Notes on Daniel

William Kelly

Public domain. As published on plymouthbrethren.org.

Also online at https://plymouthbrethren.org/article/3282

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

Daniel

With an introduction In Review Of Dean Farrar’s Work On The Prophet In The “Expositor’s Bible.”

Preface.

These lectures on the Book of Daniel were taken in shorthand and printed first some forty years ago, with a very slight correction in a later edition. It would be easy to fill up details and to improve their literary form. But as they are, they have helped not a few souls, and not least since Great Britain and the United States have been beguiled into their growing pursuit of that guilty and withering craze which calls itself the “Higher Criticism.” What is it in the main but a revival of older British Deism, aided by devices of foreign unbelief, and decorated with modern German erudition or its home imitation? Yet all fail to conceal hostility to God’s inspiration, and ceaseless effort to minimize real miracle and true prophecy, where, as in this country, men dare not yet deny them altogether.

The notorious Oxford Essays, which roused strong feeling in a former generation, are quite left behind. Dissenters vie with Nationalists (Episcopalian or Presbyterian), Methodists with Congregationalists, and of late Ritualists with avowed Rationalists, in showing themselves up to date in freethinking; as if the revealed truth of God were a matter of scientific progress. What joy to all open infidels, who cannot but hail it as the triumph of their contempt for His word! It is not now profane men only, as in the eighteenth century, but religious professors, ecclesiastical dignitaries in the

various bodies or so-called “churches” of Christendom, and particularly those who hold theological and linguistic chairs in the Universities and Colleges all over the world, who become increasingly tainted with this deadly infection. Alas! it is the sure forerunner of that “apostasy” which the great apostle, from almost the beginning of his written testimony, said must “first come” before the day of the Lord can “be present.”

Take, as a recent instance (and it is only one out of many in the conspiracy against Scripture), the present Dean of Canterbury’s contribution on the Book of Daniel to the Expositor’s Bible. Self-deception may hide much from its victims; but no believer should hesitate to say, “An enemy hath done this.” While claiming for the Book an “undisputed and indisputable” place in the Canon, think of the infatuation of denying openly and unqualifiedly its genuineness and its authenticity! “It has never made the least difference in my reverent (!) acceptance of it that I have for many years been convinced that it cannot be regarded as literal history or ancient prediction.” Yet such persons assume to be actuated simply by the love of truth; for this they confound with the counter-love of doubting. Alas! they are under “the spirit of error” (1 John 4:6); or, as Jude so warns, “These speak evil of the things which they know not: but what as the irrational animals they know, in these things they corrupt themselves.” May the Christian keep Christ’s word, and not deny His name!

W. K., CANNES, April, 1897.

Introduction.

DANIEL is characteristically the prophet of the Babylonish exile. The frightful excesses of Antiochus

Epiphanes find their place in the course of his visions, and a special place, quite distinct from the general ground on which the book starts and proceeds. From the first the solemn fact is made evident that the Jews are for the present Lo-ammi (not My people): God no longer addresses them through the prophet. They are called Daniel's people in Dan. 9:24, Dan. 10:14, Dan. 11:14, Dan. 12:1; and God is distinctively designated "the God of the heavens" (Dan. 2:18, 37, 44); which is repeated in Ezra 1:2, Ezra 5:12, Ezra 6:9, 10, Ezra 7:12, 23, Neh. 1:4, 5, Neh. 2:4, and also in 2 Chronicles 36:23. The state of His people, their idolatrous apostasy, made it incompatible with His nature and majesty to act at their head or in their midst as "the Lord of all the earth." (Joshua 3:11) He is only called "Jehovah" in the prophet's own prayer and confession. (Dan. 9) "Thus saith Jehovah" would have been equally out of place.

Yet, as the God of the heavens, He deigned to make known to the heathen king "what should be at the end of the days" (Dan. 2:28): for then only will God's purpose be manifest to every eye in the judgment of the Gentile empires, and in the subsequent establishment of His kingdom, which shall fill the whole earth and stand for ever. Hence Daniel gives, as no other does, the "times of the Gentiles." (Luke 21:24) This large scope is precisely suited to a great prophet raised up at the starting-point in Nebuchadnezzar's day, and continuing in singular honour not only before a mighty king at first and an unworthy successor at the close, but none the less when the new dynasty superseded the "head of gold," and Medo-Persia rose to supreme power. All this and more agrees with "the six magnificent opening chapters," as well as with the latter six, more wondrous still in

unveiling the definite iniquities of the great powers, at the close in particular, and the glorious intervention of the Ancient of Days and Son of man to set them aside judicially, and bring in a kingdom universal and everlasting. Here only we see that the saints of the high places have judgment given to them (Dan. 7:22), and their “people” have the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven (27).

In this vast sweep of prophecy “the days of Antiochus Epiphanes” receive not the smallest notice. Neither was there any analogy between the circumstances of that day to suggest such grand considerations. Nor, again, did the persecution of that cruel enemy of the Jew, his profane contempt for the institutions of the law, and his rabid zeal for Hellenizing their worship, resemble the evils foreshown thus far in Daniel. Historically the Syro-Greek antagonism is set out in Dan. 8:9-14, and reappears with fuller detail in Dan. 11:21-32. As not another reference to his days can be proved to occur in the entire book, this may serve to expose the absurd assumption of the “higher critics.” Yet absurdity is a venial fault compared with the infidelity which ignores and denies the light from the lamp of prophecy over the Gentile empires as a whole. Especially, as if to destroy their leading principle by anticipation, does the prophet dwell on the closing scenes, which induce the judgment, not even yet accomplished, to be surely executed in the day of the Lord. Only unbelief is surprised at the peculiar traits of the book: what they call its cosmopolitanism, its rhetorical rather than poetic style, and its apocalyptic form. Hence their blindness to its moral and doctrinal elements, and their undisguised

contempt for the details in Dan. 11, so considerately given in the absence of living prophets. But surely a man is too bold when he also compares “the grotesque and gigantic emblems of Daniel” with the Second Book of Esdras, the Book of Enoch, and the Sibylline Oracles. If he have no real faith in Scripture, or at least in the Book of Daniel at this moment, he has solemnly subscribed Art. 6.

The new and elaborate effort to defraud Daniel of the book which God gave him to write is the more egregious and unreasonable, as it is not denied that “Daniel was a real person, that he lived in the days of the exile, and that his life was distinguished by the splendour of its faithfulness.” The fact is, that no prophet has in the Old Testament such a testimony to him as Ezekiel renders twice (Ezekiel 14:14, 20 and Ezekiel 28:3); nor is anyone more commended by our Lord in the New Testament to the reader’s heed. (Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14) And what does the fact mean that the great prophecy which concludes the Canon of Scripture is grounded on the Book of Daniel more manifestly than on any other prophet?

Is it objected as strange that two languages, Hebrew and Aramaic, should be employed in the book? Such a phenomenon, on the contrary, suits the time of Daniel, not that of Antiochus Epiphanes. Is it not notorious that Jeremiah, his elder, has a verse in Aramaic (Jer. 10:11) strikingly preparing the way? and that the inspired scribe-priest Ezra, who followed and flourished in the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus, incorporates Aramaic through several chapters? (Ezra 4:8 - 6:18; Ezra 7:12-26) Why, then, object to a similar course in Daniel?

As to the particular words questioned, the reader may well be wary of plausibilities; for hostile criticism is unscrupulous. Take the spelling of the name of the Babylonian conqueror. It is alleged that Daniel always uses Nebuchadnezzar; while Ezekiel invariably writes Nebuchadrezzar, the assumed correct form. But it is remarkable that Jeremiah's prophecy employs both forms, Daniel's no less than Ezekiel's. How does this favour the date of Antiochus Epiphanes? and why be stumbled by some Persian words, allowing the fact to be certain? or even by the three names of musical instruments which resemble Greek words?

The depreciators of the written word cry out loudly against the "uncharitableness" of those who denounce their evil ways. But can those who know the truth be indifferent to a matter so serious and daring as the systematic perversion of the miracles in Daniel into Haggadoth, or religious romances, and of its prophecies into histories pretending to prediction? To such as neither love the Scriptures nor believe in their divine authority, it is a mere question of literary criticism. Is it not utterly vulgar to feel or to speak with decision about a Hebrew sage? Why not cultivate "sweetness and light"? God is in none of their thoughts.

Some fifteen seeming mistakes are set forth from Daniel 1 to 11:2, all of them founded on appearances against reality, which can only be accounted for by uncommon confidence in man and his monuments, and a total want of faith in Scripture. They have been refuted abundantly, as Dr. Farrar ought to know. That the answers satisfy unbelieving minds is what grace alone can effect until judgment come. Let the first "remarkable error," as it is called, serve for the rest: — "In the third year of

Jehoiakim, king of Judah." Now, against such a flippant attack let me cite the calm and clear language of an acknowledged expert in chronology, who was not a theologian, and had no controversial aim but simply the truth. Under the year B.C. 606 (371) Mr. H. F. Clinton says, "The fourth year of Jehoiakim, from Aug. B.C. 606. The 23rd from the 13th of Josiah: Jeremiah 25:3. The deportation of Daniel was in the 3rd year of Jehoiakim: Daniel 1:1. Whence we may place the expedition of Nebuchadnezzar towards the end of the 3rd and beginning of the 4th year, in the summer of B.C. 606. In the 4th year of Jehoiakim Baruch writes the book: Jeremiah 36:1, 2." (Fasti Hellen. i. 328) Anyone, even a pert boy, can question anything. But could an upright mind on reflecting fail to see that the supposed contradiction of Daniel 2 is the strongest evidence of truth? No writer in the Maccabean age would have allowed it to appear; but a contemporary, when all was notorious, could leave it to be understood. "The second year" is necessarily Nebuchadnezzar's sole reign, as Dan. 1 implies association with his father; and Daniel's three years (Dan. 1:5) would fall in with it. Scripture is written for believers, not for irreverent cavillers.

Two more of these "surprises" betray unmistakably malevolent ignorance — Nebuchadnezzar's prostrate homage to Daniel with an oblation and sweet odours; whilst the critic asks in astonishment whether Daniel could have accepted the offering. Now it is demonstrably false, from the king's own words, that he regarded Daniel as a god; and it is certain that Daniel disclaimed any such blasphemy as much as Paul and Barnabas. But the heathen king believed, what the Anglican dean does not, that God supernaturally

intervened in the case, in making “Daniel the prophet” to recall the forgotten dream, and to be the interpreter for the future throughout the “times of the Gentiles” till His kingdom come. Such a revelation led Nebuchadnezzar, in his deep emotion and gratitude, to pay Daniel the highest honours, even to what we westerns regard as an extravagant degree. There is no semblance of a sacrifice as at Lystra. The word translated “oblation” is frequently and rightly used for “a present,” irrespective of the true God or a false one; just as prostration and worshipping were often expressive of no more than civil reverence. But imagine a Jew trying to write the book in Maccabean days; would he have written in this freedom of truth? If he had introduced it at all, what care to tell the king that he must worship and offer to God alone! As to the sweet odours, can anyone be so infatuated as to contend that the very great burning made at the burial of King Asa (2 Chronicles 16:14) implies his deification? As a like offensive tone with utter unbelief of Scripture pervades much of the rest, one may well turn to something more decorous if not better founded.

The unity of the book, so often and vehemently assailed, is now admitted even by the most advanced freethinkers, save eccentric men. This is in no way weakened by the fact that only in the latter half (from Dan. 7) does the writer speak in the first person, or “I Daniel.” The first half having the historical form, Daniel is spoken of, and the Gentile chiefs are prominent; especially he who was the object of divine communications (Dan. 2, 4), though the prophet only was given to recall the first and interpret both. The historic chapters (Dan. 3-6) are of the utmost value as

following the outline prediction of Dan. 2, and introducing the moral view with its richer instruction of Dan. 7 over the same ground. In the second half of the book the prophet alone has the visions and interpretations.

Accordingly things are presented, not in their external aspect, but in their relation to God's people, and with yet higher aims. When Babylon fell, even during the transition of Darius the Mede, a marked change is observable in answer to the prophet's intercession, as he knew by the books that the captivity was near its end. A new appearance and insensibly plainer language were vouchsafed as to the city and sanctuary of Jerusalem, but with the appalling fact that Messiah was to be "cut off and have nothing," and its dire consequences, not only then but when the last week of the seventy is in accomplishment at the end of the age. Lastly, when the restorer from the exile was reigning, the final communication comes in plainer language still, corrective of all vain hopes for the present founded on the return, and in God's gracious condescension giving those continuous and unwonted details which have so roused the scornful unbelief of men, that they have dared to brand them as pretended or "pseud-epigraphic prophecy." They must give account of such incredulity to God. Meanwhile this indulgence in the principle of infidelity — the preference of our own thoughts to God's word — does not fail to spread one knows not how far. It may seem little, but it is the little beginning of a very great evil.

The book thus derives its special form from Daniel as the prophet of the Exile far more impressively than any written by even his contemporaries. Both Jeremiah and

Ezekiel were inspired to dwell, one on the future blessedness of Israel in the land under Messiah and the new covenant, the other on a wondrous display of the divine glory, which will give a new form to the city and the temple, and a new partition of the land to the restored tribes, when the nations shall know that Jehovah hallows Israel, and His sanctuary shall be there for ever. Their task was outside God's purpose by Daniel, which helps to explain why he abode among strangers when he might have returned to Jerusalem with the remnant in Cyrus' day. He had learnt definitely that the time for Messiah's coming was not yet, and that, when come, He should be rejected. He was shown subsequently that "at the time of the end" not only should the kings of the north and of the south resume their conflicts, but a new and portentous personage should reign in the land and be assailed by both, the counterpart of Messiah in evil, the man of sin as He of righteousness: a state totally different from and irreconcilable with Antiochus Epiphanes in any of his phases, and introduced by the prophet, not only after that "vile person" had long ceased to trouble the Jews, but expressly at an indefinitely distant time — the end of the age. This, once pointed out, no serious person can intelligently deny to be correct.

Then will an unparalleled tribulation befall the Jews; but another remnant shall be saved out of it with an unparalleled deliverance. Then shall God's people as a whole awake from their long sleep in the dust of the earth, some to life everlasting, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Then shall faithful and zealous intelligence in the dark day receive its reward when the glory of Jehovah is risen on Zion (still desolate). Then

the times and the seasons shall be punctually fulfilled when the scattering of the power of the holy people is accomplished, and he that waited is indisputably blessed. Till then the words were closed up and sealed for the Jew as such till the time of the end. But we Christians know the Incarnate Word, and believe that in His rejection by the Jew and the Gentile He accomplished redemption, and has given us life eternal; so that meanwhile a fuller revelation said for us to a greater prophet, “Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.” (Revelation 22:10.) Till the time is arrived Daniel was to rest, it did not matter where on earth, still more and better above, as much above the weeping of the old men as above the joyous shouts of the young. (Ezra 3) He was assured, as all saints should be, of standing in his lot at the end of the days.

The style is perfectly adapted to the circumstances with which the book was meant to deal, as much so as richness and sublimity to Isaiah’s work, or tender feeling to Jeremiah’s, or rugged grandeur to Ezekiel’s. How utterly incongruous with the disclosures of Daniel would have been the impassioned and poetic manner of the Psalms! Daniel was given the extraordinary province of revealing “the times of the Gentiles,” both in their splendid aspect of conferred imperial power and in their inward reality as “Beasts” before God uncared for and unknown, with special seducers and oppressors within those times; as well as the transgressions of the chosen people and their chiefs, which brought on them such chastenings and such an abnormal state, but also a faithful remnant first and last, who alone were wise and understood His mind.

As Babylon was in God's ways the appropriate place, so during that first empire, till Cyrus the Persian succeeded, was the period for this peculiar testimony. Who can conceive an epoch less morally or circumstantially in keeping with its entire scope than about B.C. 167 for "a brave and gifted anonymous author, who brought his piety and his patriotism to bear on the troubled fortunes of his people"? That Porphyry of Batanea, who hated Christ, should have invented such a fable is intelligible. That an unbelieving Jew like Dr. Joel should not be ashamed of following a heathen philosopher, one can also understand. But is it not treason for a baptised man, for a Christian minister so called, to imitate such profane impiety, As faith is discarded, so any intelligent apprehension of the book becomes impossible. Daniel opens with fixing attention on an event so momentous as the Lord's delivering over the king of David's house to the Chaldean, who carried off part of the holy vessels into the house of his god. This is followed up, in Dan. 2, by the distinct announcement that God set the conqueror of Jerusalem as the first of the world-powers. Only Babylon had this place direct from God; Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome had theirs simply in providential succession. So thoroughly is this distinction recognized in Scripture, that the fall of Babylon brings before the Holy Spirit in Isaiah and Jeremiah the final destruction of the Gentile authorities as a whole, and the connected deliverance, not of Judah only but of Israel also, Cyrus' being but its foreshadow. It is not so with the intermediate empires, till the judgment is fully manifested which yet awaits the fourth or Roman; for in the final sense "the Beast," or that empire, perishes only when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven, as we read in Revelation 19:19, 20. Now this

was made known in Daniel 7 no less clearly. What could a patriotic Jew know about it at a time when prophets admittedly had long ceased? No, it was first given to "Daniel the prophet" to reveal.

The theory of histories turned into pretended prophecies is only worthy of men without faith, insensible to the unique value, character, and authority of God's word when it is before their eyes, with a malignant intent to make spots where they cannot find them. When parables appear (or as goes the Rabbinical term, Haggadoth), they are so styled, or self-evidently such; whereas not a book in the Bible takes more decided ground than Daniel's for historic truth, evident miracles, and true predictions. For the epoch was just one when miracles and prophecies were for God's glory. Imperial power was now first conferred in God's sovereignty on the Gentile, and it was made known by undoubted divine authority. It was as much or more necessary to prove at that very time that God's calling and gifts were not subject to change of mind, though the people who had them were set aside for a while. Hence the remnant, when captive in Babylon, are proved alone to have His secret, even as to the distant future, and maintained by overwhelming and supernatural might against all the rage even of the powers that then were.

Dilettanti critics do not like to hear that their system gives the lie to Daniel, even if we say nothing of the Holy Spirit. And as to objections founded on language, history, general structure, theology, etc., why do they repeat what has been often answered satisfactorily? Do they presume on popular ignorance or personal indolence, too apt to yield to the last or loudest voice?

The book itself, like all Scripture, is the best reply to calumnies.

Daniel 1 is a preface, from Jerusalem losing the direct government of God (who set up meanwhile Babylon in a fresh imperial position), down to the first year of Cyrus. Dan. 12 has also a conclusory character in the judgment of the Gentiles up to the deliverance of Israel. From Dan. 2 to 6 Gentiles are prominent in an exoteric way. From Dan. 7 to the end, only the prophet receives and communicates the mind of God intimately on all, with the glory of the Son of man and His people here below and His saints on high. We may therefore call this half esoteric. What had so immense, as well as intimate, a range of truth in keeping with Maccabean times? It is true that the Syrian king's furious persecution of the Jews, and his profanation of worship, find a marked place in the course of the book; but where it does, plain indication is given of a greater power and worse evil typified thereby before "the end of the indignation." What sad belittling of an inspired book to make that king, audacious as he was and cruel, a blind not only to the final actor in that sphere, but to others on an incomparably larger scale, who are all to come under divine dealings at "the time of the end" — a time which assuredly is not yet arrived!

Daniel 2 conveys the interesting and important fact that "the God of the heavens" acted by a dream on the first Gentile head of empire, to show the general course of dominion then begun till its extinction: an image gorgeous and terrible, but gradually deteriorating as it descends, and closing with great strength and marked weakness also. Then He sets up another kingdom, His own, after destroying not only the fourth empire in its

last divided condition of the ten toes (which did not exist when Christ suffered or the Holy Spirit came down), but the remains of all from the first — the gold, the silver, the brass, as well as the iron and clay. Only when judgment was executed does the “little stone” expand into a great mountain and fill the whole earth. Here the rationalist coalesces with the ritualist in teaching the self-complacent nonsense of an “ideal Israel,” the church or Christendom. Yet in the church is neither Jew nor Greek, but Christ is all. It is the body of the glorified Head; and its calling is to suffering grace on earth, awaiting glory with Christ at His coming. Crushing to powder the image of Gentile empires is in no way or time the church’s work. The once rejected but now exalted Stone will do it, as He declared in Matthew 21:44 and in other scriptures. But the literal Israel will be then and there delivered, and become His earthly centre in power and glory. Such is the uniform witness of the prophets. We need not begrudge this to the remnant of Jacob then repentant; for we are called to far brighter glory with Christ in heavenly places. But, whether believed now or not, the first dominion on earth will surely come to the daughter of Zion in that day, and as long as the earth endures.

The intervening histories in Dan. 3-6 are in the fullest accord with the predictions of Daniel, two of them general (Dan. 3, 4) and two particular (Dan. 5, 6) (as we shall find the prophecies are also), but none of them referring to the peculiar scourge in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes. In not one is there a trace of Hellenism imposed on the Jews. Not even in Belshazzar have we the least real likeness to punishing recalcitrants against the gods of Olympus. The aim is to show how the

Gentile entrusted with imperial power by God used it, deeply impressed as he had been by the lost secret which none but the Hebrew captive could interpret. Alas! man being in honour abides not; he is like the beasts that perish. So it had been with Israel under law, with Judah, and with David's house. New-fangled idolatry on pain of the most cruel death was the first recorded command of the Gentile world-power: a religious bond to unite by that act the various peoples, nations, and tongues of the one empire, and thus to counteract the divisive influence of gods peculiar to each of these races. But such a universal test gave God, thus ignored, the occasion to prove the nullity of that idol and every other, the total and manifest defeat of supreme power even by its own captive cast into the fiery furnace, be it ever so heated. How grave the public lesson read to all the Gentile empires, were not man as forgetful of God as he is bent on his own will!

The next chapter (Dan. 4) is no less general, and the more impressive as the deepest humiliation was inflicted by God, after His slighted warning, on the same haughty head of imperial power. Nebuchadnezzar had ascribed all his glory to himself, and was debased, as none else ever was, to the bestial state till "seven times" passed over him. After that he "lifted up his eyes to heaven," a repentant and restored man owning the Most High, no longer like the brute but morally intelligent. It is childish to lower or restrain to the Seleucid prince a lesson he never learnt. It is infidel to doubt the facts of this chapter or of the preceding one. It is blind not to recognize that Dan. 3 looks on to the deliverance of faithful ones (not "the many") at the end, as the other to the day when the Gentile shall have a beast's heart no

more, but will bless the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth: the character of the divine display when this present evil age terminates. What connection had either with the loathsome foe of the Jews, Antiochus Epiphanes? Nothing could be more telling than both displays of God's power during the "head of gold" "till the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." It is Satan's work to disbelieve them; and a nominal Christian is far more guilty now than a heathen of old if he help Satan against God.

The special aims of Dan. 5, 6 are of no less serious moment. Neither the one nor the other resembles or represents Antiochus Epiphanes. In Dan. 5 we see dissolute profanity eliciting a most solemn token of divine displeasure on the spot, and judged by a providential infliction that very night. Monuments or not, the word of our God shall stand for ever. Nothing more dangerous than to trust any thing or one against Scripture; and what can be more sinful? What avail the brave words of men enamoured of Babylonish bricks, cylinders, etc.? Let them beware of the snares of the great enemy; not even resurrection power broke Jewish unbelief. In Dan. 6 man was by craft set up for a while as the sole object of prayer or worship, which brought on its devisers the sudden destruction they had plotted for the faithful. What bearing had this, any more than the chapter before, on the grievous time of Antiochus Epiphanes? They evidently prepare the way, for the judgment of the future Babylon in the one (Dan. 5), and for that of the Beast in the other (Dan. 6), as given in the Book of Revelation, where both perish awfully though differently.

Next follow the more complicated communications of God's mind about the four "Beasts," the last especially, much fuller and more intimate than in Dan. 2. The movement of heaven is disclosed, and God's interest in His people, and particularly in the sufferers for His name, specified "as saints," and even as "saints of the high places." The dream of Nebuchadnezzar, condescending as it was to him and awe-inspiring in itself, contained no such vision of glory on high, no such prospects for heaven or earth, no such display of divine purpose in the Son of man.

But as in Dan. 2, so yet more in Dan. 7, the last and most distant empire, the fourth, is much more fully described than the Babylonish then in being, or the Medo-Persian that next followed, or the Greek that succeeded in its due time. For we have a crowd of minute predictions of an unexampled nature, the many horns in the last empire at its close, the audacious presumption and restless ambition of its last chief, who from a small beginning governed the rest, and, not content with trampling down the saints, rose up in blasphemy against God and His rights, which called forth summary and final judgment on all, with the action of heaven in establishing the everlasting kingdom of power and glory.

Such a revelation fundamentally clashes with the canons of the Higher Criticism, and demonstrates, if believed, their utter futility. Hence we can understand their efforts to get rid of the unvarnished truth Daniel sets before us in this vision. The attempt to separate the Medish and the Persian elements, so as to make them respectively the second and third empires, is desperate and unworthy. Dan. 5:28 was explicit beforehand as well as Dan. 6:8, 12, 15; and afterwards Dan. 8 demolishes

such contradiction of Scripture. The bear in Dan. 7 answers to the ram in Dan. 8, which had two horns, the kings of Media and Persia — not two Beasts but one composite power expressly. The leopard, therefore, with its four heads answers to the goat of Greece, for whose great horn, when broken, four stood up in its stead. The fourth Beast, different from all the Beasts before, is none other than the Roman Empire, which has ten horns in its final shape, after which, when further change comes, divine judgment falls in a form without previous parallel.1 If we let in, as we are bound, the further light of the Apocalypse, where we cannot but recognize the same “Beast” as Daniel saw in the fourth place, we gain the fullest certainty from Rev. 17 that the seven heads were successive governing forms, of which the sixth or imperial head was in being when John saw the vision (v. 10); and that the ten horns were contemporary, for all receive authority as kings for “one hour with the beast.” It is preparatory to the last crisis, when they make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them. (vv. 12-14) This is also decisively shown in verse 16, “And the ten horns which thou sawest, and [not ‘on’] the beast, these shall hate the harlot,” etc., as they also give their kingdom to the “Beast” until the words of God shall be fulfilled. This, accordingly and absolutely, disposes of the attempt to make the “ten horns” mean only ten successive kings, so as to apply the list to the Seleucidae, and make it appear that Antiochus was the little horn of Daniel 7, who got rid of the three last of his predecessors. Such a scheme is mere perversion of Scripture, wholly dislocates the chapter, and deprives us of the only true interpretation. For this supposes a divine interposition at the end of the age in judgment of

the Roman Empire, revived to fulfil its complete destiny and to be judged by the Lord Jesus at His appearing.

The first empire had a simplicity peculiar to itself. The second or Medo-Persian had dual elements; and so has the symbol two horns, of which the higher came up last. The third or Macedonian had after its brief rise four heads, of which two are noticed particularly as having to do with the Jews in the details of Daniel 11. The fourth empire, beyond just doubt, is the Roman, diverse from all before it, and distinguished by the notable form of ten concurrent horns, ere its destructive judgment by a divine kingdom which supersedes all, and is truly both universal and everlasting. Then shall the saints of the high places have their grand portion, surely not to eclipse the Son of man, as these sorry critics would like, but to swell the train of His glory who is Heir of all things.

None but the Roman Empire corresponds with the feet of iron and clay; none other furnishes an analogy to the ten toes in one case and ten horns in another, the only true force of which is ten kings (subject to the violent change indicated) reigning together. Nor can any power that ever bore sway be so truly compared to “iron breaking and subduing all things,” or a most ravenous nondescript brute with great iron teeth which “devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it.” The entrance of the Teuton clay indicates the brittleness of independent will (in contrast with the old Roman cohesive centralism), which, as it broke up the empire in the past, will culminate in the tenfold division of the future in that revival of the empire which is presupposed in Daniel 7 before judgment falls, and is distinctly revealed in Revelation 17. This is a trait wholly

absent from all previous empires, as well as from the Syro-Greek kingdom, which never was an empire nor approached it.

As this revival of the Roman Empire is so momentous a fact of the future and for “the time of the end,” it may be well here to point out the clear and conclusive evidence of Scripture. On the showing of Daniel 2 and 7 the fourth or Roman Empire is in power when the kingdom of God comes, enforced by the Son of man. But the Revelation explains how this can and will be. In Rev. 13:1-10 is seen the “Beast” emerging once more from the sea or revolutionary state of nations, having seven heads and ten horns. These last have been ever held to identify it with Daniel’s fourth empire. And the seven heads, now appropriately added, can only confirm it, for (explained as it is in Rev. 17:9, 10) this description applies to no known empire so significantly as to the Roman. Only we have to observe an absolutely new fact in connection with the healing of that one of his heads (the imperial, as I conceive) which had been wounded to death, that the great dragon (who in Rev. 12 is declared to be Satan) gave him his power and his throne and great authority.

Pagan Rome was evil exceedingly, and had its part in the crucifixion of the Lord of glory. The same Roman Empire will reappear at the end of the age, energized by Satan in a way neither itself nor any other empire ever had been. This gives the key to its extreme blasphemy and defiance of the Most High as well as its other enemies, because of which the judgment shall sit and the dominion be taken away by the wrath of God from heaven, when the Beast with its hosts dares to make war against the Lord descending in power and glory. The

horns will then act as one will with the “Beast” that is then present to give imperial unity. For still more clearing the intimations of Rev. 13, Rev. 17:8 is most explicit, “The beast that thou sawest was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go into perdition.” Again, at the close of the verse, “Seeing the beast, how that he was, and is not, and shall be present.” (See also verse 11.) It was the “Beast” without the horns under the Caesars and their successors. Horns in their varying numbers were without the “Beast” in the middle ages and onward: “The beast was, and is not.” But the wonder of the future is that the Beast, before the closing scene, is to arise not only out of the sea, but, with the far more awful symbol, out of the abyss, the prelude of perdition. Here, again, the consistency of the truth asserts itself. To none but the Roman Empire can these predictions apply. To Alexander’s empire they are irrelevant, how much more to a mere offshoot of it! No, it is the empire that rose up against the Lord in humiliation, which, blinded and filled by Satan’s power, will make war with the Lamb when He comes in glory to its appalling ruin.

Dan. 8 is manifestly of a character and scope more circumscribed than the general prophecies of Dan. 2 and Dan. 7. Yet it is none the less important for its design, because it takes up only a special part; but all alike conduct us to the catastrophe at the end. As this we have seen to be evidently true of the great general visions of the book, so is it equally of the particulars, which circumstance exposes the fallacy of identifying the objects. All come into collision with divine judgment; but they are distinct in character as in fact. “A divine kingdom” crowns the two general series of the four

empires, as even rationalism does not dispute for Dan. 2, and admits that our Lord in Matthew 26:64 alludes to Dan. 7. There is, indeed, an effort to treat “the personality of the Messiah” as “at least somewhat subordinate and indistinct.” But such unbelief is vain. No believing Jew severed the coming kingdom from the Great King, as haughty Gentiles are prone to wish. The saints of the high places are very far from usurping the Son of man’s place in the vision, which makes Him the manifest centre and the object invested with dominion for ever. But their blessedness also is carefully shown. Whatever honour these saints may have in that day (and they reign with Christ, as the New Testament plainly puts it), it is a false interpretation which denies Him personally and supremely the excellent glory.

In this Dan. 8, then, the first of the special prophecies, we have the second empire of Medo-Persia assailed overwhelmingly by the third or Greek kingdom of Alexander the Great. How any upright mind can fail to apprehend this from the simple reading of the text is hard to account for. The great horn was broken when it became strong, and in its stead came up four notable horns. Out of one of these four kingdoms rose a little horn which became exceeding great, and also meddled peculiarly with the Jews and the sanctuary. It is a deplorable lack of intelligence to confound this oppressor with the little horn of chapter vii., the one being as manifestly a ruler over a part of the Greek Empire in the East, as the other from a small beginning arrives to be the chief of the Western Empire. Both are to be excessively impious and wicked, and both are punished by God beyond example; but to confound them is to lose the difference of the actors at the close, even

wholly opposed as they are to each other, though both inflict the worst evils on the chosen people. But there is the less need of many words here, as it is agreed that the vision in its later part from verse 9 does set forth the Seleucid enemy of the Jews and of their religion. And it would appear that verses 13, 14 apply to his defilement of the sanctuary and suppression of the daily offering.

As usual in Daniel, and elsewhere in Scripture, the interpretation not only explains, but adds considerably, and in particular dwells, not on the typical Antiochus Epiphanes, but on the final antitypical enemy in the same quarter at the latter day. It is weak to pretend that the awful end predicted for the infamous personage of the future in this chapter and at the end of Daniel 11 was fulfilled in the death of Antiochus Epiphanes, terrible as it was in the estimate of Greeks as well as Jews. Thus the real prediction of his history in the preceding verses of the same chapter (11 up to 32) does not dwell on it as comparable with that of him who is found at the end.

Even in the earlier portion (Dan. 8) there is a remarkable parenthesis in verses 11, 12 defined by “he,” as compared with “it” in the verses before and after. This appears to give marked personality to the evil actor that is chiefly in view, however much the king who sought the apostasy of the Jews and the destruction of such as refused to Hellenize made him a type.

But the prophecy goes on to the consummation, when God interferes in unmistakable power. Hence the angelic interpreter would make Daniel know “what shall be at the end of the indignation.” Who can say with the smallest show of truth that this was in the days of the

Syrian's evil or of the Maccabean resistance? "The end of the indignation" will only be, when Israel are truly repentant and God has no more controversy with His people. Nor should this surprise anyone who reads the Scriptures in faith, for all the prophets look on to that happy time. The real person before the mind of the Holy Spirit at the close is one who will "stand up against the Prince of princes," but shall be "broken without hand," in a way far beyond its type in past history. A gap, therefore, necessarily occurs in every one of the prophecies. In no instance is continuity aimed at. Enough is said to make the general bearing plain; but in every case the Holy Spirit dwells on the final scene which connects itself with the subject-matter before us, because then only will the judgment of God decide all absolutely and publicly, and introduce the kingdom of power and glory that shall never pass away.

Daniel 9 has its own peculiarities. Those who contrast this book with other prophecies, as lacking the predominantly moral element, only prove their own blindness. In no prophecy is it so conspicuous; and the same chapter which so profoundly tells out to God a heart that identified itself with the sins and iniquities ("we have sinned," etc.) of the men of Judah, and of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and of all Israel near and far off, but with the most earnest intercession, is precisely the one that, as he prayed, received from God a prediction in some respects the most striking and important of such scriptures. Here even rationalism cannot but own that the promised blessings of verse 24 belong to the Messianic hope, when the 490 years are closed. Thus it shares, with every other prediction in the book, the mark of going down to the end of the age

when the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, and God sets up His kingdom in Christ by judgments executed on all wickedness, Jewish or Gentile. But here, where Jeremiah's seventy years are referred to, with the provisional return of a remnant from Babylon to rebuild the city and the sanctuary, we have not only Jehovah the Lord God of Israel addressed, but also Messiah's first advent and cutting off. This interrupts the thread of the seventy weeks, as it naturally must, and an undated vista of desolation follows. For it clearly includes Messiah's rejection, and leaves nothing but the destruction of the city and temple, and a flood of troubles on the Jews. There evidently is the break. Messiah's death was "after" the sixty-ninth week = 483 years. Then follow the desolation determined, and to the end war, outside the course of the "weeks" altogether, as it is hardly possible to deny.

The last week remains for the close, without fixing any connection or starting-point, save that the Roman "prince" (whose "people" came and destroyed Jerusalem) will, at the time of the end, make covenant with "the many," or mass of faithless Jews, for a week or seven years, and will in the midst of it cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease. That is, he will put down the Jewish religion, contrary to his covenant; and "because of the protection" (rather than the overspreading) "of abominations" or idols, which take its place, a desolator will be, even until the consumption and that which is determined be poured on the desolate, i.e. Jerusalem. The desolator seems to be the last north-eastern enemy, as the Roman prince is he who is so prominent in Daniel 7, where we saw the times and laws

given into his hand for the same last half week, or three and a half times.

Instead of this plain, worthy, and homogeneous interpretation, what do the neo-critics say? “There can be no reasonable doubt that this [the cutting off Messiah] is a reference to the deposition of the high priest, Onias III., and his murder by Andronicus (B,C, 171)”; while the rest is turned to Antiochus. Of course, all is chaos among the critics. The design is to pervert the prophecy, from Christ’s death and the burning of their city and the flood of desolation, to those murderers. The precise scope is clear if the interruption of the series is observed in the text, with the future bearing of the last week. If this be true, it is a death-blow to the “higher critics,” and an unanswerable proof that the true Daniel wrote it, who here distinctively brings in the awful truth of Christ’s rejection, which has deferred the world-kingdom till His second advent, while the disasters of the poor Jews are shown not only till the Romans destroyed their city and temple, but at the end of the age when they meet their worst tribulation before deliverance comes for the godly in that day.

It is well known that De Wette in his German version of the Bible strove to eliminate “Christ” from this great prophecy, so striking for its chain of dates; and that the dogs of rationalism do their worst in rending it ever since by exaggerating whatever difficulty may exist. The chief difference among believers is the slight one of applying “the word to restore Jerusalem” (Dan. 9:25) to the decree of Artaxerxes Longim. either in his seventh year (Ezra 7), or in his twentieth year (Nehemiah 2). The prediction itself leaves a margin, not “at” but “after” the 62 weeks, added to the preliminary 7 (= 69 weeks, or

483 years); so much so, that some suppose this margin covers the three years or more of our Lord's ministry before the cross, answering, in fact, to the first half in evil of the future Roman chief's covenant with "the mass" of ungodly Jews. Otherwise the lineaments are plain. Here De Wette betrayed his unbelief; for Messiah no more in Hebrew than in English requires the definite article. It is correct to say, "Messiah shall be cut off." Why did he say here only "ein Gesalbter," when elsewhere he gives "der G."? Was it not to get rid of the weightiest truth predicted and fulfilled, and to avoid the total refutation of the reverie here about the days of Antiochus Epiphanes? But all this effort is fighting against God's word. May men learn their folly and sin before His judgment overtake them! may they be spared to proclaim the truth they have sought to destroy, and glorify God thereby, if to their shame, assuredly to their joy and blessing for ever!

Of course to these critics the chapter is confusion, and wholly unworthy of a prophet. But the cutting off of Messiah was an event of transcendent importance, especially being through the will and guilt of His people; as is implied in the interruption of the weeks, and the undated vista that follows of their desolation, in which is prominent the accomplished destruction of their place and nation by the Roman people. It is not yet, however, the prince that should come. He is reserved for the last week, when he makes covenant with "the many," or ungodly majority, in contrast with the faithful remnant of the Jews, and breaks it with yet more iniquity, when the end of evil comes, and the long expected blessing follows.

The last three chapters are also a particular prophecy, and Dan. 11 is exceedingly minute, to the fierce dislike of such as think for God, and would dictate to Him if they could. There is a rich variety in Scripture, and not less in the prophetic word. Our place is to bow to God and learn of Him. Unbelief sits in judgment on Him who is worthy of all trust and adoration. Now Dan. 11, peculiar as it may be, demands and deserves our fullest confidence, whatever say the scorners. It was in the third year of Cyrus that the revelation came to Daniel. Three more kings were to arise in Persia — Cambyses, Pseudo-Smerdis, and Darius Hystaspes; then the fourth, richer than them all, Xerxes, who, when waxed strong by his riches, should stir up the whole against the kingdom of Javan, or Greece.2 This gives the fitting gap, which necessarily must be, unless an uninterrupted thread were inserted: a thing unprecedented in such cases, as the gap we have seems to be regular.

The next personage is the Macedonian chief, who repaid the blow intended by Persia. No honest man can avoid seeing Alexander the Great in verse 3, or his divided kingdom in verse 4, which introduces two of those divisions, the kingdoms of the north and the south, and their conflicts which follow. Again, it is clear and certain that in verses 21-32 we have a full account of him who more than any hated the Jews and their religion. The sceptical theory is, that a patriotic Jew in his day personated Daniel of ancient renown in the exile, and converted the past history into professed prophecy up to that time. But the fact stands opposed that, when Antiochus Epiphanes is dropped, verses 33-35 give a protracted state of trial which ensued long for the Jews, when their old foe ceased from troubling, and that the

text expressly declares their trial was to go on to “the time of the end.” Here, therefore, is the great gap implied in accordance with the other predictions of the book, and even with the same principle on a smaller scale between verses 2 and 3 of this chapter.

Then from verse 36 we find ourselves confronted with the last time. We are told, not of a king of the north or of the south as before, but of “the king,” that final wicked one whom a prophet so distinguished and early as Isaiah presents in Isa. 11:4, Isa. 30:33, Isa. 57:9 with the same ominous phrase, the personal rival of the Anointed, reigning in the land according to his own pleasure, and thus fully contrasted with Him who only did His Father’s will. It is an energetic sketch of one exalting himself against every god; whereas Antiochus Epiphanes was devoted to the gods of Greece and Rome. Though speaking impious things against the God of gods, he is to prosper till the indignation be accomplished — God’s indignation against His guilty people (as Isaiah also spoke), another proof of days still to come. The Palestinian prince (which Antiochus Epiphanes was not, but king of the north) will have no regard for the God of his fathers, namely, Jehovah (for he is an apostate Jew), nor the desire of women (Messiah, the hope of Israel), nor any god (i.e. of the Gentiles), which last it is absurd and false to say of Antiochus Epiphanes. It is, in truth, the long predicted and then present Antichrist, supplanting Christ, denying the Father and the Son, coming in his own name, and received by those that refused Him who came in the Father’s. His and their destruction is shown elsewhere; but here the prophet turns to the old struggle of the kings of the north and of the south, both being as opposed to “the king” as to

each other: an incontestable proof of the folly, first of fancying Antiochus Epiphanes here, and next of denying that these events, believed or disbelieved, are set forth as the prophet's prediction of the last future collision.

Observe, finally, what accumulation of proofs Daniel 12 affords of these events to come, which of themselves refute the petty scheme of seeing only Antiochus Epiphanes up to the end. For when the last king of the north perishes by divine judgment, a divine intervention on behalf of Israel is assured "at that time." Sorely will the Jews need it, for they will have passed through this their last and severest tribulation. But, unlike their calamitous history for long centuries, "at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book." It is no mere policy nor prowess, but mercy for the righteous. Hence the appropriate figure of many of the sleepers in the dust awakening, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. So Isaiah (Isa. 26) and Ezekiel (Ezek. 37) employed the same figure of resurrection for the uprising of Israel nationally, but with the rejection of the unrighteous, as our prophet plainly indicates.

The result, then, of this brief survey of the book, assailed by neo-critical unbelief, is to show that their scheme is unfounded from first to last, and that it overlooks the grand scope of Gentile empire, both exoteric (Dan. 2) and esoteric (Dan. 7). In this so inconsiderable a ruler as Antiochus Epiphanes could have no place, still less be the culmination of all in bringing on the divine extinction of the entire system of Gentile empire, and hence in restoring Israel under conditions of blessing and glory which will change the world's history. It is plain that no such time is come. When Christ came, the fourth empire

was in power; which will also play its part against Him at His second advent, as the New Testament carefully and clearly reveals. His cross laid the basis for reconciling, not believers only, but all things also in due time. Meanwhile in the world “the times of the Gentiles” proceed, and “the indignation” against faithless Israel. The gospel is indeed sovereign grace toward all and upon all that believe, and the church is Christ’s body for heavenly glory. But the world-kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ is not yet come, nor can it come till the seventh trumpet is blown. Even in the particular prophecies of Daniel, where Antiochus Epiphanes is referred to (Dan. 8 and Dan. 11), the book itself teaches us to look on from his evil to a greater and worse antitype expressly bound up with “the time of the end,” which in no way applies to the Seleucid king.

Thus every part of the book, when received in faith, is seen to rise up in rebuke of the unbelieving dream that makes Antiochus Epiphanes the paramount object and chief upshot. And as the Roman Empire, in its not yet revived shape, is from the earliest vision predicted, and its judgment when the Son of man appears in glory, so also we learn of a north-eastern monarch who is to oppress the Jews at the final crisis. (Dan. 8) Nor is the book silent on the role of the western chief in making and breaking his compact with the Jews, and in imposing idolatry on them, and thus bringing on the consummation. (Dan. 9) Then Dan. 11:36-39 presents the clear picture of the lawless king in the land, who magnifies himself above God and Christ, as well as every pretended god, yet honours a strange god himself, exalting whom he will, and dividing the land for gain. If we had not the Lord Jesus vindicating for ever “Daniel

the prophet," such a survey calls for believing and thankful acknowledgment of the book as not only genuine and authentic but inspired of God, casting His light authoritatively on all the Gentile empires, and especially on the end of the age, on which each part converges.

It was for others rather than our prophet to descant on the bright scenes of righteousness and peace under Him who is alike David's Son and David's Lord, the Man whose name is the Branch and Jehovah, King over all the earth, as He is also Head over all things. But Daniel simply abides prophet of "the times of the Gentiles"; and this he is with a divine precision and fulness for all who are children of light now. For others it is only natural to love darkness rather than light.

What else after all could be expected from one who, ignoring the word and Spirit of God, takes his stand on "our reason and our conscience as lights which light every man who is born into the world" The apostle Paul alleges, in Romans 1 and 2, that these suffice to leave without excuse even a Gentile who has not the law (still less the gospel). Think of a professing Christian abandoning his precious privileges for heathen ground! And what perversion of John 1:9 to a similar purpose! There the evangelist is really asserting the supreme excellence of Christ as the Light, which, coming into the world, sheds its light on every man, instead of acting, as the law, in the limited sphere of the Jews. One could understand such ideas in a Quaker, though not a few of the Society are beyond that. No wonder that one so far from the truth of the gospel testifies his gratitude to the heathen philosopher Porphyry (86, 87, 317), the bitterest foe, not only of Christ, but of Christianity and

of revelation. No wonder that he praises the “manly words” of Grotius in avowedly adopting this part of Porphyry’s scepticism. “The unjust knoweth no shame.” The “higher criticism” begins in disloyalty to God and His word, and can only work to more and greater ungodliness.

Notes On The Book Of Daniel.

Daniel 1

It must be evident to any attentive reader that this first chapter is purely a preface to the book. It introduces us into the scene to which the prophecies, of which Daniel was either the interpreter or the vessel, are the great after-piece, the subject-matter which the Spirit of God is about to convey to us. We may therefore take advantage of this, to inquire into the peculiar nature of the book on which we are about to enter.

The properly prophetic part of Daniel begins with the second chapter. Then follow certain historical incidents, which, as I conceive, have a most intimate connection with the prophecy — if not directly, in the way of types — which show out the moral principles or the issues of the powers of the world, with which the book is occupied.

In order to understand Daniel it is necessary to bear in mind that prophecy in the Old Testament divides itself into two great parts. There were prophecies that concerned the people of God, Israel, when they were still under His government; unfaithful often, but still subject to His discipline and owned of Him to a certain extent. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and indeed many of the lesser prophets, such as Hosea, Amos, and Micah, have

this first character. Israel was still recognized as God's people, if not the whole, at least that part of the people with which God still had certain dealings in the land: of course I refer to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, which clave to the house of David. After a while they too fell, and the heir of David became the leader in rebellious idolatry against the Lord. Then a change of the utmost importance ensued. The throne of the Lord, which was established in Jerusalem, ceased altogether upon the earth. God no longer owned Israel, nor even Judah, as His people. And I call your attention particularly to this, because there are often vague thoughts as to what is meant by "the people of God" in Scripture. As Christians we look at God's people as those that really belong to Him — His children by faith of Christ. Now there is a danger of carrying the same thoughts back to the language of the Old Testament. But it will be found, if we examine Scripture with care, that in the ancient oracles by "people of God" is meant only the Jews or Israel. Nor is it merely a certain aggregate of the elect among them, but the entire nation, or that part which still clung in a measure, though very unfaithfully, to God's king, and whatever they might be, owned as the people of God. Then came a time when God disowned His people. This was predicted by Hosea. It was accomplished when God gave up the last king of Judah to the Chaldean conqueror. God would have sacrificed His own holiness, truth, and majesty, if He had longer tolerated the Jews or their idolatrous king.

Now it is a remarkable thing in the history of the world, that although there were certain powers of growing importance and ambition in the east, none before had been allowed to step into positive superiority to all

rivals. In the west there were only hordes of wanderers, or, if some were settled, they were uncivilized barbarians. In the east and south powers had rapidly risen; one of them, Egypt, is particularly well known in connection with Israel. Another too, Asshur, is quite as ancient in its origin: indeed, we read of its name, and of certain aspirations and efforts after power, before we read of Egypt at all. These were the great rivals of the early world, and they had a civilization of their own. It might have a rude character, but that it was barbaric grandeur none can deny who believes the Scriptures, nay, who sees the relics of Egypt and Assyria. Well, these powers were constantly struggling for the mastery. But however God might use the Egyptians and Assyrians, or others less considerable, as a rod of discipline for the good of Israel, yet to no nation on earth was supremacy allowed until it was perfectly plain that God's people were proved to be unworthy of being His witness and the scene of His government on the earth. First, then, Ephraim (the ten tribes), having sunk into hopeless idolatry, was swept away. For a long time there had been monarch after monarch only following or exceeding each other in evil; and all through it had been a scene of rebellion and idolatry. Thus God had been compelled to root such a people, that only disgraced Him, out of the land where they had been planted. Still the two tribes that clung to the house of David were owned. But clouds hung over them, and snares were laid by the enemy of the most fatal kind. At this crisis prophecy shines out in all its fulness. For prophecy always, I think, supposes failure. It never comes in during a normal state. But when ruin is impending or begun, then the lamp of prophecy shines in the dark place.

This we find true from the first. Take the revelation in Gen. 3 — that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. When was it given? Not when Adam walked sinlessly, but after he and his wife were fallen. Then God appears, and His word not only judged the serpent, but took the form of promise to be realized in the true Seed — certainly a blessed disclosure of the future, on which the hope of those who believed rested. It was the condemnation of their actual state. It did not allow the faithful who followed to sink into despair, but presented an object above the ruin on the part of God, to which their hearts became attached. Again, Enoch is the person in the antediluvian world who, above all others, is said to have "prophesied," though we do not get the record of it till one of the latest books of the New Testament. "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." Now that the evil, found in the germ in Adam, had broken out into all but universal corruption and violence, we have a well-defined prophecy of judgment coming on the world. It was the interference of God in testimony before He acted in power. Then Noah is seen, who, still more than Enoch, was publicly connected with this evil state. I believe that Enoch's prophecy had a remarkable application to the deluge, though it looks onward, of course, to the grand catastrophe in the last days. When a prophecy is given there is often a partial accomplishment at the time or soon after. But we must never look back at the past pledge as if the whole thing were exhausted. That would be to make Scripture of "private interpretation." And

this is the true sense of 2 Peter 1:20: “No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation.” We must take it in the vast scope of the plans of God, and the unfolding of His purposes, which alone find their consummation at the close. It is to that point that all prophecy looks. Then only we have the grand fulfilment.

Again, let us take the patriarchs, who are expressly called prophets. “He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, He reproved kings for their sakes; saying, Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm.” (Ps. 105:14, 15) Their claim to this title may be explained on the same principle. They were the then interpreters of the mind of God; “called out,” because there was a new and fearful evil come into the world, which we never read of before the days of Abraham — idolatry. Worship of idols, as far as Scripture reveals it to us, is only mentioned after the flood. This was spreading everywhere, and becoming paramount even in the descendants of Shem; and, therefore, God called out a witness in word and deed separate from so flagrant iniquity. Prophecy, or a prophet, always supposes the presence of new and increasing evil, because of which God is pleased to unfold His mind with regard to the future, and to make it of present practical value to those then on the earth.

In the case of Moses it was manifest; for, though he was the great lawgiver, the golden calf was set up almost immediately after, and thus the ruin of Israel, as a people under law, was complete. And so it remained for him, as the great prophet of Israel (Deut. 34:10), to reveal the sure and growing corruption of the people, whatever might be the resources of God’s grace at the end; as, at an earlier epoch, he had predicted the

inevitable judgment of God upon Egypt. Coming lower down in the history of Israel, we have one who begins the line of prophets emphatically so called; for he is mentioned thus: “Yea, all the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after,” etc. His call was at a very critical period in Israel’s history; at a time when the children of Israel had fallen into such a frightfully low state, that they were willing to use even the ark of God as a charm to preserve them from the power of their enemies. Then it was that God put His people to shame. His own ark was taken, and Ichabod was the only name that godly feeling could dictate. The glory was departed. Just about that time we hear of Samuel the prophet. If this was the token of some new crisis, equally at least did it show that God, in vindication of His own name, brings in the light of prophecy as a comfort to the hearts of those who stand for Himself.

Descending still further, we find the full outburst of prophetic light in the time of the prophet Isaiah. The reason is apparent. Not merely had Israel committed itself to idolatry, but the king, David’s son, had actually taken the pattern of the heathen altar at Damascus, and must have another made for himself in the holy city! There was a sin heinous and most insulting to God. Isaiah is set apart with unusual solemnity to the prophetic office. The evil condition of the Jews is realized by him. He sees the glory of the Lord, which draws out from him the immediate confession of his own and the people’s uncleanness. “Then said I, Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” But one of the seraphim touches his lips with a live coal,

assuring him that his iniquity was taken away, and his sin purged. And he is sent with a message of judicial darkness upon the people, which must last till the cities were wasted, and the land made utterly desolate. Thus we have prophecy so much the more brilliant because the evil was manifest and profound. The consequence of the prophetic warning, where received, was a genuine spirit of repentance and of intercession. And God subsequently raised up a royal witness for Himself, so that for a time the evil was suspended.

And all this while you have prophecy coming out with more and more distinctness, directing the hearts of the saints to Him whom the virgin should conceive and bear — the Son of David, Emmanuel, that was to be the only and sure foundation for the people laid in Zion. I need not now attempt to give even an outline of the distinctive features of the prophets that followed. But this far, I trust, the great principle is clear, that prophecy, as a whole, comes in when there is ruin among the people of God. As the ruin deepens, prophecy adds fresh light in the goodness of God.

Besides this universal character of prophecy, we have seen it, first, while God is still disciplining the people and owning them as His. But there is another form of which Daniel is the great example in the Old Testament. This is, when God, no longer able to address His people as such, makes an individual to be the object of His communications.

For this is the manifest feature of Daniel. It is no longer a direct address to the people, reasoning, pleading, warning, opening out bright hopes, as in Isaiah, etc. Nor is it, as in Jeremiah, a prophet “ordained to the nations,”

with most affecting appeals to Israel and Judah, or at least a remnant there. In Daniel all is changed. There is no message to Israel at all; and the first and very comprehensive prophecy contained in the book, was not at first given to the prophet himself, but rather a dream of the heathen king, Nebuchadnezzar, though Daniel was the only one who could recall it, or furnish the interpretation. The other visions were seen by Daniel only, and to him all the interpretations were given. What is the great lesson to be drawn from this? God was acting on the momentous fact that His people had forfeited their place — at least for the present. They had lost their distinctive standing as a nation — God would no longer own them. The presence of elect persons among them did not, in the least degree, arrest the divine sentence. It was not a question of there being "ten righteous" in their midst. Of a corrupt Canaanitish city, like Sodom, that was said as a reason why it should be spared. But does God ever speak so about His people? He may liken them to Sodom for their iniquity, but there can be no such hindrance to judgment in their case. On the contrary, it is expressly said in Ezekiel 14, that "though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it [the land of Israel], they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness "; and again, "they shall deliver neither son nor daughter." That is, in His own land, and in the midst of His guilty people, no matter who were there, nor what their righteousness, the righteous only should be delivered, and God's four sore judgments must be sent. And so, at this very crisis of the captivity, there were righteous men, such as the prophets themselves, and others, kindred spirits in their measure. Whatever, then, be His willingness to spare the world, God does not refrain from judging the evil of His

own people, because of a handful of righteous men in their midst. “Hear this word that the Lord hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities.” (Amos 3:1, 2) Otherwise, there never could have been a national judgment of Israel at all; for there was always a line of faithful ones in their midst. The entire principle is false. In a book I lately met with, such was the plea why England should come comparatively unscathed out of the terrible judgments about to fall on the nations of the earth. There are so many good men! — such changes for the better in high and low — such benevolent and Christian institutions — the Scriptures not only printed in abundance, but everywhere circulated, read, and expounded! But these are the very grounds which, to my mind, make divine judgment inevitable. For it is quite clear from Scripture, that, if there is to be any difference in the measure, those who know His will and do it not “shall be beaten with many stripes.” A more fearful illusion can scarcely be conceived, than that the possession of a greater amount of spiritual knowledge and privilege is to be an effectual shield when the earth comes into judgment.

The Lord recalled the memory of Tyre and Sidon (Matt. 11), but it was only to show the far greater guilt of the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done. “Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of

judgment, than for you." But there was another city still more favoured (elsewhere called His own city, Matt. 9:1), because it was where He then usually dwelt; and, therefore, was its case so aggravated in guilt. "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works which were done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee." In other words, the measure of privilege is ever the measure of responsibility.

We have seen, then, the startling fact that the government which God had set up in Israel (accompanied by the visible sign of His presence, i.e. the Shekinah of glory), was now to subsist no more. God Himself stripped them of their name as His people. Henceforth they were "Lo-Ammi," not My people. That was their doom now, as far as He was concerned, whatever the ultimate designs of His grace might be: for His "gifts and calling" are "without repentance."

Along with this sad change, and dependent on it, the prophecy of Daniel begins. And in this respect there is a strong analogy between this book and the grand prophecy of the New Testament. No doubt, in the latter, special messages were sent to the seven churches through John. But the book, as a whole, was addressed and confided to him, however much it was intended that the things should be testified in the churches. Christ sent and signified the revelation, by His angel, unto His servant John, who stands in the same sort of relation to Christendom that Daniel did to Israel. The failure was so complete that God could no longer address the prophecy directly to His people in either case. Thus there is a very

serious moral sentence of God upon the condition of Christendom. It was a ruin as regards practical testimony for God — Ephesus threatened with the removal of its candlestick, if it did not repent, and Laodicea with the certainty of being spued out of the Lord's mouth. Not but what God continued to save souls: this He always did and does. But it has nothing to do with the witness which His people are responsible to render. More than two hundred years after Judah had become "Lo-Ammi" Malachi could tell of them that feared the Lord speaking often one to another: "And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels, and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." All that might be true; yet the solemn sentence of God — "not My people" — remained on them. Circumstances could affect neither His judgment of the nation nor His grace to faithful souls within it. And what was true then remains equally true now. The salvation and blessing of souls go on. But before God, that which bears the name of Christ in the world is as far from satisfying the thoughts of God about us, as the people of Israel were from fulfilling His design in them.

Accordingly, we find that the character of the book perfectly accords with the time and circumstances in which Daniel was called to be a prophet. It was when the last vestiges of God's people were being taken away. In Jeremiah 25:1, the date of Nebuchadnezzar's reign is reckoned from the first attack. And I would just observe, that there is a little difference from what is said in Daniel 2. In Babylon, where the latter wrote, the reckoning was naturally from the time when Nebuchadnezzar succeeded to the throne upon his

father's death; whereas, in Jerusalem, where Jeremiah prophesies, it was just as naturally from the time that Nebuchadnezzar, during his father's life, wielded the power of the kingdom, to the ruin of Jerusalem and the Jews. The truth is, the case is not uncommon, both in sacred and profane history. Whatever may be the difficulties in the word of God, they really arise from want of light. Generally, the object of the particular portion where they occur is not understood. But speaking of dates, another little thing it is well to bear in mind, which the first verse of our chapter, as compared with Jer. 25:1, gives occasion to: years are sometimes reckoned from their beginning, sometimes from their end, that is, either inclusively or exclusively. So it is in the well-known instances of the days between our Lord's death and resurrection, and of the six or eight days before the transfiguration. Thus in Daniel it was said, "in the third year of Jehoiakim"; but in Jeremiah, "in the fourth year." The one was the complete, the other the current year.

Looking then at the moral character of Daniel's prophecy, the key to the ways of God at the time it was given lies in this, that God no longer exercised a direct, immediate government upon the earth. He had owned David and his seed as the kings that He had set upon the throne of Jehovah at Jerusalem. (1 Chr. 29:23) No other kings were thus recognized of God. They were emphatically His anointed, before whom even the high priest had to walk.

And here was what God intended to set forth by them: a foreshadowing of what He is going to do by and in the Christ, the true Son of David. The same thing is found throughout Scripture. First, a position is committed to

man’s responsibility, and failure is immediate; then, it is taken up by Christ, who establishes it on a foundation which cannot be moved. Thus, God makes man, and sets him sinlessly in paradise, with dominion over the lower creation. Man falls at once. But God never gives up His purpose of having a man in paradise. Where shall we find it now? In the first Adam it broke down utterly. He was turned out of Eden: his race became outcasts from that day to this; and all the efforts and the material progress that man makes in this world are only so many remedial measures to hide the fact that God has driven him out of paradise. But the last Adam is God’s glorious answer to that first trust which was confided to man’s keeping — the Second Man exalted in the paradise of God. Again, Noah, as it were, begins the world afresh after the flood, and has the power of life and death first committed to his hand. The sword of magistracy was introduced. “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made He man.” This was the root of civil government, and man was thereby made responsible to restrain or punish the violent hand. This is never reversed. Christianity, wherever received, brings in other and heavenly principles. But the world remains bound by this irreversible statute of God for its guidance. Noah, however, failed in his trust as completely as Adam had in the garden. He did not govern himself nor his family to God’s glory. He becomes intoxicated, and his younger son insults him: and the issue is, that, instead of the universal blessing of righteous rule, a curse falls upon a portion of his descendants, So, in due time, the principle of a king, responsible to rule righteously over God’s people, was tried in the house of David. And what is found,, Even before David died, there was such dreadful

sin that the sword was never to depart from that very family which ought to have secured blessing to Israel. Did God therefore abandon His designs? In no wise. The Lord Jesus takes up headship, government, and the throne of David's Son. And so with all the other principles that broke down in man's hands; all will be illustrated and established for ever in the person and glory of the Lord Jesus.

We saw that Jerusalem ceases to be Jehovah's throne. And Jeremiah shows us the holy city counted as one among the other nations; and as most privileged, so the first to drink the cup of God's fury. Babylon must drink it also, but Israel first. It is in the same chapter (Jer. 25) that you have the distinct prediction of the seventy years' captivity, during which Judah was to be carried away to Babylon; and then should come at the end the judgment of the power that led them captive. But while Jeremiah predicts the rising supremacy of Babylon, and its final judgment, and that, too, not as a matter of history alone, but as the type of the world's overthrow in the day of the Lord, we have not there the details that intervene. So Ezekiel, among the captives at Chebar, brings us up in the first half of his prophecy to the time of the great struggle for the chief place among the powers of the world. Pharaoh-Necho, king of Egypt, desired to have it; but, as the Assyrian before him, he is destroyed, and Babylon remains the ambitious claimant of universal dominion. There were these three powers, Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon; the latter comparatively young as a great kingdom, though founded probably upon the oldest associations of all, viz., Babel — "the beginning of Nimrod's kingdom." They were like fierce animals, held in by an unseen leash till the experiment

was fairly tried, whether the daughter of Zion would walk humbly and obediently with the Lord, or whether she would turn from her backsliding and repent at His call. But she did neither. This left room for what had never been seen before — the rise of universal empire.

After the flood, and the judgment of the Lord at Babel, the great dispersion of nations took place — families, kindreds, tongues, and lands, all separate. Israel was the centre of this system of independent nations. So it is written in Deut. 32:8: “When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance; when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.” All was arranged with reference to Israel, for “Jehovah’s portion is His people, Jacob is the lot of His inheritance.” They were the divine centre for the earth, and God will yet make good His purpose. Though completely frustrated through the wickedness of the people, Israel must yet be His centre of nations in this world, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. This, too, was first tried in the hands of man, and failed; then it is turned over into the hands of Christ, who will establish it in due time. Israel’s pride made it to depend at first upon their obedience to God. At Sinai they undertook the responsibility of the law. Whenever a sinner attempts to stand upon that ground with God, he is lost. The only safe and lowly ground is, not what Israel would be for God, but what God would be in faithfulness and love and pity toward Israel. And so it is with every soul at all times. Israel accepting that condition, the law became their scourge, and God was compelled to judge them. Death accordingly was certain, spite of God’s marvellous patience. People fail, priests fail, and kings at last

became the leaders in all evil. God was compelled to give up His people. From that moment all that held in check the nations of the earth was taken away, and the vast rival dynasties struggled for the mastery. God no longer had a people that He owned as the theatre of His government. If their heart had only turned to Him, like the needle to the pole, spite of quivering to and fro, there would have been long-suffering (as indeed there was to the uttermost), and the intervention of divine power would have established them in blessing for evermore. But when not only the people, but the king anointed of Jehovah, blotted out His very name from the land; when His glory was given to another in His own temple, all was over for the present, and “Lo-Ammi” was the sentence of God. They had become now the most bitter in their idolatry, being apostates from the living God, and, if maintained, would have been the active champions of heathen abominations. By God’s judgment, therefore, the people and the king at length passed into captivity.

At this crisis Daniel appears at the court of the Babylonish monarch, according to the sure word of Isaiah to King Hezekiah. (Isa. 39) “The times of the Gentiles” (for so runs the remarkable phrase in Luke 21) were begun, and of those times Daniel was the prophet. They are not always to run on; they have a limit assigned by God, when the present interruption of His direct earthly government shall cease, and Israel shall again be acknowledged as the people of God. During this interval, as we saw, their distinctive calling being lost, God allows in His providence a new system of government, the system of imperial unity, to rise up in the great successive Gentile powers It is no longer

independent nations, each having its own ruler, but God Himself sanctioning, in His providence, the surrender of all nations of the earth to the absorbing authority of a single individual. This is what characterizes “the times of the Gentiles.” Such a thing was unexampled before, though there may have been strong kingdoms encroaching upon weaker ones. Even the infidel historian is compelled to recognize, as all history does, the four great empires of the ancient world. Israel was now merged in the mass of nations. Hence that expression comes in, “the God of heaven.” God had, as it were, retreated from the immediate control of the earth, in which character, at least in type, He had governed Israel. This had now wholly disappeared, and God, acting sovereignly, and at a distance, so to speak, from the scene — “the God of heaven” — gave certain defined powers of the Gentiles to succeed each other in a world-wide empire.

Before these preliminary remarks close, I add a little word on the great moral features of this chapter; for if they are brought out prominently in Daniel, they were not written for his sake only, but for ours, if we desire the same blessing.

The chapter opens with the scene of the complete prostration of the Jews before their conqueror. They were now besieged and overwhelmed in their last stronghold. “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, came Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar, to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure-house of his god.” Next we

have the fulfilment of the remarkable prophecy of Isaiah, already alluded to. Hezekiah had been sick, nigh unto death. At his urgent desire to live, God had added to his days fifteen years, and this was sealed to him by a striking sign; the sun returned ten degrees by which it was gone down. But it had been better to have learnt well the lesson of death and resurrection, than to have life prolonged, fall into a snare, and hear of the sorrows that yet awaited his house and, with it, the eclipse of Israel's hopes. Whether a sign so remarkable was what chiefly attracted the notice of a nation the most celebrated in the ancient world for its astronomical lore, I cannot say. Certain it is, that at that time the king of Babylon sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, and this, not merely because he was recovered of his sickness, but to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land. (2 Chr. 32:31) Instead of going softly all his years, Hezekiah displays his treasures to the ambassadors of Merodach-baladan. "There was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not." "Then said Isaiah to Hezekiah, Hear the word of the Lord of hosts: Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."

Here we see this accomplished. "And the king spake unto Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes (or nobles); children in whom was no blemish, but well-favoured, and skilful in

all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans." Accordingly "the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat and of the wine which he drank; so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king." Along with this, the names of Daniel and of his three companions are changed. It would appear, that the desire was to efface the memory of the true God, by giving them names derived from the idols of Babylon. "The prince of the eunuchs gave to Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abed-nego"; in all probability names derived from Bel and the other false gods then worshipped in Chaldea.

And now let us mark what the Holy Ghost records, as peculiarly showing Daniel's heart for God, that in his moral ways he might be a vessel to honour, and meet for the Master's use. How remarkably is the power of God superior to all circumstances! Daniel and his companions say nothing to the change of names, painful as it must have been. They were slaves the property of another, who had the authority to call them as he pleased. "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank." Naturally they would have received such fare with thankfulness; faith works, and it is refused. It was connected with the false gods of the country, being a part of the daily food of an idolatrous king. Even in their own land, and apart from idols, God insisted upon separating between things

clean and unclean, and much that was prized among the Gentiles was an abomination to a Jew. The law was stringent as to these defilements, and Daniel, as a Jew, was under its obligations. Christianity comes in and delivers the conscience from anxiety as to such things. “Whatsoever is sold in the shambles,” Paul says, “that eat, asking no question for conscience’ sake.” And so at a feast. If it were known, however, that certain food had been offered unto idols, the Christian was not to eat, both for the sake of those that named the fact and for conscience’ sake. But for the Jew, there was unqualified separation required. Daniel at once shows himself decided for the true God. It was not to him a question of doing at Babylon what was done there, but of the will of God as enjoined upon Israel. “Therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.” God had meanwhile wrought in His providence that Daniel should find special favour. But this did not lessen the trial of faith. And when difficulties and dangers were pleaded, still he has confidence in God. We are all apt to find good reasons for bad things; but Daniel’s eye was single, and his whole body full of light — the only means of understanding the mind of God. He did not consider what was pleasing to himself; he did not fear to risk the peril; he looked at the matter in connection with God. He only asks that they may be proved for ten days; “and let them give us pulse to eat and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon,” etc. Not “pleasant bread,” but that which spoke of humbling themselves before God, was what a true heart felt to be their suited food; such fare as the lowest in that proud and luxurious city might have disdained. What is the result of this trial? Daniel and his companions turn out “fairer and fatter in flesh than all

the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat." Thus they were spared further trouble on that score.

But that is not all. There was the positive blessing of God, in giving them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom. And of Daniel it is said, that he was made to understand "all visions and dreams." They were prepared of God, each for what he had afterwards to fill. God was their teacher, and the trial of their faith was a needed, essential part of their training in His school. Then, when they stood before the king, none was found like them. When the king inquired of them, he found them, in all matters of wisdom and understanding, "ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.'' (Verses 17-20)

If we, too, are to understand the Scriptures, I believe that we must travel the path of separation from the world. Nothing more destroys spiritual intelligence than merely floating with the stream of men's opinions and ways. The prophetic word is that which shows us the end of all man's projects and ambition. "And the world passeth away, and the lusts thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." Doubtless, "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." But all the plans of men will come to nothing first, though "they shall labour in the very fire, and shall weary themselves for very vanity." Himself shall do it. If there be one Scripture truth which stands out more prominently than another, or rather which underlies all truth, it is the total failure of man in everything that pertains to God, before His grace interferes and triumphs. And this is true, not of unconverted men only, but of His people of old, and of

His Church since. Nor is there any advantage greater for the enemy, short of destroying the foundations, than the mixing up of the saints of God with the world, and the consequent darkening of all spiritual intelligence in those who ought to be its light. God would have us in practical communion with Himself: in His light we see light. If we see the end of all the plots of Satan to thwart the work of God, it separates us from what leads thereto, and joins us with all that is dear to Him. Then "the path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." So walking, we shall understand the word of God. It is not a question of intellectual capacity and learning. I am confident that human erudition in the things of God is only so much rubbish, wherever it is made to be anything more than a servant. Unless Christians can keep what they know under their feet, they are incapable of profiting fully by the word of God. Otherwise, whether a man know much or little, he becomes its slave, and it usurps the place of the Spirit of God.

Faith is the sole means and power of spiritual understanding; and faith puts and keeps us in subjection to the Lord, and in separation from this evil age. Daniel was separated from what, to a Jew, dishonoured God, and God blessed him with wisdom and understanding.

Daniel 2

Before entering upon my present subject, I would point out an obvious proof that Dan. 1 has a prefatory character. The last verse of the chapter informs us that "Daniel continued unto the first year of king Cyrus." It is not merely an account of certain circumstances, before

we are introduced to the various revelations or facts that are given in succession in the book; but we have the preparation for the place that Daniel was to keep. And then we are carried, as it were, on to the end. The continuance of Daniel is shown through the whole term of the Babylonish monarchy, and even to the beginning of the Persian. It is not meant that Daniel only lived to the first year of king Cyrus; because the latter part of the book shows us a vision subsequent to that date. The fact is simply stated, that he lived at the commencement of a new dynasty. And it will be found that the end of the last chapter is an equally suitable conclusion to the book; answering, as such, to the first chapter as a preface.

But before going farther, I would make one remark of a general kind. The book divides itself into two nearly equal volumes or sections. First, that which refers to the great Gentile powers, and the features that would mark their outward conduct; and, finally, to the judgment of it all. This is continued up to the end of Dan. 6. Then, from Dan. 7 to the close, we have not the external history of the four Gentile empires, but that which is of more peculiar interest to God’s people. This was, evidently enough, indicated by the circumstance that the first portion of the book does not consist of visions that Daniel saw; for the only one, properly so called, was seen by Nebuchadnezzar. There is one in Dan. 2, and then another of a different character in Dan. 4; Dan. 3, 5, and 6 being facts that had to do with the moral condition of the first two monarchies, but nothing at all that was made known in the first instance to Daniel, or visions seen by the prophet himself; whereas the latter part of the book is occupied exclusively with

communications to the prophet himself. And there it is that we find, not merely what ought to strike the natural mind, but the secrets of God that peculiarly affect and interest His people, and hence details also. The external proof of this is, that chapter vi., which closes what I have called the first section of Daniel, brings us up to the close again. “So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.” Now this is remarkable, because the next chapter goes back again to Belshazzar. “In the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions of his head,” etc. That was long before Cyrus the Persian. Then in Dan. 8, “In the third year of the reign of king Belshazzar.” And in Dan. 9, “In the first year of Darius, the son of Ahasuerus.” So far all is regular. Next, we come down to Dan. 10-12. “In the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia, a thing was revealed unto Daniel,” etc. The first part (Dan. 1-6) brings us down to the close in a general way, and the second (Dan. 7-12) with equal order; divided, not merely in this outward manner, but having the moral difference, already explained, i.e. the one external and the other internal. That this is not an unprecedented thing in the word of God is familiar to the reader of Matthew 13. There, we have an orderly setting forth of the kingdom of heaven under certain parables — the first of these being a prefatory one. Now, taking the other six parables (for there are exactly seven in all), you have a division of them into two sets of three, the first of which refers to the exterior of the kingdom, and the last to more inward and hidden relations.

This exactly answers to what we have in Daniel. First, the external history goes down to the close, and then the internal succeeds, or what was of special interest to

those that had understanding of the ways of God. This will suffice to show that the book is characterized by that divine method which we ought to expect in the word of God. There is a profound design, which runs through the works of God, and more especially through His word. The finger of God Himself is evident indeed upon what He has made; yet death has come in, and the creature is made subject to vanity. Hence, we hear the groans of the lower creation; and, as you rise in the scale of animal life, the misery is more intense. Man is more conscious and capable of feeling the wretchedness that his own sin has brought upon the world, and upon that creation, of which he is made the lord. But in the word of God, although there may be slips and errors of scribes, they are for the most part but specks. They may obscure its full light; but they are trifling in comparison with the evident brightness of that which God gives, even through the most imperfect version. In passing through the hands of men, we discover more or less of the weakness that attaches to the earthen vessel; but through the great mercy of God, there is ample light for every honest soul.

But turning to this first great scene, we have the entire failure of the wisdom of the world. Unusual care was taken, at the court of Babylon, to have men trained in all wisdom and knowledge. The time was now come when this was to be put to the test. God was pleased, while the great Gentile king was meditating upon his bed, to give him a vision of the future history of the world: on the one hand, gratifying his desire to see the world’s course thence onward unveiled; while, on the other hand, he was made to feel the utter powerlessness of all human resources. It was God’s opportunity for

displaying His own power, and the perfect wisdom of which even a poor captive was made the channel. This is a signal example of God's ways. Here were these Jews; and the proud king might have supposed that, if God was for them, they could not possibly have come under his hand. But if God's people are guilty, there are none whose faults He so much exposes. How do we know the wrong that Abraham did? or David? Only from God. He loves His people too well to hide their faults. It is a part of His moral government, that He is the very last to put or allow a veil over what displeases Him, in those even whom He loves best. Take a well-governed family. Is it the way of love to cover over the fault of the child, when the child ought to feel it? — and feel it he must if he is to be happy. So with God's people. Israel had abandoned Him — had denied their relationship to Him; and God shows that He felt their sin, and that they must feel it too. He disowned them as His people for a time — swept them out of the land in which He had planted them; and now they were the slaves of the Gentiles.

But in turn their conqueror must be taught that, after all, the mind — the heart of God, was with the poor captives. The power of God might be with the Gentile for a season, but the affections of God and His secret were with His own, even in the hour of their abasement.

The circumstances through which this was brought out strikingly illustrate the ways of God. The king dreams a dream: the thing departs from him. He summons his wise men, and calls upon them to make known the dream and the interpretation of it. But all in vain. They themselves are so struck with the unreasonableness of the demand, that they say, "There is none other that can show it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling

is not with flesh." (Ver. 11) It was impossible to meet the king's request. Thus all was allowed to come out in its reality. Their wisdom proved to be unavailing for what was wanted. Daniel hears of the decree which went forth, that the wise men should be slain. He goes to Arioch, and begs for time to be given him. But mark this — and it is the characteristic of faith — he has confidence in God. He does not wait till God gives him the answer, before he says that he would show the interpretation of the dream. He proffers it at once. He is confident in God, and that is faith — a conviction founded on the known character of God. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and Daniel feared the Lord. Therefore, also, he was not alarmed at the decree. He knew that God who gave could recall the dream. At the same time, he does not in the least degree pretend to answer it himself. We have thus two great things brought out in Daniel: first, his confidence that God would reveal the thing to the king; secondly, his confession that he could not. He goes to his house, and makes the thing known to his companions. He wishes that they also should "desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret." He has exceeding value for the prayers of his brethren — the witnesses with himself of the true God in Babylon. He gets them on their knees before God, as well as takes that place himself. But Daniel, having special faith, was the one that God therefore honours. "Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision." (Verses 14-19)

Neither does he go directly to the king, nor even to his companions, to tell them that God has made known the dream to him. The first thing he does is to go to God. The God that has made known the secret is the One that

Daniel at once owns. He is in the place of one that worships God. And allow me to say, that this is the grand object of all the revelations of God. Do not suppose it is a question of making known to me my sin and a Saviour meeting all the need of my soul. What God works by His Spirit in His saints, is not merely that they should know they are delivered from hell, or that they should walk as His children. There is a higher thing still. God makes His people worshippers of Himself; and, if there is one thing, in which God's children fail more than another, it is in realizing their place as worshippers.

Now, Daniel understood this. Though comparatively young, he was well acquainted with the mind of God. And here we have this beautiful feature. He brings out in his outburst of praise the mind of God; and this, not so much in connection with His power — though it is true that "He changeth the times and seasons; He removeth kings and setteth up kings," etc. — but what his heart specially dwells upon is this: "He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding." I call your attention to the words. It is quite true that the Lord looks with compassion on the ignorant, and shows His goodness to those that have no understanding. But Daniel is speaking of His ways with those whose hearts are towards Him; and in their case the Lord's principle is, "Unto every one that hath shall be given,.... but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." (Matt. 25:29) Nothing is more dangerous, In the things of God, than to stop short in the path of learning His ways. What arrests souls is the consciousness that the truth is too practical; and they fear the consequences: for the truth of God is not a thing merely to know, but to live; and the soul

instinctively shrinks back because of the serious present results it entails. In Daniel's case the eye was single, and the whole body, therefore, full of light. This is the real secret of progress. Let the desire only be towards God, and the progress is sure and steady.

Daniel then goes in unto Arioch, and says, "Destroy not the wise men of Babylon: bring me in before the king, and I will show unto the king the interpretation." Accordingly, Arioch brings him in before the king in haste, and says, "I have found a man of the captives of Judah, that will make unto the king the interpretation." The king asks him whether it is true, that he is able to make known the dream and the interpretation. Daniel's answer is beautiful. Real, deep knowledge of the ways of God is always accompanied by humility. There is no greater mistake, nor one more unfounded in fact, than the supposition, that spiritual intelligence puffeth up; knowledge may — mere knowledge But I speak of that spiritual understanding in the word, which flows from the sense of God's love, and seeks to spread itself, if I may so say, just because it is divine love. Daniel intimates how impossible it was for "the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers," to show the dream unto the king. "But there is a God in heaven, that revealeth secrets, and maketh known [he does not even say to Daniel, but] to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days." He desired that Nebuchadnezzar should know the interest that God took in him. "As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind, upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter; and He that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass." But he is not satisfied with that: he adds, "As for me, this secret is not

revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart."

Then he enters upon the dream. "Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible." He had seen the course of empire, not merely in a fragmentary successional manner, but as a whole. In the latter part of the book, we have the succession more minutely marked, and the detailed ways of the different powers towards Daniel's people: but here it is the general history of the Gentile empire.

"This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass." That is, there was deterioration, as the empires departed from the source of power. It was God who gave imperial rule to Nebuchadnezzar. Consequently, that which is nearest to the source is seen as "this head of gold." There comes in a certain measure more of what was human in the Persian empire; "the breast and the arms of silver," an inferior metal, and so on down to the legs, which are of iron, and the feet, part of iron and part of clay. It is quite plain from this, that, as we descend from the original grant of power, there is a gradual debasement.

But it is well, now, to state a principle or two, which I believe to be of importance in looking at prophetic scriptures. One of the commonest maxims, even among Christians, is this: that prophecy is to be interpreted by the event — that history is the proper exponent of prophecy — that when the prophetic visions are realized

upon the earth, the facts explain the visions. This is a false principle; it has not one particle of truth in it. People confound with interpretation of prophecy the confirmation of its truth. When a prediction is fulfilled, of course its fulfilment confirms its truth, but that is a very different thing from explaining it. The proper understanding of prophecy is just as difficult after the event as before it. For instance, let any one take the seventy weeks of Daniel. That chapter has furnished occasion for immense controversy and dispute among believers themselves. It is one of their commonest assumptions, that it is all fulfilled (which is not correct), and yet there is no such thing as agreement among them about its meaning.

Looking again at Ezekiel's prophecy: we find that the difficulty of prophecy arises from a totally different source. The first part of Ezekiel was fulfilled in the then ways of God with Israel; it extended over the time when Daniel lived. But that does not explain it. It is, in fact, more obscure than the closing chapters, which are future.

What, then, does explain prophecy? That which explains all Scripture — the Spirit of God alone. His power can unfold any part of the word of God. Do you ask, if I mean to say, that it is of no importance to know languages, understand history, and so on? I am not raising a question about learning: it has its use; but I deny that history is the interpreter of prophecy, or of any Scripture. And if there are Christians who know the history of the world, or the original tongues of Scripture, it is Christ that has to do with their spiritual intelligence, and not their knowledge or learning. Besides, even if men are Christians, it does not

necessarily follow that they understand Scripture. They know Christ, else they would not be Christians. But real entrance into God's mind, in Scripture, supposes that a person watches against self, desires the glory of God, has full confidence in His word, and dependence on the Holy Ghost. The understanding of Scripture is not a mere intellectual thing. If a man has no mind at all, he could not understand anything: but the mind is only the vessel — not the power. The power is the Holy Ghost, acting upon and through the vessel; but it must be the Holy Ghost Himself that fills a soul. As it is said, "They shall be all taught of God."

There is a great difference in the measure of the teaching, because there is much difference in the measure of dependence upon God. The important thing is to bear in mind that the understanding of Scripture depends much more Upon what is moral, than what is of the mind — upon a single eye to Christ. The Holy Ghost can never give us anything to save us from the necessity of dependence and waiting upon God.

How, then, are we to interpret prophecy? It is entirely independent of history; it was given to be understood before it becomes history. That this is true must be manifest. The great mass of prophecy is about the terrible judgments that are to fall at the end of this age. What becomes of the people who do not profit by the prophecies, till the facts have taken place? It is a serious thing to despise it. The believer that understands prophecy has got special help, which he lacks who neglects it.

Starting, then, with this great principle — that it is the Holy Ghost who gives us to read prophecy, as bearing

upon the glory of God, and connected with Christ, who shall yet be exalted, and whose glory shall fill the earth and heavens, all usurpers and pretenders being put down — let us look at this scene, as that which shows us the course of the world, up to that time. First, consider the position of the parties. Here was the proudest king in the world. He had gone forth at the head of victorious armies, before his father's death — before he had properly come into the undivided kingdom of Babylon. And now he has laid open to him a sphere of dominion, perhaps, beyond his ambition. He learns, with certainty, that it was God, in His providence, who had put him in this position. But more than that: he sees brought before him, in a few touches, the whole chart of the Gentile world — the leading features of its history from that day to the day of glory and judgment that is coming. He has brought before him the rise of another and neighbouring power, that had been already alluded to in prophecy; so that there was therefore no difficulty at all in gathering what was meant by it. The prophet Isaiah, who lived a hundred and fifty years before Cyrus was born, had not only referred by the Holy Ghost to the nation and king of the Medes and Persians, but had called him by name.

Again: another empire was foreshown, that was then comparatively in its infancy, or consisting only of so many separate tribes, without any stable bond of cohesion among them — I refer to the Greeks. But, more remarkable still, the kingdom, which is most dwelt upon by the Spirit of God, was then one that was in a mere embryo condition, and probably not even known by name to the king of Babylon. For though that kingdom was destined to play the greatest part ever taken by a kingdom in the history of the world, it was then utterly

obscure. It was engaged in home and neighbouring squabbles of the pettiest kind, without any thought of extending its dominion. The more marvellous, therefore, it is to look at that great king, and the servant of God that stood before him, unfolding the history of the world "Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory." It was not a question of his own prowess, nor special wisdom, that he possessed. If Nebuchadnezzar had been allowed to carry away these captives — to triumph over the power of Egypt, that had wished to dispute the supremacy of the world, it was the God of heaven who had given it to him. "And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field, and the fowls of heaven, hath He given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold." Clearly the Babylonish monarchy is meant. God had referred to this by Isaiah. And Jeremiah, who was a contemporary of Daniel's, had brought before him not only the length of period during which the Babylonish monarchy should last, but even the succession. There would be Nebuchadnezzar and his son, and his son's son. This had a remarkable fulfilment. So that we need not go beyond Scripture to understand prophecy. It is the right, spiritual use of what is in the word of God, and I bless God for it. If you find the simplest man who only studies with diligence the Bible, in his mother tongue, and is led by the Spirit of God, he has the elements and the power of a true interpretation. But as sure as a man tries to find an interpretation here and there, by the help of history, antiquities, newspapers, and what not, he is only deceiving himself and his hearers. Such is the universal moral sentence of God upon the soul that searches, in what is of man, the proper key to God's

secrets. I must find it in God Himself, by a right use of what is in His own word.

An early Jewish writer, whose history is everywhere read and valued, Josephus, I had the curiosity to look at, and, finding the common version peculiar, I examined the original Greek of his history, but found the same strange sense still. He makes out that the head of gold means Nebuchadnezzar, and the kings that were before him! Thus, there is an entire want of understanding what the word of God says. The going away from Scripture, and allowing one's own thoughts, always leads astray. Babylon was first made an empire of in the person of Nebuchadnezzar, who here includes, as it were, those that were to follow. "Thou art this head of gold." There is no reference to the kings that were before him. Babylon never was allowed to have the empire of the world till Nebuchadnezzar's day; therefore it was that he, and not his forefathers, formed the head of gold. He was the one in whom the imperial place of Babylon finds its beginning.

In Jeremiah 25 we find not only the epoch of seventy years of captivity, but, farther on (Jer. 27), the succession is mentioned. "All nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the very time of his land come." It happened that, after his son Evil-Merodach was cut off, there was one who took the throne, not in the order of succession, but called to it by the Babylonish people, with a sort of claim through marriage with Nebuchadnezzar's daughter. This man reigned for a time, and after him' his son, who was, therefore, the son of Nebuchadnezzar's daughter, not of his son. It might, so far, then, appear that the prophecy had failed. Not at all. A few months after,

Nebuchadnezzar's grandson was called to the throne. "Scripture cannot be broken." It had been said, "Nebuchadnezzar, his son, and his son's son," and so it was. In Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, the whole thing terminated. For this then Scripture furnishes all the main parts. So that prophecy does, in fact, explain history, but history never interprets prophecy. The man who understands prophecy can open up history; but no understanding of history will enable him to explain prophecy. It may confirm the truth of a prediction, to a doubter, so far as it is clear. Thus, if the history of the taking of Jerusalem, as it is given in the Wars of Josephus, is a true one, it will, of course, coincide with the inspired notice told us by Luke. But it is quite plain, that if I have confidence in the word of God, there I have a much more certain account of it. In a word, the circumstance of being uttered before the event has nothing to do with the matter. The eye of God saw all along, and through the stream of Gentile empire; and the language is as plain in the prophecies of Daniel, as in the writings of the Greek and Latin historians.3 And so true is this that those who have no sympathy with what is of God, even infidels, are obliged to acknowledge, that whatever clearly bears upon the subject coincides with what Daniel had said hundreds of years before the events.

"And after thee shall arise another kingdom, inferior to thee." Not inferior in territorial extent, but in splendour, and perhaps most of all in the admixture of control outside the ruler, instead of a man acting in the conviction that God had put him in his place of authority. Darius (Dan. 6) took the advice of unscrupulous subjects and suffered bitterly for it. Had he felt the sense of

immediate responsibility to God, the snare had been avoided. Men naturally shrink from absolute authority, chiefly because it is uncontrolled power in the hands of a weak and erring man. But supposing it was one who had all the wisdom and goodness in his own person, nothing could be happier. This is exactly what will be true in the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, when full authority will be put into His hands, and all will be blessed and according to the will of God, and when the contrary will of men would only be rebellion.

What seems to confirm this, is, that when we come down to the third kingdom, the Macedonian, of which Alexander the Great was the founder, there we have a man, who not merely acted at the suggestion of his wise men, but was controlled by his generals. It became, in fact, a kind of military rule — a less respectable thing than the aristocratic interference of the Medes and Persians, and their inflexible laws.

Then we come down much lower still, and have a fourth kingdom, represented by iron. “And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron; forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things; and as iron breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.” There, strength is the great feature of the kingdom, and the quality of the metal is consistent with it. But it is of the commonest sort — not one of the precious metals; perhaps, because the Roman empire was distinguished by this, that it was nominally the people that governed. However despotic the emperor, he always pretended, in theory at least, to consult the people and senate. Even under the empire, the Romans had still the semblance of their old republican constitution; whilst, in point of fact,

it was but an individual who had clothed himself with all the real power.

Here, then, we have sketched before us the whole course of empire. But it may be asked, How do you know these things? It is not said that the second empire represents Medo-Persia, or the third Macedonia, or the fourth Rome. I think it is. It may not be said here: but Scripture does not always hang up the key exactly at the door. It is not often that we find the explanation of one portion in the very next verse. God wants me to know His word, to be familiar with all that He has written, and to be assured that all is very good. To instruct even the unconverted child in the Scripture is always of great value. It is like laying a fire well, so that a spark alone is needed to kindle it into a flame. It is a good and wholesome thing for Christians to be most particular in training up their children in a thorough knowledge of the word of God.

But, returning to consider what light Scripture gives, we need not go farther than this Book of Daniel to find the names of these empires In chapter 5:28, we are told, “Peres: thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.” There is the answer at once. We find the Babylonian kingdom just tottering and about to be destroyed. We are told that the Medes and Persians succeed. Nothing simpler or more certain. The only people I ever heard of that found difficulties, were some learned men who strove to make out that the empire of Babylon extends to Persia as well, so as to make Greece the second, Rome the third, and the fourth a distinct and purely future antichristian power. Another class of these scholars have contended that Alexander’s kingdom is one thing, and that of his successors another wholly

different: in fact, one the third and the other the fourth empire; so as to make even the fifth kingdom (that of "the little stone") a past or present thing. Had Scripture been read and weighed without an object, mistakes like these could never have been made. But the believer, instead of seeing in history things to perplex his mind, takes up his Bible, and finds the solution before he leaves the prophecy itself. For it is plain from Daniel 8:20, 21, that the empire of the united Medes and Persians gives place to the Grecian kingdom, with its fourfold division at Alexander's death. This again is succeeded by the fourth, or Roman Empire, the peculiar feature of which is, that in its last stage it is seen divided into ten separate kingdoms. (Dan. 7) Was this ever the case with the successors of Alexander? His kingdom was divided into four, never into ten. Thus we have prophecy explaining history; while the general use that mere learning makes of history is to obscure the brightness of the word of God. But let us understand the word of God first; and then, if we turn to history, we shall find it comes in as a human witness, and confirms, with its feeble voice, the divine testimony. It is obliged to do so. Thus, the man that does not know history stands upon at least as good ground as those who are learned, but find difficulties. He is not perplexed as others are, who look through the mist of their own speculations.

In the third kingdom a feature is introduced which is not in the second. It was to "bear rule over all the earth." How remarkably this was fulfilled in the Macedonian or Grecian kingdom! Because, although Cyrus was a great conqueror, it was altogether in the region where he lived. He overcame the whole of those parts to the north of Media and Persia, and also southward, as well as the

west. All that was true; but he never went outside, so far as I know, the bounds of Asia.

But now we see a kingdom marked by extraordinary rapidity of conquest. One might challenge all ages to show anything that fulfils this prophecy, as the kingdom of Alexander did. In the course of a few years, that remarkable man overran almost the whole of the then known world. He even lamented, as we know, that he had not another world to conquer. This is a striking commentary upon what we have here. Do we need to go to history for it all? No. We find in this very book the explanation. In Dan. 8:20, 21, the third empire is shown to be the Grecian. “The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia.” There you have also a confirmation of what I said before, as to the second kingdom. But when this ram was there, a fierce goat came that had a notable horn between his eyes. With the single horn that he has in his head, he butts against the ram, who represented these kings of Media and Persia. Here we have the third kingdom, that was to “bear rule over all the earth.” What is its name? The 21st verse gives the answer. “The rough goat is the king of Grecia, and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king.” We do not need history to explain prophecy We have here the distinct, positive answer from the word of God, as to what the third kingdom is; and all real research you may make in history will only confirm this, but you do not need it. If you take your stand upon the word of God, you are upon a ground that no history can touch for a single instant. God, who gives the only sure account, shows that the Medo-Persian Empire is followed by the Grecian. The sole great horn of the latter is broken, and “for it came up four notable

ones, towards the four winds of heaven." The kingdom of Alexander, at his death, was broken up into four great parts, which his generals fought for. You have their comparative littleness in the presence of Alexander. He was the great horn, the first king and representative of the third kingdom. The next question is, What was to follow that? What other great empire was to succeed: and that, the last empire before God should set up His kingdom? The Old Testament history closes before the third empire begins. The last facts historically stated are in the Book of Nehemiah, while the Persian was still the great king, i.e. the second empire was yet supreme. But the New Testament history opens, and what is found there? I have only to read the beginning of Luke, and I hear of another great empire then ruling. "It came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed." There we have, at once, the fourth kingdom, without requiring to ask history for it. There is a fourth kingdom, and the word of God shows it to be universal; it summons men throughout the world to be enrolled in its register, and God takes care that there should be a legal acknowledgment even of His own Son's having been then born.

The fourth kingdom, then, was the Roman Empire. When I know that from Scripture,4 I can go to history, which tells me that it was the Roman Empire which crushed the power of Greece. They got the Greeks first to join them in beating the Macedonians, and then they turned upon the Greeks, and soon put them down.

Afterwards, the Romans extended their conquests all over Asia. What does God say about it? "The fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron

breaketh in pieces... and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise." And if people do call in history, can they see things more clearly? Where can they show as just a description of that empire as that which God gives here? One well-known historian, when speaking about the empires, describes them in the liveliest imagery, derived from these very symbols of Daniel the prophet. He could find no figures so apt as those which the Spirit of God had consecrated to their use already, though every one knows it was from no lack of imagination, any more than from the wish to accredit Scripture.

Even this is not all that God gives us. "Forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise." Never was a description more exactly to the point. I could quote passages from the old Roman writers, which show that they themselves gave an account of their own empire and policy, in terms substantially similar.

But there was something they could not tell, and that was beyond what man could foresee. That power that above all other was distinguished for its strength in warring down every one that rose up against it, whatever its kindness to those who stooped to the conqueror — that very power is described here thus: — "And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potter's clay and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided." The Romans do not tell us this. History is not always a truthful speaker. Those who describe their own country's statecraft are not in general very trustworthy. If there was that which threatened extinction, they are as glad to hide it as they were ready to boast in

whatever evidences their boldness, strength, and glory; but God tells all out; and we find that the same empire, that was to be so celebrated for its amazing strength, is to exhibit also the greatest inherent weakness. “There shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.”

The iron was the original element; the clay was brought in subsequently, and properly did not belong to the great metal statue: it was a foreign ingredient. When and whence did it come? I believe that the Spirit of God in using the figure of clay refers not to the original Roman element, which had the strength of the iron, but to the barbaric hordes, which broke in at a later period, weakening the Roman power, and forming by degrees separate kingdoms. I can, however, only state this as my own judgment, founded upon the general use of Scripture language and ideas. We have what was not properly and originally Roman, but was brought in from elsewhere: and it is the mixture of the two elements that is productive of the weakness, and that finally leads to division. These hordes of barbarians, that forced themselves in at first, professed not to be conquerors, but guests of Rome, and finally settled themselves within its limits. This it was that subsequently led to the division of the empire into a number of separate independent kingdoms, when the power and pride of imperial Rome was broken. Charlemagne, later on,

cherished the desire of universal empire, which he laboured hard to realize; but it was a failure; and all that he acquired in his life was separated in his death. Another man attempted it in our own days; I mean, of course, the exile of St. Helena. He had at heart the same universal monarchy. What was the issue? His success was still more short-lived. All was completely broken up into its original constituents before he had breathed his last. And so it will continue in the main, until the moment spoken of here, but more fully entered into in the Book of the Revelation.

This is, I believe, what Scripture lays down about the matter. There will be, before the age closes, the most remarkable union of two apparently contradictory conditions — a universal head of empire, and separate independent kingdoms besides, each of which will have its own king; but that one man will be the emperor over all these kings. Till that time comes, every effort to unite the different kingdoms under one head will be a total failure. Even then, it will be not by fusing them together into one kingdom, but each independent kingdom will have its own king, though all subject to one head. God has said they shall be divided. This, then, is what is shown us. “They shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.” And if ever there was a portion of the world that has represented this incoherent system of kingdoms, it is modern Europe. As long as the iron predominated, there was one empire: but then came in the clay, or foreign material. In virtue of the iron there will be a universal monarchy, while in virtue of the clay there will be separate kingdoms.

“And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed: and

the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." Mark those words, "in the days of these kings." They are a complete answer to those who have tried to make this the birth of Christ, and the introduction of what they call the kingdom of grace. At the time here spoken of, the empire is broken up and divided. Was that the case when the Lord was born? Could it be said then "in the days of these kings "? Nothing of the sort. Rome was then in its fullest power; there was not the smallest breach apparent throughout the empire. There was but one ruler, but one will predominant. It was not therefore "in the days of these kings." What then does the verse refer to? I believe to the closing scene of the Roman Empire: not to the time when Christ was born, but when God "bringeth in the First-begotten into the world" — when the Lord Jesus is brought in, not as the Nazarene to suffer and to die, but when He comes with divine power to judge. The "stone cut out without hands," though in a sense applicable to Him at any time, applies really and fully then. We have the interpretation here. It does not refer to His person, so much as to the kingdom that the God of heaven shall set up in Him and by Him. No doubt He is the stone; but this is a destructive stone extinguishing the kingdoms of the earth. Can any one deny it? The stone was "cut out of the mountain without hands, and it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold." There was the crash of all the image. Was that the case when Christ was born Did Christ attack the Roman Empire? Did He destroy it? On the contrary, Christ was killed, and it was its minister that was the official means of His crucifixion. The image, we may say, smote Him,

instead of His smiting the image. Such an interpretation is unworthy of serious attention.

The stone falls upon the feet of the image, the toes of which were part of iron and part of clay; that is, upon the last condition of the Roman Empire. After all the division, the stone smites it. Thus its action is not grace, but judgment. It is not a sower sowing seed, to produce life; still less is it leaven diffusing itself over certain limits. Its blow falls destructively upon the image and shatters it completely. It is evident, then, that the first coming of Christ is not the question here. His birth is wholly passed by. It took place during the course of the Roman Empire and in no way destroyed it. Whereas what will deal with the Roman Empire yet, is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in a day that is future.

But some will say, How can that be? There is no Roman Empire now. But let me ask, How does this show that there is not to be a Roman Empire? Can you prove that the Roman Empire is not to revive? What is given me here is that the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold were broken in pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors.

Further, we are told in the Revelation that the beast, representing the imperial power of Rome, is remarkably characterized as “the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.” (Rev. 17:8) The last clause, which in the English version is so obscurely rendered “and yet is,” should be “and shall be present.”5 There is no doubt about this at all: no man that knows the Apocalypse properly would dispute it. If so, it follows that the beast, or empire that existed, when John was there, was to be in a state of non-existence, and then to appear again, ascending out

of the bottomless pit. That is, it will be the power of Satan that will accomplish the reunion of the fragments that make up the Roman Empire. And it is remarkable that when the beast is seen again, this chapter shows that there will be ten kings who will agree to give their power to “the beast,” or person then raised up of Satan to organize and govern the empire. He will use this vast power against God and the Lamb; every appearance of Christianity will be destroyed, idolatry will be restored, and Antichrist set up. Then God, as it were, will say, I will endure this no longer; My hour is come. The Lord Jesus will leave the right hand of God, and will execute judgment upon these vile pretenders.

“In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom… it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.” The first action of that stone is to destroy. It is not a question of saving souls; it is judgment and destruction: putting down kingdoms and everything that exalts itself against the true God.

But a difficulty may arise here as to how it is that, when this destructive blow falls, we have the gold, the silver, and the brass all jumbled together, with the iron and clay — as if these successive empires existed together at the end. The truth is that though Babylon, for instance, lost its imperial place, it existed subordinately under the powers that succeeded; and so with each following empire till Rome. (Comp. Dan. 7:11, 12) So that when the final judgment of the fourth empire takes place, there will still be the representatives of its three predecessors, distinct from itself. And this makes evident that by the last empire is meant what is

exclusively western, and not that which had belonged to the previous empires.

Thus it is the great seat of modern civilization (i.e. the ten kingdoms of the beast) that will be the scene of this tremendous apostasy. And this will be allowed in the judicial wisdom of God, because men have not received "the love of the truth that they might be saved." God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: "that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." I have not a question that this is the future history of the world, on the authority of the word of God. This remarkable prophecy brings us down from the first beginning of imperial power, and finally shows us in the last days, before God sets up His kingdom, the judgment of the world as it is, when God will deal with the quick, not with the dead merely. "He will judge the [habitable] world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead."

Daniel 3

The chapters which fill up the interval between Dan. 2 and 7 are devoted to the statement of historical facts, and therefore might not seem, at first sight, to have a prophetical character. But we must bear in mind that Scripture in general has an infinitely larger scope than the bare statement of circumstances, be it ever so instructive and important morally. Indeed, this is true of all the Bible. Take such a book, for instance, as Genesis. Though it is clearly historical, and one of the simplest narratives in the Bible, yet it would be wrong to strip it of an outlook into the most distant future. We have the

Spirit of God in the New Testament referring over and over again to its most significant facts. Thus, in the incident of Melchizedek; we see the bearing that is given it by the Holy Ghost in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the allusion to it in other parts of Scripture. A priest and king, two characters that were often united in those days, meets Abraham on his return from the slaughter of the kings, brings forth suited refreshment for the victors, pronounces blessing in the name of Him whose priest he was, and receives tithes as well from Abraham. Yet we must remember that the word of God reasons on this, as indicative of a vast change which has already come in, and leaves open a good deal more, looking onward to the day of Christ, as I conceive. In the Hebrews, where the subject of Christ's priesthood, as now in heaven, is discussed, some important features of the type are barely alluded to, not applied. The primary drift there is to show, from the Jewish Scriptures, a higher character of priesthood than that of Aaron — a priesthood that was not derived from any predecessor, nor handed down to a successor. I only refer to this to show that Scripture gives a typical (and what is that, in other words, but a prophetical?) value to what might appear to be an authentic account of an historical event. Such a character I claim for these facts in the Book of Daniel. For it is plain that, if in the most unvarnished books of inspired history, such as Genesis or Exodus, where prophecy is not the ostensible object or peculiarly marked feature, you have incident on incident, clearly used in the New Testament, as foreshadowing good things to come, we may still more strongly infer that, in a prophecy such as this of Daniel, we are to read not only the visions as directly prophetic, but also the facts connected with them as instinct with a kindred spirit. It

were easy to produce analogous examples from elsewhere. Let us look for a moment at the prophecy of Isaiah. There, after a long series of prophetic strains, you have a break. Certain well-known historical facts are related — the invasion and destruction of the Assyrian; and as to Hezekiah, his sickness and his recovery, the wonder done in the land, and the visit of the embassy from the king of Babylon. Then you have the prophecy recommencing, and following on its course. It could be readily proved that the facts related of Sennacherib and Hezekiah have a definite and most instructive bearing upon the prophecies in the midst of which they are imbedded. So that merely to regard them as facts introduced historically into such a connection, and, with no further or deeper reason, dividing one half of the book from the other, would be to deprive them of at least half their value. Am I too bold, therefore, in assuming it as a general truth, applicable to the word of God as a whole, that Scripture is not to be lowered down to the mere recital of the facts it records; but that those facts were chosen expressly in the wisdom of God, and were given in an orderly manner, for the purpose of representing the awful ways of man and Satan, and the glorious scenes before the mind of God Himself, that are to be re-enacted in the latter day? And if this be the case with the strictly historical portion of God's word, it is only reasonable that it should be emphatically true of a prophetic book such as this.

The evidence, however, of this will much more appear as we follow the facts as they are given here. We shall then see what is the connection, and what the special bearing, of the chapters themselves, better than by more laboured presumptions than one might gather from

other parts of the word of God. For that is and must be the grandest testimony of all to the real meaning of Scripture. Revealed truth is like the light. It is not that which requires illumination from without in order to let us know what it means, but it displays itself. You do not need a taper or a torch from man to find out the light of day. The sun, as it wants none, entirely eclipses all such artificial helps; it shines for itself and rules the day. So it is that, wherever you find a man capable of seeing, the truth commends itself. He has, what the evangelist Luke calls, “an honest heart,” and what other scriptures speak of as “a single eye.” Wherever the truth is really brought to bear upon a man who is open to receive it as the precious light of God in Christ, they answer mutually to each other. The heart is prepared for it — desires it; and when the truth is heard, bows, receives, and enjoys it. When the heart, on the contrary, is occupied with itself, or with the world, there is no truth that can possibly bend it. The will of man is at work; and that is the constant, unvarying enemy of God. Therefore it is said (John 3) that no man can see or enter the kingdom of God without being born again — born of water and of the Spirit. That is, there must be a direct, positive work of the Holy Ghost, dealing with the soul, judging it and giving a new nature, which has as decided an affinity for the things of God as the old life has for the things of the world. The Spirit acts upon the new creature, and gives intelligence; and the truth is, we may say, its natural sustenance.

I do not doubt, therefore, that we shall find, in this third chapter of Daniel, as in the three which follow, that each has its distinctive features; and that these were not merely seen in what was passing in the days of Daniel,

but that they were registered by the prophet to indicate the course now past, and the future destiny of the great Gentile powers. We are to view them in the light of the prophecies that surround them — to take them, not as facts put down, as any man might do it, at haphazard. In short, God has given them here, linked in the most intimate way with the prophecy where they are found.

In Dan. 2 we saw God's sovereign dealing with a man, raised up from among the Gentiles, to be the minister of His authority. This takes a new form, in consequence of the people of Israel and their kings having definitely proved themselves unworthy of God's purpose and calling. Thereon God introduces the imperial system of government in the world. It was not merely allowing a single nation to grow in power, and be the terror of its neighbours; or creating a blessed example of the ways of God. One ruler is allowed to be the master of the world — one great sovereign, not only himself mighty, but a ruler of kings, who were but subordinate or satellites. This began with Nebuchadnezzar, and it characterizes the Gentile empires. An objection might be raised, that we do not find any such power existing now. That is true. There exists no such imperial rule in the world, nor has there been since the fall of Rome; though there have been certain pretenders to it. But it has failed. The Book of the Revelation shows us this suspension. There was such a ruler once, while imperial Rome subsisted — one who had kings for his servants. But now there is an interval, when all that is over. Still it is to be revived. And this, I believe, is one great fact that awaits the world at the present time. It will take men by surprise; and when accomplished, it will be the means of

concentrating the power of Satan, and of bringing about his plans on the earth.

All this has a very serious interest for us. We stand near the crisis in the world's history; and even those who look for signs own that we are drawing near the close of the age, and of the times of the Gentiles. The reorganization of the empire is not far off. And it is solemn to remember that, when revived, it will not be a mere repetition of what has been done before; but the power of Satan will be put forth in a way never yet witnessed. God shall send strong delusion that men should believe a lie, because they "believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." Very many of my Christian brethren may cry out that I speak uncharitably. The word of God, however, is wiser than men. It is not a thought of mine, nor of any other man. None would have gathered such a prospect from their own minds. But God has most clearly revealed it. People may plead the wonderful works of God of late in one distant country and another; and the answer of blessing that is, as it were, echoing back from some quarters near us. But these things in no way contradict what has been stated. We may always see these two things going on together, when men approach the verge of some mighty change. On the one hand, the general power of evil increases, and the pride of man swells to an unprecedented height. On the other hand, the Spirit of God works energetically, winning souls to Christ, and separating those that are to be saved from the destruction which is the necessary end of sin and pride. Hence, I believe, when any crisis of evil is at hand, what we ought to expect is this increase of blessing from God, during the time of suspense which immediately precedes judgment.

But, turning to the immediate subject of the chapter, imperial power is in the hands of the Gentiles; and the first thing told of that power, is, that it was used to set up idolatry — abused, rather, to give a splendour to idolatry unexampled in the old world. And a most humbling consideration it is: the evident connection between the golden idol that Nebuchadnezzar set up in the plain of Dura, and that image which he had seen in the visions of the night. It is true that the image he had made was not an exact copy. Still, is it not grave to find that the first thing that Nebuchadnezzar does, as far as Scripture gives it to us, is to command a golden image to be set up, that all the peoples, the nations, and the languages, might fall down and worship it? One thing, at least, is plain: that whether the golden head of the great image had suggested the thought or not, at any rate it did not hinder him. On the contrary, here we find that the authority which God had put into his hands, is turned to this frightful use. The reason, I believe, was this: Nebuchadnezzar was a man as wise according to the flesh as he was wilful. He stood most evidently in a place that no man had ever occupied before. Not only the sovereign of a vast kingdom, but the absolute master of many kingdoms, speaking different tongues, and having all sorts of contrary habits and policies. What then was to be done with them? How were all these various nations to be kept and governed under a single head? There is an influence that is mightier than any other thing, which, if common, binds men closely together; but which, if jarring, on the contrary, more than anything else, arrays people against people, house against house, children against parents, and parents against children, nay, husbands and wives against each other. There is no social dislocation to be compared with

that which is produced by a difference of religion. Consequently, to avert so great a peril, union in religion was the measure that the devil insinuated into the mind of the politic Chaldean as the surest bond of his empire. He must have one common religious influence in order to weld together the hearts of his subjects. In all probability, to his mind it was a political necessity. Unite them in worship, unite all hearts in bowing down before one and the same object, and there would be something that would give the hope and opportunity of consolidating all these scattered fragments into a whole. Accordingly, he projects the idea of the gorgeous image of gold for the plain of Dura, near the capital of the empire: and there it is that he summons all the leading men, the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, all in power and authority, to come together to the dedication. He surrounds it, too, with everything that could attract nature and act upon the senses. All kinds of music must contribute to the scene. When the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, etc., was heard, this was the signal for the representatives of that vast realm to “fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.” Man can but make an idol; he cannot even find out the true God. If it is a question of having the world’s homage, the only thing that will carry away men on a vast scale must be something of this creation, something adapted to the nature of man as he is. You cannot unite hearts that are true with such as are false. But if the true God is shut out, Satan is there to find something which, if introduced by the authority of man, may command all but universal acquiescence. So it was here. The

authority, therefore, of the empire was put forth, and all were commanded to worship the golden image on pain of death. “Whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”

“Therefore, at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of music, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.” (Verse 7)

But there were some apart from that idolatrous throng; very few, alas! though, no doubt, there were others hidden. We may be bold enough to say there was one not mentioned here — Daniel himself. However that be, his three companions were not there; and this made them obnoxious to others; especially as their position, exalted as it was in the province of Babylon, exposed them to more public notice. Of course they were singled out for the king’s displeasure. “Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near and accused the Jews.” Then they remind the king of the decree that he had made, and add, “There are certain Jews, whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. These men, O king, have not regarded thee; they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. Then Nebuchadnezzar, in his rage and fury, commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego,” etc.

Now this appears to me a fact of very great importance. The use which the Gentile makes of his power is to set up a religion connected with the polities of the kingdom, a religion for present earthly purposes. Where this is the

case, religion cannot be left between God and the conscience. It is no longer a question of having a real conviction as to God and His truth, nor is there liberty to judge the imposture. The worship devised by the Gentile king is bound down upon the subject under penalty of death.

There may be certain things which hinder, for a season, the natural results of the world's will in having its religion condemned. And this has been the case for some time. For the last fifty years and more, every one knows there has been a certain system of opinion, commonly called "liberalism." This has got hold of men's minds. In no way does it respect God and His word as such. Its great stock-in-trade is the rights of man. Its cardinal virtue is, that all should be left free to think, act, and worship as they please. As long as the idea of man's rights is allowed to have play, the mercy of God turns it into an occasion for Christians, having a conscience towards Himself, to pass quietly through, and worship God according to His will. And as it was always unquestionable that God claimed the right over His own people; as His revealed will alone can rightly govern them; so, as the Father, He now seeks His children, that they may worship Him in spirit and in truth. The renewed heart and conscience delight in His will and find the chief blessedness here in exalting Him. To the believer, that will is more peremptory than the absolutism of the heathen king. Liberalism really dislikes this exclusive claim over the conscience. Still, it has led to a sort of calm in the world; and the full exercise of its authority, as to religion, is in abeyance for the time. For, apart from temporary circumstances, none can deny that, wherever there is a religion introduced

by the monarch, for the guidance of his realm, necessarily it does not admit of difference, contradiction, or compromise. This would defeat the purpose for which it is imposed. But it is to fight against God. The monarch himself may have a conscience, and he is, of course, bound to worship God according to His will. But the using the authority of the realm to coerce others is the denial, practically, of God's direct control over the individual conscience.

The lesson, then, that we have here, is that, at the very outset, this was what the Gentile made of the power God gave: to set up his own religion, and bind it upon the whole of his subjects. That is, all his authority from God was turned to deny the true God, and to compel universal obedience to his own idol, with a frightful death held up as the immediate forfeit in case of disobedience. This was the great characteristic of the first of the Gentile empires.

But the evil of man and the craft of Satan only serve to bring the faithful into view. The king commands them to be cast into the burning fiery furnace. He first, no doubt, remonstrates, and gives them the opportunity of yielding. "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now, if ye be ready, that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, etc.,... ye fall down and worship the image that I have made, well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace: and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" It is solemn to see how evanescent was the impression made upon the king's mind. The last act recorded before this image was set up, was his falling down on his face

before Daniel, paying him all but divine honours. He had even said, “Of a truth it is that your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldst reveal this secret.” But it was another thing, when he finds his power disputed, and his image despised, spite of the burning fiery furnace.

It was all very well to acknowledge God for a moment when He was revealing a secret to him. That was plainly decided in Dan. 2. And Daniel there represents those who have the mind of God and who are found in the place of fearing God. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him.”

But God had delegated power to the head of the Gentiles, Nebuchadnezzar. And now that these men had dared to brave the consequences rather than worship the image, he is filled with fury, which vents itself in scorn of God Himself. “Who is that God,” he says, “that shall deliver you out of my hands?” The consequence was that it became now a question between him whom God had set up and God Himself.

But a most beautiful and blessed feature comes out here. It is not God’s way, at the present, to meet power by power. It is not His way to deal with the Gentiles in destruction, even where they may be abusing power against the God who has set them in authority. And I call your attention to this, believing it to be an important thing practically. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego do not in any way take the ground of resisting Nebuchadnezzar in his wickedness. We know afterwards that his conduct was so evil that God stripped him of all glory, and even intelligence as a man, for a long time. But still these godly men do not pretend that he is a

false king because he sets up and enforces idolatry. For the Christian, the question is not about the king, but how he ought to behave himself. It is not his business to meddle with others. He is called to walk, relying on God, in obedience and patience. In the great mass of everyday obligations we can obey God in obeying the laws of the land in which we live. This might be the case in any country. If one were even in a popish kingdom I believe that, in the main, one might obey God without transgressing the laws of the land. It might be necessary, sometimes, to hide oneself. If they were coming, for instance, with their processions, and required a mark of respect to the host, one ought to avoid the appearance of insulting their feelings, while, on the other hand, one could not acquiesce in their false worship.

But it is extremely important to remember that government is set up and acknowledged of God, and it has, therefore, claims upon the obedience of the Christian man wherever he may be. One of the New Testament epistles takes up this question, the very one that, more than any other, brings out the foundations, characteristics, and effects of Christianity, as far as regards the individual. I allude to the Epistle to the Romans, the most comprehensive of all the Pauline epistles. There we have, first of all, man’s condition fully developed; then the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The first three chapters are devoted to the subject of man’s ruin; the next five to the redemption that God has wrought as the answer to the ruin of man. Then, in the three chapters which follow, you have the course of the dispensations of God — that is, His dealings, on a large scale, with Israel and the Gentiles. After that, we have

the practical, or, at least, the preceptive part of the epistle: first, in Romans 12, the relations of Christians, one to another; and then, after a gradual transition, to enemies at the close; and, next, their relation to the powers that be. (Rom. 13) The very expression — "the powers that be" — seems intended to embrace every form of government under which Christians might be placed. They were to be subject, not merely under a king, but where there was another character of sovereign; not only where the government was ancient, but let it be ever so newly established. The business of the Christian is to show respect to all who are in authority, to pay honour to whom honour is due, owing no man anything save love. What makes this so particularly strong, is, that the emperor then reigning was one of the worst and most cruel men that ever filled the throne of the Caesars. And yet there is no reserve or qualification, nay, the very reverse of an insinuation that, if the emperor ordered what was good, the Christians were to obey, but, that if not, they were free from their allegiance. The Christian is always to obey — not always Nero or Nebuchadnezzar, but always to obey God. The consequence is, that this at once delivers from the very smallest real ground for charging a godly person with being a rebel. I am aware that nothing will of necessity bar a Christian from an evil reputation. It is natural for the world to speak evil of one that belongs to Christ — to Him whom they crucified. But from all real ground for such an accusation this principle delivers the soul. Obedience to God remains untouched; but I am to obey "the powers that be" in whatever is consistent with obeying God, no matter how trying.

The light of these faithful Jews was far short of what the Christian ought to have now: they had only that revelation of God which was the portion of Israel. But faith always understands God: whether there is little light or much, it seeks and finds the guidance of God. And these men were in the exercise of a very simple faith. The emperor had put forth a decree that was inconsistent with the foundation of all truth — the one true God. Israel was called expressly to maintain that Jehovah was such, and not idols. Here was a king who had commanded them to fall down and worship an image. They dare not sin; they must obey God rather than man. It is nowhere said, that we must ever disobey man. God must be obeyed — whatever the channel, God always. If I do a thing, ever so right in itself, on the mere ground that I have a right to disobey man under certain circumstances, I am doing the lesser of two evils. 'The principle for a Christian man is never to do evil at all. He may fail, as I do not deny; but I do not understand a man quietly settling down that he must accept any evil whatever. It is a heathenish idea. An idolater that had not revealed light of God could know no better. Yet you will find Christian persons using the present confession of the condition of the Church as an excuse for persevering in known evil, and saying, Of two evils we must choose the lesser! But I maintain that, whatever the difficulty may be, there is always the path of God for the godly to walk in. Why then do I find practical difficulty? Because I wish to spare myself. If I compound for even a little evil, the broad way of ease and honour lies open, but I sacrifice God and come under the power of Satan. It was just the advice that Peter gave our Lord when He spoke of being put to death. "Far be it from thee — pity thyself, — Lord." So with the Christian. By

doing a little evil, by compromising the conscience, by avoiding the trial that obeying God always entails, no doubt a person may thus often avoid a good deal of the world's enmity, and gain its praise, because he does well to himself. But if the eye is single in this, God always must have His rights, always be owned in the soul as having the first place. If God is compromised by anything required of me, then I must obey God rather than man. Where this is held fast, the path is perfectly plain. There may be danger, possibly even death staring us in the face, as it was on this occasion. The king was incensed that these men should dare to say, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter." Not careful to answer him! And what were they careful for? It was a question that concerned God. Their care was to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." They were in the very spirit of that word of Christ before it was given. They had walked dutifully in the place the king had assigned them: there was no charge against them. But now there arose a question that deeply affected their faith, and they felt it. It was God's glory that had been interfered with, and they trusted in Him.

Accordingly they say, "If it be so, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace." How beautiful this is! In the presence of the king, who never thought of serving any but himself, and who saw none but himself to serve, they say, "Our God, whom we serve." They had served the king faithfully before, because they had ever served God: and they must serve God still, even if it had the appearance of not serving the king. But they have confidence in God. "He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king." This was not

the mere abstract truth: it was faith. “He will deliver us.” But mark something better still. “But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.” Even if God will not put forth His power to deliver us, we serve Himself; we will not serve the gods of this world. Oh! beloved reader, in what a place of dignity faith in the living God puts the man who walks in it. These men were at that moment the object of all the attention of the Babylonish empire. What was the image then? It was forgotten. Nebuchadnezzar himself was powerless in presence of his captives of Israel. There they were, calm and undaunted, when the king himself showed his weakness. For what can be more evident weakness than to yield to a fury that changes the form of his visage, and that utters menaces which utterly failed of their purpose? The furnace was ordered to be heated seven times more than it was wont to be heated. The mighty men, the king’s agents to cast them in, were themselves devoured by the flames.

And now, when the deed is done, a new marvel passes before the eyes of the king. It was no vision now, but the manifest power of God. When the sword of the king was drawn out against God, how miserably futile it was! In the midst of this burning fiery furnace was a sight which arrested him. Astonished, the king “rose up in his haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt.” What was to be said of the power of Nebuchadnezzar now? What did it avail to be the mightiest monarch of the world,

surrounded, too, with all that constituted the sinews of his force and the grandeur of his empire? There were these men, who had been bound and cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace, apparently the most pitiable case in his realm. But now he is obliged to behold their bonds burnt, and themselves only set free by what he meant for their destruction. But not this merely. There was another to be seen, and that other he can but say is like the Son of God. “Lo, I see four men loose... and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”

Just as God might use a Balaam or a Caiaphas to speak the truth when they little thought of it and had no communion with Himself in it, so, in this expression of the king’s, “the Son of God,” there seems to be amazing propriety. We cannot suppose that he entered into its meaning with intelligence. Still there was striking propriety in this respect. There are other titles he might have used. He might have said, “Son of man,” or “the God of Israel,” or many more. But “Son of God” seems exactly suited to describe the scene: and therefore, I think, the overruling power of the Spirit of God was manifest in leading the king to use this expression. In the New Testament, where all truth comes out with distinctness we find our Lord Himself referring to these two titles, both of which occur in Daniel — Son of man and Son of God. Son of man is the title of Christ in His judicial glory. He is Son of man “because all judgment is committed to Him.” As Son of God He gives life: He quickens in the midst of death. As Son of God, He frees those that were bound: and “if the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” That verse seems to me a doctrinal commentary upon this very scene. There was

the Son, and He was making the prisoners free. Man had bound them, had attempted to execute his threat of vengeance against any who should acknowledge the true God. These three men had jeoparded everything upon the truth of God Himself against all rivals and images; and God had come in for them with delivering power. The proud king not only owns his word changed, but associates their names with the most high God, who was not ashamed to be called their God.

The Gentile dominion is not over yet. And I believe that the close of it will bring in the same thing with as great force as ever. The Book of the Revelation shows us that the last great Gentile king will employ all the authority of his government to enforce what might be called the "religion" of that day. And then God will put forth His power miraculously to preserve His witnesses for their appointed work. There may be some that will suffer unto death, there may be differences in the ways in which God will act. But the Revelation shows us that there will be persons preserved in the midst of the power that enforces idolatry in the last days.

When this takes place, we shall not be upon the scene. Hence the mention of the Jews is emphatic at the time of the last great tribulation. For while men in general will be forced at the end to acknowledge the true God, before that there will be a fiery persecution put forth. There will be such a thing as "glorifying God in the fires"; an expression decidedly used about the remnant of Israel in the last days. The wonderful hand of God will be at work, but it will be with the Jews, not with Christians. As far as we are concerned, tribulation is our constant and proper portion in the world. The New Testament shows this from beginning to end. Nothing is

plainer than that the Holy Ghost never acknowledges the Christian in any way except as separate from the world, the object of its animosity and persecution, cast out, despised, unknown by the world. That is our place as recognized by the word of God. It is for Christians to account for the fact, that they have lost it; for clearly, what I have been describing, somehow or another, does not apply at the present time. Is it that the world is getting better, or that they themselves have become worse? Conscience ought to answer, and God will use it, if upright, as the means of bringing one back to the place that ought never to have been left. All through the time of the Gentile supremacy, the Christian's place is obedience. For the most part what the power insists upon is that which the Christian can render with a ready mind; but when there comes a collision between the world's authority and God's, we must obey God rather than men, let the consequences be what they may. This is the only thing that God owns in His people.

The chapters that follow have each of them an increasingly marked connection with the course of the Gentile empire. But this is sufficient to bring out the fact, that idolatry — worldly religion — a religion that is intended for every one, and bound down upon all, under pain of death — is the first great feature recorded of the Gentile empire, and will be found, more or less, to run through the whole of it. As this was the first exercise of authority, so it will be at the end of the age. The Book of the Revelation shows us the last stage of the last Gentile empire; and there we find that what it began with, it will end with: that the same compulsion used here, to make all its subjects bow down and worship in a way of its own setting up, will reappear at the close.

But we find another analogy. God at that time had His witnesses. And as the Jews were the persons that then withstood Gentile idolatry, they will come again upon the stage of God's dealings, and will be especially the witnesses that God will put honour upon. This godly remnant of Israel is represented by the disciples in the days of our Lord's earthly ministry. They will be a godly seed, cleaving to Him and loving His name; and this, because they will have got hold, with more or less light, of the Messiah. These persons will be found waiting for Jesus to come and take His kingdom, after the Church, properly so called, has passed out of the scene of God's dealings on the earth.

Thus, then, as Gentile authority began with this idolatry forced upon all, and the only witnesses for God were among the Jews; so, at the close, idolatry will reappear, and God will have a faithful remnant again among that poor people — a testimony for Himself in the midst of apostasy.

But I hope, in looking at future chapters, to enter a little more into details. May we remember, that what we have been now seeing is not merely for that day, nor does it concern the witnesses of that time only! If God will have a faithful people among the Jews then, may we who are Christians not be found disobedient unto the heavenly vision! We have a brighter prospect than any which Daniel saw. He was not privileged to see Jesus, because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour. He could testify, on the one hand, of the rejection of Messiah, and, on the other, of His universal and everlasting dominion. Between the one past and the other future, we know other and higher glories in Him now, and Himself, in whom these blessings are treasured

up. We know that “He is the true God and eternal life,” and ourselves blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Him. We are called out from this world to follow Him and be the sharers of His heavenly glory. It is but “a little while, and He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry.” And if this is so, how ought we to be apart from this present evil world! How ought we to keep clear of its attempt to put on the appearance of reverence for the name of Jesus! Alas! how often people get perplexed, and ask, Where and what is the world? The truth is, that all this is a lamentable proof that they are so mixed up with the world that they do not know it. The Lord grant that we may have no difficulty in knowing where the world is, and where we are. The Jew was obliged to enter it with the sword in his hand, executing judgment. But that is not the place of the Christian. We began with the sword against Christ, and Himself bowing to it. We began and should go on with the cross, looking for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. All our blessedness is founded on the cross, and all our hopes centre in His glory, and His coming again for us.

The Lord grant that we may live thus, in the increasing knowledge of the Blessed One, with whom we have to do, and to whom we belong. Whatever, then, may be the danger and trial, we shall have the Son of God with us in it.

May we know more and more what it is to walk with Christ in liberty and joy! So shall we have Christ with us in every time of need.

Daniel 4

We have seen, after the vision of the great image, that a chapter followed, presenting at first sight little appearance of connection with the prophecy, but which, I trust, was shown to have a very important bearing upon it. For in Dan. 2 we had merely the general history of the Gentile powers, not their moral qualities. Empire after empire rose on, and disappeared from, the scene of God's providence. But what was the character of these empires, how they used the power that was given into their hands by God, we saw not. These historical incidents were introduced purposely between the first grand outline in Dan. 2 and the details which follow from Dan. 7 to the end of the book. They show the conduct of the empires while in possession of supreme authority from God in the world. The first picture of their moral ways was given in Dan. 3: religion, such as it was, rendered compulsory by the Gentile power, irrespective of the claims of God and the conscience of man.

The principle of this from the first runs through the times of the Gentiles. No doubt it seemed necessary, in consequence of the immense extent of the empire, to have some one controlling religion that would bind together the various lands and subject nations. What a return for the place of honour in which God had put Nebuchadnezzar! Nevertheless, it only gave occasion for God to display His power, even in the Jewish captives now under the control of the Gentiles. In the chapter before it was plain that the wisdom of God was found among them. All the lore of the Babylonish empire was completely at fault. Daniel alone. could explain the visions. But although divine wisdom was there, power is

another thing and God took advantage of the terrible punishment, as it seemed, of the three Hebrews, and showed Himself most conspicuously as the Deliverer of the faithful in the hour of their need. The beginning of Gentile empire is only the foreshadowing of what will be the closing scene. And as there was then deliverance by divine power at the beginning, so there will be by-and-bye: and this specially found in connection with the faithful of Israel, the Jews. I do not mean, of course, with the Jews in their present state; because, now, a Jew remaining such is an enemy of God. But that will not always be the case. The time is coming when the seed of Abraham, without ceasing to be Jews, will be converted to God — will receive the Messiah, according to the prophecies. I do not mean the Jew will enter into the same blessed knowledge and enjoyment that we have now; but that he will be among the faithful to be found in the latter day, as is predicted in many prophecies. Of course, a very important change is supposed, which is to take place in the history of the world; or rather, God will remove from the world that which is not of the world, in order that He may resume His interest in what is taking place upon the earth. Because, at the present time, God's work is not immediately connected with the movements of the world. Its stages of progress and decline are not the expression of His will, although He always exercises a providential control over them.

But there was a time, we know, in the world's history, when God took a direct and immediate interest in what was going on among men. Even their battles were said to be the Lord's battles; and their defeats, famines, etc., were sent as a known infliction from God for some evil that He was dealing with. Now, while it remains

perfectly true, that there is no war or sorrow of any kind that happens without God, and all is decidedly under His sovereign control, it is not in the way of the same direct government. So that a person cannot now say, This war is at the word of God; or, This famine is a chastening for such and such an evil. That would be indeed both ignorance and presumption. No doubt there are persons quite ready enough to pronounce as to these matters. Their mistake arises from not appreciating the great change that has taken place in God's government of the world. As long as Israel was the nation in which God was displaying His character for the earth, these things were found directly and immediately from God. But from the time God gave up His people Israel, it has been merely the indirect, providential control of a general kind, that God exercises over human affairs.

Another thing has come in. When the true Christ was rejected by Israel, and Israel thereby lost their opportunity of being restored to their place of supremacy, God, we may say, took advantage of this to bring in another thing — the calling of the Church. It was no longer God governing a nation like Israel under His law; nor was it simply an indirect government of the Gentiles; but the revelation of Himself as a Father to His children in Christ, and the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, not only to act upon their hearts, but to dwell in their midst, and to baptize them, Jew or Gentile, into one body, the body of Christ the Head in heaven. That goes on now. And therefore God has no particular relations with the Jews now: He does not deal with them any more than with others, save that they have a sentence of judicial blindness upon them. They were blind before. God did not oblige them to refuse Christ. He never

makes any person blind in that sense: only sin thus blinds. But when men refuse the light of God, and obstinately reject its every testimony, He may and does give up sometimes to a total darkness, in the sense of its being a judicial one, added to what is natural to the human heart. The nation of Israel is under that judicial blindness now. But while this is the case with the great mass, it is not so with all. There is always to be a remnant of Israel. They are the only nation indeed of which that can be said — the only nation that God has never absolutely given up. Other nations may know God visiting them for a time, and visiting them remarkably in grace. Our own country God has most marvellously blessed — given men His word freely, and many other privileges. But while such is the case, there is no obligation on God's part always to keep England in that position. If the country show a deaf ear, turning away from the truth, and preferring idolatry, which is not at all impossible, it will certainly be given up, and will fall under the delusion which God will send upon the world by-and-bye. But God bound Himself by special promise to Israel, and He will never give them up entirely. In Israel there will always be a holy seed in the very darkest times. And this is connected with a remark that I made before. While God is occupied with the work of gathering out the Church, there cannot be any special relation with Israel in bringing them out as His people, and delivering them out of their distresses, and the like. But when God is pleased to remove the Church out of this present scene, Israel will come forward again; and it is in that day, when their hearts are touched by the Spirit of God, that there will be the fulfilment of a deliverance, the type of which we see in the end of Dan. 3.

Upon that occasion, I may just observe, the king was so far moved, that he commanded, as a sort of ordinance of his realm, that the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, should be honoured; and that any person who attempted to speak against that God should be cut in pieces, and their houses made a dunghill. But we do find this: that, whether it was the special honour that he paid to Daniel, in Dan. 2, or the command that his subjects should honour the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, in Dan. 3, it had but little permanence. It was merely a passing feeling, which, like the morning cloud, faded away from the mind of the king. He himself records in this chapter how little the ways of God had reached his heart, however he might for the moment have been struck with the display of His wisdom. It is one thing to show honour to a prophet, and to compel the subjects of his realm to honour the God who delivered as none other could. But how was it with Nebuchadnezzar himself? “I, Nebuchadnezzar,” he says, “was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace.

Thus, you see, it is plain, from his own account, although he gives it to show the mercy manifested towards him, that, after all the wondrous transactions of the previous chapters, Nebuchadnezzar was just the same man at bottom still. There was no thorough change in his soul — no such thing as his heart brought to God. He was at rest in his house and flourishing in his palace. As the man of the earth, all that God had given into his hands only fed his pride and self-complacency. In this condition God sends him a fresh testimony. “I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me.” Therefore he makes a decree, commanding to bring in all the wise men of

Babylon, that they might make known the interpretation of the dream. It was in vain. They came, and he told the dream. But he says, “They did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof. But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god,” etc. To him he speaks with confidence. “O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in thee, and no secret troubleth thee, tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and the interpretation thereof.” He may speak to him in a heathenish style; the wisdom of the Most High God in him he may attribute to his own gods; but still he does acknowledge that there is something special and peculiar in Daniel. He also alludes to the vision in the same style. Daniel, when he hears the dream, and realizes its meaning, was troubled and amazed for one hour. Nor must we confine this to the story of Nebuchadnezzar. Just as we saw in Dan. 2 that the king was said to be the head of gold, so in this chapter he was the tree. But in Dan. 2 it was not the king personally alone, but his dynasty that was represented by the head of gold. In a certain sense, what was true of Nebuchadnezzar would characterize the Gentile empire to the close. So in this present scene. Daniel had the pain and horror of seeing what awaited Nebuchadnezzar. And this, alas! too plainly foreboded the issue of this new system that the God of heaven had set up.

But following simply the chapter before us, Daniel explains the vision. “My lord,” said he, “the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies. The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven,

and the sight thereof to all the earth... It is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong." Every one must be familiar with the way in which troth the psalms and prophets use the figure of the tree to describe the position assigned by God to Israel, as well as to other people. Thus, the vine in Ps. 80. is clearly what Israel was intended to be in the purpose of God. But there was total failure. And so we see in Jer. 2, Ezek. 15, etc., God's purpose seemed to be broken. But He never gives it up. He may repent of creation. But wherever there is that, which is not barely the work of His hand, but the fruit of the action of His heart, — and that His purpose is, — God never abandons it. Where He merely calls into being that which did not exist before, a change may come in. But there is no change where God sets His love upon a person, and gives certain suited gifts. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." (Rom. 11:29) This is a very important thing, as connected with individual souls. Doubt the faithfulness of God in any one respect, and you weaken it as to everything else. If God could call His people Israel, and afterwards give them up absolutely, how could I be sure that God would keep me always as His child? For if ever it was tried, it was in Israel. If I believe in the faithfulness of God to myself, individually, why doubt it as to Israel? The question always is, Is God faithful! Has He departed from His purpose, or withdrawn His gifts? If not, whatever appearances may say for a time, God will vindicate His truth and mercy in the end.

But to return, the figure of the cedar-tree in Ezek. 31:3, may yet more help to illustrate what we have in Daniel. "Behold the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon, with fair branches and with a shadowing shroud, and of an high

stature; and his top was among the thick boughs." Then later on we find "the cedars in the garden of God could not hide him." Those were the other powers in the world. "The fir-trees were not like his boughs," etc. And, further still, we find that there is an allusion to Pharaoh king of Egypt. (Verse 18) But I will not dwell upon it further. My desire has been to prove, from these various passages, that it is a common thing in Scripture to use the tree, either as the symbol of fruit-bearing or of a place of high dignity and importance. In the New Testament the figure extended to that which for a season supersedes Israel Matt. 13 shows us that the dispensation of the kingdom of heaven is, in one of its phases, compared to a tree sprouting up from small beginnings. The Lord unfolds the history of professing Christendom. In Matt. 12 He had given His sentence upon Israel. The last state should be worse than the first. Such will be the state of the wicked generation of Israel, that put the Lord Jesus to death, before God judges it. Then the Lord turns to Christendom, and shows, first of all, His own work on earth. He sows seed. In the next parable an enemy appears upon the scene, intrudes into the field, and sows bad seed. It is the inroad of evil into the field of Christian profession. The parable following discloses that what was little in its commencement grows into a vast towering thing in the earth. The little mustard-seed becomes a great tree.

Now, we may see by these passages that in every case, whether it be an individual as expressive of power, as Nebuchadnezzar, or a nation, which takes the ascendant, or a system of religion, as in Matt. 13, the symbol of a tree points to greatness in the earth, unless fruit be the object. Such is its universal teaching. Of

course I am speaking now not so much of those trees, that were merely for bearing fruit, as of such as were chosen for their size and stateliness also. Earthly power is clearly meant by the tree in Daniel. (Dan. 4:21) “In it was meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation: it is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth.” This tree was the admiration of men. There was everything that gratified the heart: its own magnificent proportions, the beauty of its boughs and leaves, the abundance and sweetness of its fruits, the kindly shadow, under which all these creatures, the beasts of the field and fowls of heaven, found protection. All this and more was found in it, and such were man’s thoughts about it. But what was God’s estimate? “And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down and destroy it.” Observe, it is merely a destruction for a time; there is no such thing as annihilation in any one thing in the mind of God. “Yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth.” There must be means used of God to maintain it alive. Leave it, therefore, He says, “with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him.” “This is the interpretation,” he says, “O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which is come upon my lord the king.” And then he gives its personal application to Nebuchadnezzar. In this case all was perfectly simple. Nebuchadnezzar was warned of what was to come upon him. He was to be driven from men, and his dwelling was to be with the beasts of the

field. But more than that, he himself was to be reduced to their condition. “They shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven.” And this for a certain defined time. “And seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.” We need not dwell upon this history of Nebuchadnezzar. No simpleminded believer would be disposed to raise difficulties about it. Men have done so, explaining it as a mere delusion in the king’s mind. But these are not questions that a Christian ought even to consider, except for the good of another. The word affirms that king Nebuchadnezzar was, by God’s power, reduced in appearance to a bestial condition. If we own that God could and did set aside the laws of nature, giving some to walk unhurt in the fiercest of fires, and preserving another intact in a den of lions, we must feel that it is a mere question of His will and word whether Nebuchadnezzar was brought into this terrible debasement; hunted about among the beasts of the field, and made to eat grass like the oxen. The man that believes the one must believe the other. God’s power alone could so work, and God’s word is the warrant for all.

But while that is plain and simple enough, we have a further image of the Gentile power, its self-exalting character, and the judgment of God upon it. I apprehend that Nebuchadnezzar, personally, only showed what would be the general tendency of the Gentiles, as having power given him from God. He would admire and exalt himself; turning all the greatness that God had conferred upon him to his own credit. He was clearly shown the judgments that would come upon him; but the

warning was unheeded. Therefore, “all this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? While the word was in the king’s mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee.” The sentence was executed. Exactly so have the Gentile powers acted with regard to God. I am not now speaking of individuals who may arise from time to time. Godly persons may have been in the position occupied even by Nebuchadnezzar; but, as a general rule, his successors, from that day to this — those that have had the supremacy of the world, and the world’s glory — have used it in the main for themselves. I do not now speak so as to allow a feeling of disrespect towards these powers for a moment; but am only stating the well-known facts of Gentile rule. They were heathen for many centuries down to Christ, and after Christ; and when Christianity was accepted by Constantine, and its profession was by degrees taken up by the empire, no one can suppose that it was more than a system of religion adopted. But this did not hinder the general course of things. The only difference was: that the heathen profession, which was dominant before, was put down, and Christianity, which was trampled down before, was set up. Heathenism and Christianity changed places. Constantine may have thought it right to put down the heathen and show honour to the Christians; but there was no such question as his taking the Bible and inquiring, What is the will of God about me? How shall I show my obedience to God? That never has been the case, since Nebuchadnezzar’s

time, with any one that has swayed the world's destinies. It could not be. I speak of the great masters of the world, when the empire was an unbroken thing. And even since that, though there may have been exceptional cases of kings who have had the fear of God before them, yet even then it has not been in their power to change the substantial course of policy in their kingdoms. Those who have attempted to do so have completely failed. God's authority in the world is one thing, and God's having a soul obedient to Him as His servant is quite another.

This chapter shows us, then, the turning of all the power, and authority, and glory that God gave men, into a means of gratifying their own pride. The consequence of this is, that all understanding of God's mind would be taken from them. Nebuchadnezzar had remarkable visions and revelations from God. But what did they avail? He had had this warning, the most personal one of all. But what did it avail? Daniel had counselled him to break off his sins by righteousness, and his iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. He heeded it not. Twelve months passed away, when, in pride of heart, he attributed all the greatness and splendour, with which he was surrounded, to himself and the work of his own hands. That great Babylon was what he had built "for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty." At once the sentence takes effect upon himself; and what was then literally true of him individually, was morally true of the Gentile powers as a whole. The character of the Gentiles all through would be without intelligence of God and without subjection to Him.

“The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles’ feathers, and his nails like birds’ claws.” In verse 16, it had been said, “Let his heart be changed from man’s, and let a beast’s heart be given unto him.” All thought of God was entirely lost. He had no more idea about God than the beast of the field. Even a natural man has a conscience in him. But Nebuchadnezzar lost all thought; he was reduced to the non-intelligence of a beast. Man was formed to be the being on earth that looked up to God, and stood in dependence upon Him. That is his glory. A beast enjoys, so to speak, what is its own sphere of enjoyment, according to the capacity that God has conferred upon it naturally, but it has no idea of the God that made it and all things. Man has. That is, recognition of God is the great essential difference between a man and a beast, if one may speak now in a sort of practical way of the truth intended to be taught by the history. I apprehend that we are shown by this history, if we read it typically, that the Gentile powers would give up the recognition of God in their government. They might use His name outwardly, but as for any owning of God as the source of all they possessed, it would completely pass from their minds; and so it has.

But there was a physical change, which was what really took place in Nebuchadnezzar’s case. Reduced to the condition of a beast, he lost what characterizes a man — all recognition of God. He had a beast’s heart, as it is said here. He had nothing of the character and glory of a man. Man is put here below as the image and glory of God. He is responsible to make God known; and he can

only do it because he looks up to God. There are those that have an outward semblance of man, but “man that is in honour and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish.” This received its most remarkable confirmation in the case of Nebuchadnezzar; but the same thing is true, in principle, of every man that has got self and not God before his eyes. That was exactly true of the Babylonish king. He understood not. He attributed all to himself and not to God; and so, by a terrible retribution, he is reduced to the most abject state. Never had a Gentile possessed such glory and majesty as Nebuchadnezzar; but in a moment all is changed. In the height of his pride the sentence of God falls upon him. “He was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen,” etc. But all this had its limit. It was to be “till seven times had passed over him,” “Times” may have been used rather than years, perhaps, because this judgment of Nebuchadnezzar is the type of the condition to which the Gentile powers are reduced during the whole course of their empire. Hence a symbolic term may have been chosen rather than one of ordinary life. The Gentiles, spite of God’s gift of supreme power, would be without any adequate recognition of Him in their government. They would use their power for their own ends and interests As to really and honestly conforming themselves to the will of God, when was such a thing ever heard of as the great object of any nation’s policy since they got their power? I am not aware that it was ever even thought of. So truly does this figure apply to the whole course of the Gentiles.

Let us look a little at the effect of the judgment on Nebuchadnezzar. The seven times passed over the king. “And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up

my eyes unto heaven." Then was the first great sign of returning intelligence. A beast looks downward. He never looks upward, in the moral sense of the expression. Man, acting morally as man, acknowledges in his conscience One from whom he has derived all, and One whom he is bound to honour and obey. Nebuchadnezzar, when the term of the judgment was passed, lifted up his eyes unto heaven. He is taking the true place of a man. "And mine understanding returned unto me." What was the consequence? "And I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured Him that liveth for ever." Mark the difference. On previous occasions, he might have bowed down before the prophet, and commanded sweet odours to be offered to him: he might send out statutes and decrees that the God of the Jews should be honoured by all his subjects. But what does he now? He drops all others for the moment, and bows before God. Nebuchadnezzar is not occupied with compelling other people for good or ill, but himself, blessing, praising, and honouring the Most High. Observe, too, the expression, "Most High"; because it is used here with particular emphasis. "I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured Him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest thou? "

When the times of the Gentiles close, the stump will assert its vitality, which was left in the earth protected by divine providence, and allowed still to be a stay in the

midst of the anarchy that would otherwise have overspread the earth. We must remember, that the world's government is a signal mercy for the earth compared with having no government at all. Yet, while God has controlled it and kept it in His providence for the good of the world, there is a time coming, when it will sprout up again and will be found really fulfilling the object for which God has established it in the earth. And when will this be "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." When everything that has come from God will really be accomplished according to His will — when man will be blessed fully, and will no longer be as the beasts that perish — when Israel will not any more be found rejecting their own Messiah, nor the Gentiles arrogating to themselves the power conferred on them by God, in His sovereign bounty. That same day will see all these glories shining out; but it can only be "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear," and when we shall "appear with Him in glory." It is reserved for Him to be the head of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews. All nations and tribes and tongues shall serve Him. For God can only be known where Christ is known — can only be seen in His goodness and glory where Christ is recognized as the expression and substance of it. And so it will be in that bright day. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself will come and establish, in perfection, everything that has only crumbled under man's hand, and had, at best, only a negative effect in the world, staying the evil here and there, but far short of the full means of blessing that God intends. When that day comes, it will be seen that Gentile government, not in its present corrupt state, but cleared of evil, and expanded according to the thoughts of God, will flourish in the earth, and be the channel of

nothing but blessing. It is only sin which has hindered God's mercy in it hitherto. Thus, when the grand fulfilment will take place of this typical history of Nebuchadnezzar — when the time of the "beast's heart" towards God, caring only for self, gratifying pride and lust of power, shall have passed away, God will take the reins into His own hands as the Most High God, and Gentiles shall bow in praise and thankful joy.

When that expression, "Most High God," first occurs, there is a very striking scene. And in Scripture we must often recur to the first use, in order to get the full meaning. "Most High God" appears first in the case of Melchizedek, when Abraham was returning victorious from pursuing the kings who had taken Lot prisoner. So it will be at the close of this dispensation, when there will be not only victory over all the powers that assemble against God's people, but the answer to the blessed scene that followed. Melchizedek meets Abraham, and Abraham gives him tithes of all, and receives his blessing. And Melchizedek is the type of Christ in this, that He unites the kingly glory with the priestly. He was the King of Salem, and his very name was King of righteousness. Then will be the day of peace founded on righteousness. But he was the priest of the Most High God also. It is not the offering of sacrifice or of incense that characterizes his action, but the bringing out of bread and wine for the refreshment of the conquerors. He blesses, and pronounces the blessing of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth. For in that day, there will be no longer a moral chasm between heaven and earth, but complete union. It will be no confusion or amalgam of the two, but a link of most intimate harmony; and the Lord Jesus will be that

uniting bond. The Head of those that belong to heaven, He is also the King of kings, and Lord of lords — the sovereign Disposer of all earthly power. To Him all will bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things infernal too. This will be the full epoch of the restoration of Gentile intelligence and blessing.

If any persons are called to honour the truth of God, and to walk in the intelligence of His ways, it is His own children who enjoy the consciousness of their Father's love. And may we, understanding this our place, be enabled to remember what will be the end of all things, as far as man is concerned! That day of judgment approaches which is coming upon the world, and the weight of which will fall upon the Jew and Gentile, both in a state of apostasy. Still, we know that it will see a remnant of both brought out to shine with greater blessedness than ever — the Jews exalted, the Gentiles blessed, in their true places. No longer a poor, mutilated stump, but again sprouting up into its normal strength and majesty, under the dews of heaven. The Lord grant that we may expect good from God, remembering that in the midst of judgment there is mercy that triumphs over judgment in every case, save in that which utterly rejects Christ — which lives, refusing His mercy — which dies, counting itself unworthy of everlasting life. Remember, that no soul that hears the gospel is lost simply because it is evil. There is a sure remedy for all we are. Men are lost because they reject and despise eternal life, pardon, peace, everything, in the Son of God.

Daniel 5

Dan. 5 and 6 form a part of the series of, what we may call, moral chapters. They are historical, but withal stamped with the character of a foreshadowing of the future, receiving light from and casting light upon the prophecies which precede and follow them. Of these practical illustrations of the Gentile powers we have had already two following the dream of Nebuchadnezzar. We are now to enter upon the first of two more, before we examine the more precise communications made to the prophet himself in Dan. 7. Dan. 5 and 6 have this peculiarity, that they bring out, not so much the general characteristics of the Gentiles, as certain particulars to be found in them at the close, the forerunners of speedy destruction. In short, they typify special acts or outbreaks of evil, rather than what pervaded their whole standing and history. Nevertheless, there is a marked difference between each of these chapters, and we must now proceed to look briefly at the first of them.

"Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand." It was a scene of gorgeous, and perhaps unwonted, revelry. The sacrilegious king, "whiles he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives and his concubines, might drink therein. Then they brought the golden vessels.... They drank wine. and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass; of iron, of wood, and of stone." History may tell us that it was an annual festival, when a loose rein was given to licentiousness; and that thus was furnished a favourable opportunity for the besieger to seize an unguarded

moment, and turn his vast preparations to account. Scripture shows us that the king, wrapped in that false security which precedes destruction, used the occasion for insulting the God of Israel. Rash, blinded man! It was the eve of his ruined dynasty, and of his death.

For Belshazzar, the past was a profitless blank. for him it was a lesson, unheard and unlearnt, that God had in His providence made his forefather to be the instrument of just but terrible judgments. The city, the holy city of God, was taken, the temple burnt, the vessels of the sanctuary, with people, priests, king, carried into the enemy's land. It was an astonishment to men everywhere when Israel thus fell. The importance of the fact was entirely out of proportion to the number of the nation or the extent of their territory. For poor as they might be individually, the halo encircled them of a God who had brought them of yore out of Egypt, through the Red Sea — who had fed them with angels' food for many a long year in the dreary desert — and who had shielded them for centuries, spite of sad ingratitude, and a thousand perils in the land of Canaan. Was it not a strange sight for the world, when God gave up His own elect and favoured people to be swept out of their land by a Chaldean king, the chief of the idolatry of that day? For Babylon was ever famous for the multitude of her idols.

Nebuchadnezzar, in all the pride of successful ambition, had not been so insensate He had bowed to the wonderful truth, that the God of heaven, who had abandoned Israel for their sins, had raised himself in His sovereignty to be the golden head of Gentile empire. He had owned the God of Daniel to be a God of gods and a Lord of kings; he had confessed the God of Shadrach,

Meshach, and Abed-nego to be the Most High God — a deliverer and a revealer of secrets beyond all others. Nebuchadnezzar had been guilty of much sin — had been proud and self-complacent, spite of warning, and had been abased as no king nor man ever was because of it; but he had acknowledged throughout his wide realm his own sin and the mighty wonders of the King of heaven — all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment. But before this bright end, even in his most reckless days, (when all trembled before him, and "whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive, and whom he would he set up, and whom he would he put down,") never had he proceeded to such an act of contemptuous profanity as that now perpetrated by his grandson.

But the sentence of instant, inevitable judgment at once made itself heard. For the cup of iniquity was full; and long had the mouth of the Lord proclaimed the punishment of Babylon's king. (Isa. 13; Jer. 25, etc.) Yet, even the stroke does not fall without a solemn sign from God. "In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote."

It was no dream of the night now; but a silent monitor of awful omen in the midst of their wild revelry and impious defiance of the living God. The hour of the execution of wrath was now come. Bel must bow down, Nebo stoop before an indignant but most patient God. The king needed no intimation from another. His conscience, corroded with depravity, trembled before the hand which traced his doom, though he knew not a word that was written. Instinctively he felt that He

whose hands none can stay, was dealing with him. “Then the king’s countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.” Forgetful of his dignity in his fright, “the king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers.” But all was vain. The highest rewards are offered; but the spirit of deep sleep closed all eyes. “They could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof.”

In the midst of the still-increasing alarm of the king and astonishment of his lords, the queen (doubtless the queen-mother, if we compare verses 2 and 10,) comes into the banqueting-house. Her sympathies were not in the feast, and she reminds the king of one who was yet more outside and above it all — a total stranger in person to the impious king. “There is a man,” etc. (Verses 11-14)

This fact of Daniel’s strangership to Belshazzar is one that speaks volumes. Whatever the pride and audacity of the great Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel sat in the gate of the king — ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men. His degraded and degenerate descendant knew Daniel not.

This reminds me, by the way, of a well known incident in the history of king Saul, the moral force of which is not always seen. When troubled by an evil spirit, a young son of Jesse was sought out, whose music God was pleased to use as a means of quieting the king’s mind. “And it came to pass when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil

spirit departed from him." (1 Sam. 16:23) Not long after, Saul and all Israel were in sore dismay when the giant of Gath challenged them in the valley of Elah. God's providence brought there, in the humble path of unwarlike duty, a youth who heard the vainglorious words of the Philistine with different ears. Instead of terror, his feeling was rather amazement that the uncircumcised should dare to defy the armies of the living God. The victory was no sooner won than the king turns to the captain of the host with this question, "Whose son is this youth?" And Abner confesses his ignorance. Here was a strange case: the very youth who had ministered to him in his malady unknown to king Saul! The interval was certainly not long; but Saul knew not David. This has perplexed the critics immensely; and one of the most distinguished of Hebraists has tried to make out that the chapters must have been shuffled somehow, and that the close of 1 Sam. 16 should follow the end of 1 Sam. 17; so as to remove the difficulty of Saul's ignorance of David after he had stood in his presence won his love, and become his armour-bearer. But I am convinced that all this arises from not apprehending the very lesson that God teaches in the scene. The truth is, that Saul might have loved David for his services: but there never was a particle of sympathy; and where this is the case we readily forget. Strangership of heart soon ends in actual distance, when the service of the Lord comes in. It is the very spirit of the world towards the children of God. As John says, "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." They may be acquainted with many things about Christians, but they never know themselves. And when the Christian passes away from the scene, there may be a passing reminiscence, but he is an unknown

man. Saul had been under the greatest obligations to David. But although David had been the channel of comfort to him, yet all knowledge of David completely passed away with the service that he had rendered. So of Daniel the queen could say, “In the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers.” Yet there was no thought about him now. He was comparatively unknown by those at the feast. The only one who thought about him was the queen, and she was only there because of their trouble.

Accordingly Daniel is brought before the king, and the king asks him, “Art thou that Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Jewry?” Then he tells him his difficulty, and speaks of the rewards he is prepared to give to any who should tell the interpretation of the writing. Daniel answers as became the occasion. “Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known unto him the interpretation.” But first he administers a most painful word of admonition. He brings before him in a few words the history of Nebuchadnezzar, and God’s dealings with him. He reminds him withal of his own entire indifference; nay, of his reckless insults against God. “And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven... and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified.” He brings before him what that scene was in the eye of

God. For this is what sin, what Satan, seeks ever to hide. Before the Babylonish court, it was a magnificent feast, enhanced by the memorials of the success of their arms, and the supremacy of their gods. But what was their gorgeous revelry in the eye of God? What was it to Him that the vessels of His service were brought up so proudly to vaunt the triumph of Babylon and her idols? To one who knew Him it must have been a most painful moment, however sure and speedy the issue. Yet there are scenes that take place in the world now that give forebodings of a character at least as grave. The question is, Are we in the secret of God so to read His judgment on all these things for ourselves? We may readily and without cost pronounce, in a measure, on the presumption of Nebuchadnezzar and on the open impiety of Belshazzar; but the great moral criterion for us is this: Are we discerning aright the face of the sky and of the earth in this our day? Are the lowering aspects of this time lost upon us? Are we identified simply and solely with the Lord's interests at the present time? Do we understand what is going on in the world now Do we believe what is coming upon it? Clearly the king and his court were but the instruments of Satan; and the contempt they showed for the God of heaven was not the mere working of their own minds, but Satan was their master. And it is a true saying that wherever you get the will of man, you invariably find the service of Satan. Alas! man knows not that the enjoyment of a liberty without God is and must be to do the devil's work. King Belshazzar and his lords might think that it was but celebrating their victories over a nation still prostrate and captive in Babylon; but it was a direct, personal insult offered to the true God, and He answers to the challenge. It was no longer a controversy between

Daniel and the astrologers, but between Belshazzar himself and God. The command to bring the vessels of the house of the Lord, might seem but a wicked drunken freak of the king's; but the crisis was come, and God must strike a decisive blow. Depend upon it, these tendencies of our day, although not met at once by God, are not forgotten; there is a treasuring up of wrath against the day of wrath. The present is not a time when God lets His judgments fall. Rather is it a day when man is building up his sins to heaven, only so much the more terribly to fall when the hand of God is stretched out against him.

But there is even then a warning, solemn, immediate, and before all. And observe, as to this writing seen upon the wall, what was the great difficulty of it? The language was Chaldean, and those who saw the hand and the characters were Chaldeans. We might have judged then, that the mere letters must be more familiar to the Chaldeans than to Daniel. It is not the way of God, when He communicates anything, to put it in an obscure form. It would be a monstrous theory, that God, in giving a revelation, makes it impossible to be understood by those for whom it is intended. What is it that renders all Scripture so difficult? It is not its language. A striking proof of it is found in this: — if any one were to ask, what part of the New Testament I conceive to be the most profound of all, I should refer to the Epistles of John; and yet if there be any part, more than others, couched in language of the greatest simplicity, it is these very Epistles. The words are not those of the scribes of this world. Neither are the thoughts enigmatical or full of foreign, recondite allusions. The difficulty of Scripture lies herein, that it is the revelation of Christ, for the

souls that have their hearts opened by grace to receive and to value Him. Now John was one who was admitted to this pre-eminently. Of all the disciples he was the most favoured in intimacy of communion with Christ. So it was, certainly, when Christ was upon earth; and he is used of the Holy Ghost to give us the deepest thoughts of Christ's love and personal glory. The real difficulty of Scripture, then, consists in its thoughts being so infinitely above our natural mind. We must give up self in order to understand the Bible. We must have a heart and an eye for Christ, or Scripture becomes an unintelligible thing for our souls; whereas, when the eye is single, the whole body is full of light. Hence you may find a learned man completely at fault, though he may be a Christian — stopping short at the Epistles of John and the Revelation as being too deep for him to enter into; while, on the other hand, you may find a simple man who, if he cannot altogether understand these Scriptures or explain every portion of them correctly, at any rate he can enjoy them; they convey intelligible thoughts to his soul, and comfort, and guidance, and profit too. Even if it be about coming events, or Babylon and the beast, he finds there great principles of God that, even though they may be found in what is reputed the obscurest of all the books of Scripture, yet have a practical bearing to his soul. The reason is, Christ is before him, and Christ is the wisdom of God in every sense. It is not, of course, because he is ignorant that he can understand it, but in spite of his ignorance. Nor is it because a man is learned, that he is capable of entering into the thoughts of God. Whether ignorant or learned, there is but one way — the eye to see what concerns Christ. And where that is firmly fixed before the soul, I believe that Christ becomes the light of spiritual

intelligence as He is the light of salvation. It is the Spirit of God that is the power of apprehending it; but He never gives that light except through Christ. Otherwise man has an object before him, that is not Christ, and therefore cannot understand Scripture which reveals Christ. He is endeavouring to force the Scriptures to bear upon his own objects, whatever they may be, and thus Scripture is perverted. That is the real key to all mistakes about Scripture. Man takes his own thoughts to the word of God, and builds up a system which has no divine foundation.

To return, then, to the inscription upon the wall, the words were plain enough. All ought to have been intelligible, and would have been, had the souls of the Chaldeans been in communion with the Lord. I do not mean that there was not the power of the Spirit of God needed to enable Daniel to understand it; but it is an immense thing for the understanding of the word, that we have communion with the God that is making known His mind to us. “Therefore,” said Paul to the elders, “I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace.”

Daniel was entirely outside the revellings and such like. He was a stranger to those that were at home there. He was called in from the light of the presence of God to see this scene of impiety and darkness; and coming, therefore, fresh from the light of God, he reads this writing upon the wall, and all was bright as the day. And nothing more solemn. “This is the interpretation of the thing.” (Verse 25-28) He at once sees God in the matter. The king had insulted God in what was connected with His worship. “TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.” It was not that

anything appeared then; nothing was seen at the time that made it even probable. And I call attention to this, because it is another proof, how utterly false is the maxim, that we must wait till prophecy is fulfilled before we can understand it. If a man is an unbeliever, to see the fulfilment of prophecy in the past, is a powerful argument that nothing can surmount. But is that what God wrote prophecy for? Was it to convince infidels? No doubt God may use it for such. But was that what God intended the writing upon the wall for on that night? Clearly not. It was His last solemn warning before the blow fell, and the interpretation was given before the Persians broke into the city — when there was not a sign of ruin, but all was gaiety and mirth. “In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.” In short, Babylon was judged.

Daniel 6

We have now another and final type of the Gentile powers brought upon the scene. But in looking at types we must always bear in mind that the question is not about the personal character of him that affords the type. Thus, Aaron officially was a type of Christ, but we are not therefore to suppose that his ways were like His. In some respects he was a very guilty man. It was he who made the calf of gold and who even sought to deceive about it. But this does not disqualify him from being a type of Christ. He was a type of Christ in spite of all that, not in that. David typified Christ, not as a priest but as a king — as a suffering and rejected king first, and then as one reigning and exalted. There are two parts in the life of David. First, the time when he was

anointed king but when the power of evil was still allowed and he was hunted about and persecuted; and secondly, when Saul died, he takes the throne and puts down his enemies. In both respects, David was a type of Christ. But there was manifestly also the contrast of Christ in the failure of king David, and the dreadful sin into which he fell.

But if on the other hand, we find a type here, as I believe there is, of an awful scene, that closes the present dispensation, we are not to suppose that it cannot be its type, because there were good qualities in the king. King Darius, rather than Belshazzar, foreshadows the way in which man will take the place of being God. It was what Darius did, or suffered to be done, that sets this forth in principle. While Belshazzar was one of the most degraded of the human race, Darius was a person who, in his own character and ways, had much that was exceedingly amiable, if not something better. But I am not now raising a question of Darius personally. We have had the type of Babylon's fall, and the judgment of God that will come down upon it, because of its wickedness in insulting and profaning what belongs to the true God, and in mixing up its own idols, and giving its praise and worship to them, in indifference to the sorrows of God's people. This will be verified a great deal more in future history. There is that upon the earth which takes the highest place as being the church of God. There is that, which boasts of its unity, of its strength, and antiquity; which boasts of its uninterrupted lineage; which takes credit to itself for sanctity and the blood of martyrs. But God is not indifferent to its sins, which have been going on increasing and deepening from generation to generation; and they are only awaiting the day of the

Lord to come, for judgment to be executed and to receive the sentence that is due to them. In the Revelation there are two great objects of judgment — Babylon and the beast. The one represents religious corruption, and the other violence; two different forms of human wickedness. In the latter form of it, we see a man, urged on by Satan, presuming to take the place of God upon the earth. Now this is what Darius permits to be done. He might not know it himself, but there were others around him that led him to the dreadful deed.

The historical circumstances that led to it were these: — They wanted an occasion against Daniel, and they well knew that it was impossible to find one except they found it against him "concerning the law of his God." So they put their heads together, and taking advantage of the usage of the Medes and Persians for the nobles to form the law and for the king to establish and sign it, they devise a decree that it should be lawful for none to ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days save of the king. What was this but for a man to take the place of God? That no prayer was to be offered to the true God, and that every prayer that was offered at all was to be offered to the king: if that was not giving the rights of God to man, I know not what is. The king fell into the trap, and signed the decree.

But now we have to mark the beautiful conduct of Daniel. There is no intimation that the decree was a secret to Daniel. On the contrary, he was perfectly aware (v. 10) of what had passed into law. But, on the other hand, he could not compromise his God. His course, therefore, was taken. He was an old man, and the faith that had burned within him from early days was at least as bright as ever. So when he knew that all

was signed, and sealed, and settled, as far as man could, and that the unchangeable law of the Medes and Persians demanded that no knee of man should bow down to God for thirty days, — knowing it all, he goes to his chamber. There is no ostentation, but he does not hide it. With his windows open, as usual, toward Jerusalem, he bows down before his God three times a day, and prays and gives thanks as he had done aforetime. He gives his enemies the occasion that they sought. They at once remind the king of the decree that he had made, and proceed to arraign Daniel before him. “That Daniel,” they say, “which is of the captivity of the children of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day.” Then the king “was sore displeased with himself,” and labours in vain till the going down of the sun, to deliver the one whom he respected at least. Miserable though he was, yet, on the appeal of the nobles to him on the ground of the immutability of the laws of the Medes and Persians, he sins again. He gives up the prophet to the rage of his enemies, to be cast into the lions’ den, with the hope, which perhaps he scarcely allowed himself, that his God would deliver him. And God appears for His servant. God does deliver: and the dreadful fate, that was intended for the prophet, fell upon those who had accused him to the king. “The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made: in the net which they hid is their own foot taken. The Lord is known by the judgment which He executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.” (Ps. 9:15, 16) Nothing can be plainer than the bearing of this on the deliverance of the godly remnant at the close by the outpouring of wrath and destruction upon the traitors within and the oppressors without of the last days. The

end will be as here — the acknowledgment on the part of the Gentiles, that the living God is the God of delivered Israel, and that His kingdom shall not be destroyed.

Here we have then, in Daniel 5 and 6, the combined types of that which will close the present dispensation. For if you look later on in this Book of Daniel, you have a person introduced called “the king.” (Dan. 11:36, etc.) You have there a direct prophecy of similar deeds. “The king shall do according to his own will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods,” etc. Not that Darius personally did these things. I am speaking of what his act or decree meant in the eye of God. The question is, what God thought of the sin Darius had been drawn into, and this, as a type of the future.

It is said, further, of “the king,” in Dan. 11, “Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers... for he shall magnify himself above all.” In the New Testament we have this alluded to in more than one place. A person might say to me, That is about the Jews, and does not concern the present dispensation. Well, then, taking up what does refer to it, I would cite in proof 2 Thess. 2:3, 4: “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day [that is, the day of the Lord’s judgment upon this world] shall not come except there come a falling away first, [strictly, it means ‘the apostasy first,’] and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” Now, it is plain, that what Darius did was in effect to exalt himself above all that is called God or is worshipped. Because, to

forbid prayer to God, and to demand that the prayer that was offered to God usually should be offered to himself, only for a certain space of time, was nothing more nor less than the type of him who would take this place in a far more dreadful and gross and literal way. We have clearly a New Testament proof that these days spoken of in Daniel, and typified then, are yet to come; that this person, who is looked forward to by prophecy, is one who is to set himself up as God, not as the vicar of Christ merely, having persons ready to bow before him and kiss his foot. All this is wicked and superstitious; but it is not a man saying that he is God, setting himself up in the temple of God, and saying, There is no prayer to be offered except to myself. Whatever be the evil of Popery and the presumption of the pope, there is a great deal worse to come. And the solemn thing to remember is this, that it will not be merely the issue of Popery, but of Popery AND Protestantism, etc., without God. Not even the spread of truth will be an infallible preservative against it. Most guilty and foolish were those who once fancied, that because Israel had the ark of the covenant of the Lord, they were necessarily safe in the conflict with the Philistines! The ark returned in triumph, but where were they?

Beware of the fond conceit that, because of religious zeal, no harm can befall this country. Rather be sure of this: the more light, the more Bibles, the more preaching, the more of everything that is good there is, if men are not conformed to it, and not walking in it, the greater the danger. If they treat it as a light thing, and despise it; if they have no conscience about practical bowing to the light of Scripture, they are most sure to fall under one delusion or another. For who is to say

what is not of importance in Scripture, or by what means the devil gains power over the soul? Wherever the soul commits itself to a refusal to listen to God, gives itself up to disobedience to God in anything, who is to say where it is to end? There is no security except in the path of holy dependence upon God and obedience to His word. We are not to be choosing one part of Scripture above another because we get more comfort from it. There is no security save as we take all Scripture. It is very sweet to be enjoying the presence of the Lord, but; more than that, it is a fearful thing to be found in disobedience to the Lord. Disobedience is as the sin of witchcraft. There is nothing more terrible. To disobey God is virtually to destroy His honour. It was so in Israel, and yet there is much worse to come, arising out of the lax and evil state of Christendom.

We have first, then, the apostasy. Christianity will be given up, and the more light, the more certainly it will come for the mass who refuse that light. There never was a time in Israel that appeared so promising as the day when our Lord was upon earth, never such a time of religious activity, the scribes and Pharisees compassing sea and land to make one proselyte. They showed zeal, apparently, in the reading of the Scriptures. They had the priests and Levites; there was no idolatry, nothing gross. They were a Bible-reading people, and a Sabbath-keeping people; they called our Lord Himself a Sabbath-breaker, so rigid did they appear outwardly to observe the day. All this was going on, but what did it end in? What did they do? They crucified the Lord of glory, and they rejected the testimony and the gracious working of the Holy Ghost, so that the end was that the King sent forth His armies, destroyed those murderers and burned

up their city. Nor was it that there was no conversion going on. God put forth His power and they were converted by thousands. James says, “Thou seest, brother, how many thousands [rather myriads] of Jews, there are, which believe.” There were, then, thousands and tens of thousands converted after the cross of Jesus, and people might think that all Israel and the world were going to be converted. But what was the fact?, God was merely gathering out these thousands in His grace to leave the rest to be destroyed in the judgment that fell upon Jerusalem. That is a little foreshadowing of the judgment which is to fall upon the world by-and-bye. And if God is now putting forth His power and gathering out souls everywhere from the world, it is a solemn question for every one whether they are converted or not. And if they are converted, it is a call to them to be walking in the path of obedience, submitting in all things to the word of God, and looking for Christ. The idea that some have of universal conversion is a delusion. Babylon or the beast: these will be the two great snares of the latter day. The one will be the source of corruption coupled with religion and a profaning of all things holy. The other will be characterized by the last degree of pride and violence. It will appear that Christianity has been a complete failure, and men will think they have a new panacea for all the ills and miseries of man better than the Gospel. And they will praise up their idols of gold, and silver, and brass, glorying in the fact that Christianity, save the outward form, has disappeared from the face of the earth. Then will come the judgment.

Rev. 17 shows us that as with Babylon in Daniel, so it will be with the New Testament Babylon, the corrupted

form of religious apostasy. Man will be used as the instrument of the downfall of Babylon, the woman drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. We have men wreaking their vengeance upon her. She is no longer seen riding upon the scarlet-coloured beast, but trampled upon, hated, and desolate. And then what do we have? Not Christianity everywhere overspreading the world. On the contrary, the beast fills the scene, and assumes the place of God. Instead of merely having an intoxicating, debased Christianity, it will then be man that sets himself up in proud defiance of God. He takes God's place upon the earth. I do not pretend to say what space of time will elapse between the destruction of Babylon and the fall of the beast. Rev. 17 proves that so far from the destruction of Babylon making the world to be an improved scene, we have only bold evil in place of hypocritical evil; and instead of religious corruption, you have irreligious pride and defiance of God. "The ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings for one and the same time with the beast. These have one mind and shall give their power and strength unto the beast" — not to God. All is given to the beast for the purpose of exalting man. The hour will have come for man to have the supreme place in the world. But, contrary to the ambition of man generally, there will be the giving up of their own will to the will of another — the desire to have some one very high and exalted, to whom all must bow When this is achieved, "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them." That this follows the destruction of Babylon is plain. For it says afterwards, "The ten horns which thou sawest, and the beast [so it ought to be read], these

shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked." This is exactly what answers to the type of Darius. Darius comes in and destroys Babylon and takes the kingdom immediately; and the next thing is, he is led on by his courtiers to take the place of God Himself. He passes a law, or confirms one, that no prayer shall be offered to any save to himself, for thirty days. That is, he assumes, in effect, to be the object of all worship; he arrogates that which is exclusively due to the true God.

These two types are highly instructive, as closing the general history of the Gentiles. They show, not what had characterized them from the beginning and during their progress, but the main features of evil at the close. There will be destruction falling upon Babylon, because of its profaneness in the religious things of God; and then the height of blasphemous pride to which the head of empire will rise by assuming the honour and glory due only to God Himself. I was anxious to connect the two things together, because we cannot otherwise get the true force of them so well.

We have now concluded what I may call the first volume of Daniel, because it divides exactly into two portions at the close of this chapter; and that is one reason why it is mentioned that Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian. In the next chapter we shall find that we come back to the reign of Belshazzar, when Daniel is again brought before us. But this I must leave, only praying that this sample of the great importance of reading Scripture typically, where it is so intended to be read, may stir up the children of God to see that there is much more to be learnt from Scripture than what appears on the surface at a first glance. What God says has got a character about it that

is infinite. Instead of being exhausted by a draught taken from it here and there, it is the well itself; the constantly flowing spring of truth. The more we grow in the truth, the less we are satisfied with what we have got, and the more we feel what we have yet to learn. It is not to affect words of humility, but the real, deep feeling of our own total insufficiency, in presence of the greatness and goodness of our God, that has taken such poor worms as we are to set us in His own glory — for such indeed are the mighty ways of His grace.

1 As far as I know, Ephraem Syrus stands alone among the early ecclesiastics in treating Antiochus Epiphanes as the little horn of Daniel 7. A devoted man, extremely attached to monasticism, and vehement against the heterodox, he died in A,D. 378, but one has yet to learn why his differing from all other fathers earlier and later should have weight. Grotius and others, notorious for excluding the future and Christ, and for limiting prophecy to past history, followed in modern times, though early fathers enough led in the same path of unbelief.

2 It is a false statement (p. 61) that the writer only knows of four kings of Persia — Cyrus, Cambyses, D. Hystaspes, and Xerxes; for after Cyrus he refers to three, and describes Xerxes as the richest. In Ezra 4 they are named Ahasuerus answering to Cambyses, Artaxerxes to Pseudo-Smerdis (who helped the adversaries), and Darius H. (who adhered to Cyrus' proclamation). Later Persian monarchs appear in Ezra and Nehemiah.

3 "The four empires are clearly delineated; and the invincible armies of the Romans described with as much

clearness, in the prophecies of Daniel, as in the histories of Justin and Diodorus." — Gibbon.

4 I have no doubt that, in "the ships of Chittim" (Dan. 11:30) we have a reference to the naval power of Rome which interfered with Antiochus Epiphanes. But as the allusion is less explicit than Luke 2:1, Luke 3:1, Luke 20:22-25, John 11:48, John 19:15, I add the direct proof from the New Testament.

5 It depends on an indisputably good various reading.