urijah to die, but it was a mercy to Judah that Jeremiah was not put to death.

Jeremiah 27

Jeremiah 27 opens thus: "In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah came this word unto Jeremiah from Jehovah, saying, Thus saith Jehovah to me; Make thee bonds and yokes, and put them upon thy neck, and send them to the king of Edom, and to the king of Moab, and to the king of the Ammonites, and to the king of Tyrus, and to the king of Zidon, by the hand of the messengers which come to Jerusalem unto Zedekiah king of Judah; and command them to say unto their masters, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel" (verses 1 to 4).

This instruction came to Jeremiah in the days of Zedekiah, as verse 3 states. Jehoiakim, in the first verse, has no doubt been mistakenly inserted by copyists for Zedekiah. This suggestion is no impeachment of scripture, but God does not work miracles to keep scribes right or printers right. They may easily misread the original, particularly in the matter of a name or a date.

In this instance, the scripture itself makes plain the mistake, because, undoubtedly Jehoiakim and Zedekiah did not reign together. Zedekiah was after Jehoiakim. Then verse 3 says, "By the hand of the messengers which come to Jerusalem unto Zedekiah king of Judah"; so that Zedekiah was reigning at the time of the prophecy of the bonds and the yokes. It follows' that Jeremiah 26 was in the days of Jehoiakim, but Jeremiah 27 in the days of Zedekiah.

A fresh message is sent on this occasion to the nations commanding them to take the yoke of submission to the

king of Babylon. The foreign messengers or ambassadors are to carry the word to their respective lords, "Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, Thus shall ye say unto your masters; I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemeth meet unto Me. And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him" (verses 4-6).

It is plain that Jehovah is speaking in a peremptory way. In the days of Zedekiah, there is no word of repentance nor of Jehovah's repenting. His word to Judah and the nations becomes absolute, speaking as Creator and Governor. Jeremiah warns that divine judgment would fall, not only upon Zedekiah king of Judah but upon the Ammonites and Moabites and the surrounding nations. All are to be given into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar to be under the yoke of bondage to him. God had granted them time to repent, but they had not used the opportunity. It was now too late, and they must all wear the Babylonian yokes and bonds.

Jeremiah 28

The opening verse of Jeremiah 28 confirms what has been said about the date in the previous chapter. Both events were in the reign of Zedekiah. "And it came to pass the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, and in the fifth month, that Hananiah the son of Azur the prophet, which was of Gibeon, spake unto me in the house of Jehovah, in the presence of the priests, and of all the people."

At this time the iniquity and enmity of the false prophets become more manifest than ever. Hananiah resents in the strongest way Jeremiah's prediction. He prophesied in the name of Jehovah, "Within two full years will I bring again into this place" from Babylon all the vessels of the temple. This was the false witness of restoration that Hananiah bore in the presence of Jeremiah, who in answer only said, "Amen, Jehovah do so" (verse 6). Hananiah predicted that Judah's yoke under Nebuchadnezzar would in two full years be broken. Jeremiah with great meekness says, "Amen, Jehovah do so." If such was His will, the true prophet was content.

Hananiah gave a sign with his false prophecy, taking the yoke from off Jeremiah's neck, breaking it and saying, "Thus saith Jehovah, Even so, will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all nations"; but Jeremiah went his way without any reply (verse 11). This self-restraint is a great lesson for us; the servant of the Lord shall not strive. The same man, Jeremiah, who had been like a brazen wall, who had

resisted kings and prophets and priests to the face, now refuses to contend with the prophet Hananiah.

The reason for his conduct is plain. Jeremiah did remonstrate, and warn while there was a hope of repentance or when long-suffering grace called for it, but where there was no conscience at work, where there was a false pretence of the name of the Lord, he simply goes his way. He leaves God to judge between prophet and prophet. If Jeremiah was true, Hananiah was false. He was perfectly sure that he was true himself. He allows, therefore, the word and the act of Hananiah to be before the consciences of the men of Judah, without adding a word of his own. He would have weakened his former testimony, if he had said one single word more.

Jeremiah even wished that Hananiah's prophecy of immediate deliverance from the yoke of Babylon might be true; but there had been no repentance in Judah. It is always a mark of false prophecies that in a day of evil they promised prosperity. When the people of God have departed from Him, false prophets prophesy smooth things. They have their glowing dreams of progress and of the extension of the work and blessing of the Lord. The coming of great things and pleasant things is their invariable testimony. A true prophet, on the contrary, in the day of evil warns of the coming of the Lord to judge the ungodly. This is what Jeremiah did. But Hananiah held out the welcome prospect that a general deliverance from servitude to the king of Babylon was close at hand.

But afterwards God gave Jeremiah a word to say to Hananiah. "Go and tell Hananiah, saying, Thus saith Jehovah; Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou

shalt make for them yokes of iron. For thus saith Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel; I have put a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him: and I have given him the beasts of the field also. Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; Jehovah hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Therefore thus saith Jehovah; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against Jehovah. So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month" (verses 13-17). It was a solemn public vindication of the truth of Jeremiah's prophecies and the falsity and deceit of Hananiah's.

Jeremiah 29

In Jeremiah 29, the prophet sent a letter unto the residue of the elders which were carried away captive to Babylon in the time of Jeconiah the king of Judah (2 Kings 24:12-16). And the word of Jehovah of hosts commanded them to submit implicitly to Nebuchadnezzar. They were not only not to rebel, but they were to obey. They were no longer Jews under the direct government of God in their own land, but they were to recognise the authority of the Gentile king whom God had now set over them because of their sins.

The captives were in a new political relationship. They required special direction from God, for undoubtedly the Jewish spirit would have strongly resented the notion of a Gentile ruling over them. They would have been always plotting in Babylon how to put an end to this miserable captivity unless God had expressed His mind. But the part of faith, when God sends a chastening, is to bow to it, not to fight against it. If the Lord does anything because of a wrong on our part, faith in Him does not consist in making light of the thing or in making light of the chastening, but in accepting with meekness the chastening and in confessing the wrong.

This subjection to their exile was what Jeremiah impressed upon the Jews in Babylon. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon: build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters" (verses 4-6). There was to be nothing morbid in their habits.

They were to take from God all the circumstances. They were happily to trust in the Lord, but to do so as captives to Nebuchadnezzar. Nay, they were even to seek the good and peace of Babylon. "Take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto Jehovah for it."

Now souls not really bowing to God are always morbid, murmuring in their affliction, and avoiding the common duties of life. The pious do not shut the* eyes to what is painful, nor are they insensible in their adversity. There would be no piety in ignoring the truth of things, but feeling the affliction, they seek grace from God to take the hardship from His hand with all patience.

"For thus saith Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely unto you in My name: I have not sent them, saith Jehovah. For thus saith Jehovah," instead of Hananiah's two years, "that after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform My good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith Jehovah, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon Me, and ye shall go and pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith Jehovah: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the

places whither I have driven you, saith Jehovah; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive" (verses 8-14).

This predicted return from captivity was, no doubt, accomplished in a measure when the return took place under Cyrus, the king of Persia, although the terms of the prophecy go beyond that, but still there was an accomplishment at that time. Then Jehovah speaks concerning those Jews still remaining in Jerusalem under Zedekiah: "Know that thus saith Jehovah of the king that sitteth upon the throne of David, and of all the people that dwelleth in this city and of your brethren that are not gone forth with you into captivity; Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; Behold, I will send upon them the sword, and the famine, and the pestilence." This is not a promise of the return from Babylon under a son of David. The son of David was to suffer chastisement still more. There had been already a son of David carried into captivity. There was another son of David still reigning in Jerusalem, and the pestilence and the sword were doomed to fall upon him.

Jeremiah 30

But Jeremiah 30 contains Jehovah's prophecy of the final restoration of His people at the end. "The word that came to Jeremiah from Jehovah, saying, Thus speaketh Jehovah God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book. For, lo, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will bring again the captivity of My people Israel and Judah, saith Jehovah; and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it. And these are the words that the Lord spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus saith Jehovah, We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? Wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it" (Jer. 30:1-7).

It is impossible to say that this promised restoration of both Israel and Judah has been accomplished. The peculiarity of this unparalleled time of suffering is that although it is the worst time of sorrow that Israel will have ever known, out of that time they shall have salvation. "It is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it" (verse 7). Such trouble with accompanying deliverance for Israel and Jacob has never been the case from Jeremiah's day to this. The Maccabean successes over their enemies were as nothing when compared with this prophecy. We also have a prediction of them in Daniel 11. There is a history of them in Josephus and in the Apocrypha, but Scripture

does not deign to give any account of the Maccabean successes.

When the Roman power came into the ascendant, Israel and Judah were not saved. Pompey captured Jerusalem; and afterwards Titus not only captured but destroyed the city, and the Jews were scattered again.

So that while there have been many times of trouble for the Jews, there has never yet been an unparalleled trouble, after which they were saved. All the times of trouble that they have gone through on any large scale so far have only ended in further troubles. Things have always gone against the Jew, with the single exception, as I have said, of the Maccabean risings, the results of which were very small indeed, when compared with the terms of this prophecy.

"For it shall come to pass in that day, saith Jehovah of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him (Jacob)." Why, strangers have been serving themselves of Jacob up to this hour! The Jews have never yet obtained their national independence - never.

"But they shall serve Jehovah their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them" (verse 9). This will be the days of the Messiah: "Jehovah their God, and David their king." It is certain the prophecy applies to the Jewish people as a whole undivided nation. The prophecy, therefore, is unfulfilled.

In the rest of Jeremiah 30 there are moral appeals to the captives in Babylon. They were to take courage from Jehovah's comforting word, and not to be dismayed. "For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy

wounds, saith Jehovah; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after. Thus saith Jehovah; Behold, I will bring again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on his dwelling-places; and the city shall be builded upon her own heap"; that is, after her destruction Jerusalem will be builded again; "and the palace shall remain after the manner thereof. And out of them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of them that make merry: and I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small. Their children also shall be as aforetime, and their congregation shall be established before Me, and I will punish all that oppress them. And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them" (verses 17-21); whereas generally the case was usually the very contrary; the governor himself proceeded from the conquering power. And Jehovah added, "Ye shall be My people and I will be your God," showing the restoration would be not merely revival as a nation, but also communion with God in worship and service.

Jeremiah 31

So in Jeremiah 31, this new relationship to God is made very distinct. "At the same time, saith Jehovah, will I be the God of all the families of Israel." There is to be a complete restoration of the scattered and dispersed tribes not of Judah only but of Israel: "all the families of Israel." Nothing can be more distinct. "Thus saith Jehovah, The people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest."

Then in a very beautiful manner this chapter delineates the mighty intervention of God. He "will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together" (verse 8). It is a complete deliverance, so that even the suffering and the sick will be brought safely back by God's command and care. He will ensure their safe entrance into the holy land. The recovery of the nations is to be, therefore, complete. If any persons were likely to be left behind when Israel is being gathered, it would, of course, be the sick and helpless, such as here described; but no, all are brought back. Jehovah will forget none.

Further, Israel will not return with vainglory and pride, as if their own arm had delivered them. Their salvation in that day will not be due to the influence of money or to diplomacy, or to anything of man. "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them." It will be a real work of God in them and for them. A work of repentance in their souls will accompany their

restoration. "For I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn" (verse 9).

In this chapter occurs the well-known scripture which is applied to Herod's destruction of the innocents, as they are called, at Bethlehem. "Thus saith Jehovah; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children because they were not" (verse 15). It is beautiful to see that the Holy Spirit (Matt. 2:17, 18) applies to that event the passage about sorrow but not that about joy. Here is what follows: "Thus saith Jehovah; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith Jehovah; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy" (verse 16).

Now the evangelist did not quote this verse. He only referred to what was fulfilled. There was bitter sorrow then, even in the birthplace of royalty. Deep anguish was in the place where there ought to have been the greatest joy. The birth of the Messiah ought to have been the signal for universal joy in the land of Israel. And there would have been if there had been faith in God and His promise, but there was not. Moreover, since the state of the people was one of shameful unbelief so there was an Edomite usurper on the throne. Hence violence and deceit ruled in the land, and Rachel wept for her children and could not be comforted because they were not. So the Holy Spirit applied the first part of the prophecy, but there He stops. When the entire prophecy is fulfilled, there will be sorrow again in the land, great sorrow, but there will also be joy. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." "And there

is hope in thine end, saith Jehovah, that thy children shall come again to their own border" (verse 17).

Then comes the repentance of Ephraim. "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus"; and the Lord shows that this work of contrition which undoubtedly begins in their souls is carried on to its end. "Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth" (verse, 19).

The Lord shows His feeling of love for the repentant one. "Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore My bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith Jehovah. Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities" (verses 20, 21). It is the final return of Israel to their own land after long wandering. "How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? for Jehovah hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man" (verse 22).

It has been common among the Fathers as well as the divines that have followed them to apply this passage to the birth of the Lord of the Virgin Mary, but the prophecy has not the smallest reference to it. A woman compassing a man is not at all the same thing as the Virgin compassing and bearing a son. Compassing a man has no reference whatever to the birth of a child. The meaning is that a woman who is regarded as the weakest of the human race should overcome even the

strongest man. The term for man here implies a man of might. He is expressly not an ordinary man but a hero, a man of might; and, contrary to the ordinary course of nature, the weak woman overthrows the powerful man.

Such is the idea of the phrase. The true force of "compass" is not only to oppose or resist but even to defeat all the man's strength. And so God will cause this woman, who is clearly a figure of the backsliding daughter of Israel in her great weakness, to be an overcomer. Though she is in the very weakest state and all the might of the man is against her, she will nevertheless compass the man and be victorious.

There will be in the coming time a complete change for Israel in the manner of what we know in our blessed Lord Himself. We often sing in one of our hymns, "By weakness and defeat, He won the meed and crown," so in that day the Lord will reproduce His own victory in His people. "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." The woman is the symbol of the nation in their weakness, and the compassing a man is their victory over all human resources brought to bear against them.

This view gives a very simple meaning to this symbolic sentence, without forcing a reference to the virgin birth of Christ. Indeed Jeremiah does not make any distinct reference to the Messiah's birth. He predicts the Messiah as a king reigning. He does not look at His birth, His life, His death, or His cross, but at the nation of Israel, and at the Lord Jesus in His national relationship to them as their King, as "David their king."

Now this special line in their ministry gives great symmetry to the prophets. There is always great

propriety in the various prophecies. The prophets do not all bring in the Messiah in the same way. Isaiah is the most comprehensive of all the prophets, and brings in the Messiah in every way. Some of them only foretell the Messiah as a sufferer, and others as a glorious conqueror. One may show Him in both aspects, but usually some present Him in one way and some in another. There is always a relation between the particular scope of the prophecy and the manner in which Christ is introduced in it.

The effect of this assurance of coming blessing for his people upon the prophet's mind was that his sleep was sweet unto him (verse 26). He was refreshed by the knowledge that God will work for His people in the time of their greatest weakness and bring about such happy results. The prophecy that follows is in entire accordance with this intimation.

"Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast. And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them to pluck up and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them to build, and to plant, saith Jehovah. In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge. Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt" (verses 27-32).

The new covenant will not be of the same nature as the old one. This contrast between them completely refutes one of the standing objections of modern Judaism. One of the most celebrated Rabbis, a Spanish Jew, called Erobeo,* reasons at great length and with considerable acuteness as if there could be nothing but the law of Moses which will remain the invariable standard of Israel and nothing else.

* There seems no doubt that "Erobeo" in the text refers to Balthazar Orobio de Castro, an apologetic writer for the Jewish faith. He was born at Braganza, Portugal, and died in 1687 at Amsterdam, where he settled after leaving Spain. He produced many works in defence of the Jewish religion, opposing especially Spinoza, the infidel Jew, who has been called the father of modern Pantheism. Orobio's parents were nominally Christian, and he himself was tortured and imprisoned by the Inquisition. On his release, he abjured Christianity, reverted to the religion of his race was circumcised, and took the name of Isaac. - (W.J.H.)

Now it is very evident that in this passage we have the prophet who completely rejects such a thought and who shows that there is to be a vast change of covenant relationship. It will be no dishonour to the law of Moses that God will establish a new covenant under the Messiah; in fact Moses himself predicted it. He foretold that the Lord God was to raise up a prophet like unto himself, but although like unto him, superior to him (Deut. 18: 15, 18). There would be no superiority in this prophet if he did not introduce a new state of things, that is, the new covenant. Moses brought in the old covenant. Christ will bring in the new covenant.

I do not say we, Christians, have got the new covenant itself, but we have got the blood of the new covenant. We have that on which the new covenant is founded. The new covenant itself supposes the land of Israel blessed and the house of Israel delivered, but neither the one nor the other has become true yet. The new covenant supposes certain spiritual blessings, namely, the law of God written in the heart and our sins forgiven. These spiritual parts of the new covenant we have received now, along with other blessings peculiar to Christianity, namely, the presence of the Holy Ghost and union with Christ in heaven which the Jews will not have.

But nothing can be more evident than that this prophecy refutes the Jew when he imagines that it is a dishonour to the law for God to bring in anything better than what was enjoyed in the days of Moses. In this passage the marked contrast between the two covenants is most clearly shown, and the special features of the new. "This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith Jehovah, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah: for they shall all know Me from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Jehovah: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (verses 33, 34). These two verses apply to the Christian just as much as they will to the Jew, but what follows does not apply to Christians, nor to the Jews now, for they are not a nation. "Thus saith Jehovah, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when

the waves thereof roar; Jehovah of hosts is His name: if those ordinances depart from before Me, saith Jehovah, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me for ever" (verses 35, 36).

To show that this prophecy is not to be understood merely in an allegorical way, but literally, the prophet says, "Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that the city shall be built to Jehovah from the tower of Hanameel unto the gate of the corner" (verse 38). This is not the city in the heavens, whose maker and builder is God. It is not the new Jerusalem that comes down from heaven from God, because there is no tower of Hanameel there. There is no such thing as measuring the corner there. "And the measuring line shall yet go forth over against it upon the hill Gareb, and shall compass about to Goath" (verse 39). They are the old localities and gates of the city of Jerusalem; and God will renew them in the day that is coming.

Further, the prophet speaks of "the whole valley of the dead bodies." Surely no one is so insane as to suppose that there is a valley of dead bodies in the new Jerusalem. "And the whole valley of the dead bodies, and of the ashes, and all the fields unto the brook of Kidron, unto the corner of the horse gate toward the east, shall be holy unto Jehovah; it shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more for ever" (verse 40). The truth is that the idea is so unfounded that there is the danger in our saying too much about it, of giving the impression that one was merely trying to make the scheme ridiculous.

Jeremiah 32

In Jeremiah 32, this prophecy of the new covenant is followed up by a very striking incident in which the prophet's faith in his own prediction is tested. The Lord allows His servants to be tested constantly. If the Lord gives us to witness to some great truth we shall have to prove our own faith in that truth. Jeremiah was put to such a test in the following circumstances. "The word came to Jeremiah from Jehovah in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. For then the king of Babylon's army besieged Jerusalem: and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the prison, which was in the king of Judah's house" (verses 1, 2).

The prophet was in a very bad case himself, and so was the city. Jerusalem was besieged and certain to be taken by the king of Babylon. Jeremiah was not only in danger from the Chaldeans but he was imprisoned in the city; that is, he was in double sorrow. He was in sorrow from the Jews even more than from the Gentiles.

Such a time one would suppose was most unsuitable for the transaction of business, but the transaction then undertaken was one eminently of faith, specially demanding the prophet's utmost confidence in the testimony that God had raised him up to bear. Accordingly, he purchased the field of Hanameel.

But at this very time, Jeremiah had given a striking word and a very serious one concerning the king. "And Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him

mouth to mouth, and his eyes shall behold his eyes; and he shall lead Zedekiah to Babylon, and there shall he be until I visit him, saith Jehovah: though he fight with the Chaldeans ye shall not prosper" (verses 4, 5).

The capture of the city was imminent, but Jeremiah said, "The word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Behold, Hanameel, the son of Shallum thine uncle, shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that is in Anathoth." What a time to buy a field! The city certain to be taken, the prophet himself in prison! There was no escape, according to his own word, from the Babylonian army, and, further, there was no escape from the hostile power of those that ruled in Jerusalem, for his testimony was dead against their pride and their false patriotism.

Yet, at such a juncture Jeremiah's uncle asked him to buy a field. What! when they were about to be all swept out of the land and carried into captivity! Should he then buy a field? What could be the ground for such a transaction? But it was Jehovah Who bade him do it. The purchase was a testimony of the greatest value, showing that in spite of the desolation, in spite of the destruction of the city, Jeremiah believed that the Jews would return to their possessions, and that land would still be cultivated and houses built there.

It is recorded in Roman history that at the time when the Gauls were encamped around Rome, the very land on which the Gauls had raised their tents was bought and sold, and this was considered one of the greatest proofs of confidence in the future destinies of Rome that this was done. There is no event, perhaps, in history, like it. I do not recollect that in any siege of any other place,

except in this case of Rome, there ever was such a transaction.

But there is a weighty difference between the two events. The Roman magnified that deed and recorded it in his history as a proof of his iron will. They knew right well that there was more toughness in the Roman than in the Gaul, and although the Gaul might gain some little advantage for a time the Roman iron would prove stronger than the Gallic fire. They knew right well that although the Gauls might be impetuous and might gain the victory for the day, Rome would rise again and would repel them and trample them under her feet. And so it was.

But how different was the spirit of Jeremiah! He was a sufferer from his own people, himself owning that the hand of God was stretched out against Jerusalem. Nevertheless, he, on the simple faith of God's word and not having the smallest confidence in his own power, and there being no display of confidence in Zedekiah or the people of the Jews, acted in this calm and striking fashion in the face of the overpowering weight of the Chaldean power that was raised up of God to trample down the proud and rebellious city of Jerusalem.

But Jeremiah bought the field of his uncle according to the provisions of the law of the Lord. He bought it because he had confidence in the restoration of Israel - not only the final restoration but the partial one after the lapse of seventy years. It seems to me, therefore, that we have a beautiful answer to the pride of Rome in the faith of Jeremiah.

"So Hanameel, mine uncle's son, came to me in the court of the prison, according to the word of Jehovah,

and said unto me, Buy my field, I pray thee, that is in Anathoth, which is in the country of Benjamin: for the right of inheritance is thine, and the redemption is thine; buy it for thyself. Then I knew that this was the word of Jehovah" (verse 8). Jehovah had first told the prophet to buy the field, and then Hanameel came to offer his field for sale.

"And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle's son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver. And I subscribed the evidence, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances. So I took the evidence of the purchase, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open" (verses 9-11). All was done according to the custom of the law. The open document was for consultation. The sealed one was that on which all depended; it was the incontestable proof. There is often a similar practice in a family now. A will is deposited in Doctors' Commons, as we say, and there it always abides. It cannot be touched. It must not be removed. It is the legal evidence on which all turns. But, besides that, the family have a copy made by their solicitor for reference in case of any question regarding the distribution of the property.

And then according to the word of the Lord, Jeremiah committed the evidence of purchase to Baruch to preserve as a witness that property would be again possessed in the land. "And I charged Baruch before them, saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel; Take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and put them in an earthen vessel, that they

may continue many days. For thus saith Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land" (verses 13-15).

While it was quite true that because of the abominations of the men of Judah, Jehovah would give them over as captives to the king of Babylon, at the same time Jehovah says, "Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in Mine anger, and in My fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: and they shall be My people, and I will be their God: and I will give them one heart and one way that they may fear Me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good" (verses 37-40). This is an additional word of the Lord about the new covenant; it will be an everlasting one; He will never turn away from His people.

We know that the Jews have never yet inherited their land according to the new covenant, still less according to the everlasting covenant. They are to inherit under both titles; the new covenant to distinguish it from anything that ever was before, the everlasting covenant to show that the new covenant will never be put out of date, or grow obsolete, but will always be effectual and valid for their possession and their blessing.

It has been asked whether these title deeds of Jeremiah's purchase will ever be recovered. But I cannot say. I should think they have perished long ago; still there is nothing too hard for the Lord. I am sure,

however, the sense of them will never perish, and I have sometimes thought that they would yet come to light.

Jehovah will yet pour out His heart of grace upon His people. "Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with My whole heart and with My whole soul. For thus saith Jehovah, Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them. And fields shall be bought in this land, whereof ye say, It is desolate without man or beast; it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans. Men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe evidences, and seal them, and take witnesses in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem; and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the mountains, and in the cities of the valley, and in the cities of the south: for I will cause their captivity to return, saith Jehovah" (verses 41-44).

It may be noticed that unbelief shows itself in two ways that are exactly in contrast with faith. Before the threatened evil or judgment comes from the hand of the Lord men do not believe it. They are always hoping for a deliverance where there is no deliverance, for peace where there is no peace. This is the first effect of unbelief - a fighting against Jehovah's chastening. When the chastening comes, then they are all plunged into despair: then they think all is over with the people and that there never will be any blessing from the hand of the Lord. Now faith, on the contrary, believes the judgment before it comes, but believes in the goodness of the Lord and that mercy shall rejoice against judgment.

Jeremiah 33-35

In Jeremiah 33, the Spirit of God unfolds further this certainty of blessing for the people from the hand of the Lord. Not only will Judah and Israel return from captivity, and buy and sell and build and plant and be a nation restored, but Jehovah says, "I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against Me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have transgressed against Me; and it shall be to Me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth" (verses 8, 9).

"Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Judah be saved and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, Jehovah our righteousness. For thus saith Jehovah, David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel" (verses 14-17).

This prophecy plainly foretells the full restoration Of the religious polity as well as the civil rule under the Messiah. The nation will have royalty in the line of David, and priesthood in the line of Aaron the Levite. Then Jehovah gives them the pledge that He will no more break this covenant with Israel than His covenant of day and night. "Thus saith Jehovah, If My covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; then will I cast away

the seed of Jacob, and David My servant, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them" (verses 25, 26).

In Jeremiah 34, a comforting word is addressed to Zedekiah, apparently because of his kindness towards the prophet. He was an evil ruler, but he was not without kindly feeling. Many a bad man whose conscience towards God is not utterly silenced has a great deal of natural feeling. He has the sense that a thing is wrong, but he has no force to do the right. He sees what is right and values the man that says what is right, but has no spiritual power to carry him in the path of what is right.

Now Zedekiah was this kind of man. There were worse kings than he, and he showed some disposition to listen to the prophet. Nevertheless, Zedekiah brought on the crisis of judgment for Jerusalem and his people. It is not the most daring man that does the worst deed. Weakness may be guilty where there is no looking to God for strength. And such was the case with Zedekiah. But the Lord showed him mercy, because, I think, of what he had done to His servant Jeremiah. "Thou shalt not die by the sword, but thou shalt die in peace." How gracious is Jehovah! He tempered the judgment which fell upon Zedekiah because of a certain relenting in the heart of the king towards His prophet. The kindly act is not forgotten by God.

In Jeremiah 35, the obedience of the Rechabites is set before the men of Judah to make them feel that some men, at least, showed more reverence for an earthly

father than Israel showed for God Himself. The Rechabites were a certain class of Arabs - Bedouins of the desert, as we say - who were true to the requisition of their father. He had bound them neither to build houses nor to drink wine, and these men had carried out the will of their father for a long time.

Now when the Rechabites sought refuge in Jerusalem because of Nebuchadnezzar, their fidelity to their father's request is used as a solemn condemnation of the disobedience of the children of Judah. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were bidden to accept instruction from the sight of these Rechabites who even in the time of the impending siege would not depart from the regulations of their father. They might have pleaded the circumstances as an excuse for disobeying at that time, but they remained faithful to their fathers. "And Jeremiah said unto the house of the Rechabites, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel; because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you: therefore thus saith Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel: Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before Me for ever" (verses 18, 19). And I have no doubt that the Lord is preserving a portion of this very race to this day.

Jeremiah 36

Jeremiah 36 shows a very different king. Jehoiakim had been an evil ruler, but bolder and more obstinate than Zedekiah. And what brought out Jehoiakim's iniquity was the roll that the prophet wrote. "Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day that I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day. It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin. Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah; and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of Jehovah which He had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book. And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, I am shut up; I cannot go into the house of Jehovah: therefore go thou, and read in the roll, which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of Jehovah in the ears of the people in Jehovah's house upon the fasting day: and also thou shalt read them in the ears of all Judah that come out of their cities. It may be they will present their supplication before Jehovah, and will return every one from his evil way: for great is the anger and the fury that Jehovah hath pronounced against this people" (verses 2-7).

Baruch did so. "And it came to pass in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, in the ninth month, that they proclaimed a fast before Jehovah to all the people in Jerusalem and to all the people that came back from the cities of Judah unto Jerusalem. Then read

Baruch in the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of Jehovah" (verses 9, 10).

Then Micaiah, who had listened, went down in to the king's house, where all the princes were sitting in the scribe's chamber, and declared to them all the words he had heard. Then the princes sent to Baruch for the roll, and being afraid at what they heard, they proposed to tell the king. "And they went into the king into the court, but they laid up the roll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and told all the words in the ears of the king. So the king sent Jehudi to fetch the roll: and he took it out of Elishama the scribe's chamber. And Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes which stood beside the king" (verses 20, 21). The poor king showed his utter unbelief. His way of getting rid of the judgment was by destroying the roll. "And it came to pass that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth" (verse 23). This was an act of daring impiety before God; futile and perfect folly, but not the less sin.

The result was that Jehovah told Jeremiah to take "another roll and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned. And thou shalt say to Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Thus saith Jehovah; Thou hast burned this roll, saying, Why hast thou written therein, saying, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast? Therefore thus saith Jehovah of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and

his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost.

And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them" (verses 28- 31).

The old roll was repeated with many like words, and more were added according to the invariable way of God. Unbelief never hinders but rather accomplishes the judgments of God. It may add to them but it never diminishes them.

Jeremiah 37-44

Jeremiah 37 describes the vain efforts of Zedekiah and his nobles to escape from the Chaldean. This description is continued in Jeremiah 38, where we also read of Jeremiah sunk into a dungeon, and only through Zedekiah's kindness was he kept from death. But in that wicked house there was one that feared the Lord, and he was Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian, who showed compassion for the prophet in the dungeon and did much for his rescue.

Jeremiah 39 shows us the capture of Jerusalem and the flight of Zedekiah. The king, however, was caught, and (what he dreaded most of all) was brought before the Chaldean conqueror. He was carried ignominiously to Babylon, his eyes put out and himself bound in chains. Jeremiah contrariwise was cared for by the king of Babylon. And Ebed-melech was not forgotten.

In Jeremiah 40 to Jeremiah 44, we have the anarchy and moral disorder that prevailed among the Jews who were left behind in the land or its vicinity when the mass of their brethren had been carried captive to Babylon. Jeremiah becomes their helper, ministering to them the word of Jehovah, but finds among them the greatest unbelief. This obduracy of heart was most sorrowful and heart-breaking to the prophet. Their unbelief in Jehovah previously had brought the crisis of destruction upon Jerusalem. But now even the little remnant, the poor left in the land among whom Jeremiah remained, were full of jealousy, full of their own plans, full of treason, full of deceit and violence. God was not really in their thoughts.

All these things fill the prophet's heart with sorrow. To escape the wrath of the king of Babylon many flee into Egypt where they practise its idolatries. The doings of their various leaders are recounted, Gedaliah and Ishmael, and then Johanan, one only of them having the least care for the people of God, the others served themselves.

The prophet announced what would fall upon the Jews who tried to escape by going down into Egypt. He showed them that there they would only incur trouble from the hands of Nebuchadnezzar still more. Had they remained quietly in the land subject to the authority of the Chaldean king whom God had placed over them, they would have been preserved. But they, choosing human policy, thought it was safer to go down into Egypt, whereas it proved to be the contrary. Nebuchadnezzar pursued the Egyptians and punished these unbelieving Jews in that land.

Jeremiah 45-52

In Jeremiah 45, the word which Jeremiah the prophet spake unto Baruch, his amanuensis, is now brought before us. The great lesson for Baruch was that in a day of judgment the proper feeling for a saint and servant of God is an absence of self-seeking. "Seekest though great things for thyself? seek them not: for, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh" (Jer. 45: 5). Lowliness of mind always becomes the saint, but in an evil day, it is the only safety. Humility is always morally right, but it is also the only thing that preserves from judgment. I am speaking now not of God's final judgment, but of that which is executed in this world. Now it seems to me plain that Baruch had not learned this lesson. He had now to learn it. This was the word of the prophet to him at an earlier date - the fourth year of Jehoiakim.

In Jeremiah 46 we have the denunciation of Egypt where these foolish Jews had fled for security, and the further denunciation of Philistia in Jeremiah 47. Then again of Moab (Jer.48): because all these countries were places to which the Jews looked for security. In Jeremiah 49 the judgment of the Ammonites is given with Damascus and others, even Elam. Elam differs from the rest in being at a considerable distance from Jerusalem, while the others were comparatively near.

These nations were all to fall under the power of Nebuchadnezzar; but some of them are to be restored in the latter day. Among these nations will be Elam, Egypt, Moab and Ammon, but not Philistia, not Damascus, not Hazor, and above all not Babylon, whose destruction is brought before us in chapters 1 and 51 in great detail.

The whole prophecy of Jeremiah closes with an inspired appendix (Jer. 52), probably by the editor, containing a brief historical account of Zedekiah's reign up to the destruction of Jerusalem by the king of Babylon. The final incident (verses 31-34) records the clemency shown by Evilmerodach, the king of Babylon, to Jehoiakim king of Judah in the thirty-seventh year of his captivity.