Notes on Ezekiel

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Ezekiel

Preface.

The work, now presented to the reader, cannot be said to be uncalled for; as the Book of Ezekiel is one of those least entered into and expounded as a whole in the Bible. There is little to reward the student in the Greek comments of Origen, Ephraem Syr., Greg. Naz., or Theodoret, less, if possible, in the Latin of Jerome or Gregory the Great. One need not speak of Mediaevals or Reformers, of Jesuits or Puritans, of modern Germans or their English admirers. All lacked the key. Which of them saw the heavenly glory of Christ and the church, as a distinct thing from the kingdom? Which of them did not deny the hopes of Israel? Hence, save pious moral reflections, there is nothing to speak of in these writings, some of them voluminous, like the architectural work of H. Pradus and J. B. Villalpandus, in three enormous folio volumes without a ray of heavenly light.

I am far from pretending, in this brief exposition, to do more than help the Christian to a general but true notion of the contents, aim, and character of the prophecy, as far as I at present understand it, though sensible of the defects of my little book more than most are likely to be.

Blackheath, London, January, 1876.

Introduction.

Of the prophet on whose book we enter we know few circumstances, none save the scanty personal

particulars which he gives in the course of his prophecies, bound up with them and expressive of their character. We are told that he was a priest, son of Buzi; also of his wife and her sudden death, a sign to Israel; and of his residence at Tel-abib by the Chebar in the land of the Chaldeans. He speaks of Daniel his contemporary, in his own day famous for righteousness even as Noah and Job.1 But there are no writings in the Bible more characteristic, and none more used in furnishing imagery for the last book of the New Testament, the widest and deepest of all prophecies. Ezekiel and Jeremiah with Daniel are the prophets of the time of the captivity, not certainly without points of contact and the surest elements of sympathy, but as diverse in their tone and style and objects as they were in outward lot, and in the circumstances which God employed to give form to their predictions. It was the place of Jeremiah to be left with the poor in the land, and afterwards to be taken away with those who faithlessly fled to Egypt for a security they might have enjoyed in submission to their Babylonish master where they were; and so he wept and groaned with the beloved but unworthy remnant to the last. It was for Daniel to be carried captive in the third year of Jehoiakim when Nebuchadnezzar verified the solemn warning to Hezekiah; though in Babylon God did not leave Himself without witness, and showed where wisdom and His secret alone lay, even when He had raised up the Gentile empires and made His people Lo-ammi. Ezekiel was one of those carried into captivity in the subsequent reign2 of Jehoiakin, son of Jehoiakim, when the king of Babylon swept away all the better sort from the land, and our prophet among the rest. There remained but one step lower, the calamitous reign of Zedekiah, that the anger

of Jehovah might, cast them all out from His presence, because of manifold provocation and incurable rebellion. In view of this time, though also leaping over the times of the Gentiles of which Daniel treats, and dwelling richly on Israel's restoration at last, Ezekiel prophesied among the captives in Chaldea.

The holy energy, indignant zeal for God, and the moral authority of the prophet in reproving Israel, are strikingly apparent. Borne along, as in the majestic chariot of Jehovah's glory, which he describes with the resistless might of its wheels below and wings above, as the Spirit led, he nowhere flatters the people, but even in the captivity administers the sternest rebuke of the sins, not yet repented of, which had brought Israel so low. The roll spread before him and eaten by him was written within and without, lamentations and mourning and woe; and the prophet was to tell the rebellious people all Jehovah's words with his forehead made as an adamant, harder than flint. He, and he only save Daniel, it will be observed, has the title "Son of man," excepting, of course, the Master, but lowliest of servants, whose it was to appropriate every title of shame, suffering, and rejection, till the day come when they too shall be manifested with Him in glory.

Those who occupy themselves with the outer framework of the truth have not failed to notice the strong sense of clean and unclean, of Levitical sanctity, of temple imagery, of feasts and priests and sacrifices, so natural to one of the sacerdotal family. Of course these features are obvious and indisputable; but far from a rigid imitation of the Pentateuch we shall find that God asserts His title to modify, omit, or add in that day, when his fellow-prophet Jeremiah explicitly declares (Jer.

31:31-34) that Jehovah will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, “not according to the covenant I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith Jehovah! But this shall be the covenant that I make with the house of Israel: After those days, saith Jehovah, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts: and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith Jehovah: for I will forgive their iniquity, and will remember their sins no more.” No doubt this is true of the Christian meanwhile, for the blood of the new covenant is already shed and ours by faith; but it will be applied to Israel and Judah as such, through divine mercy, in that day, as the verses of Jeremiah which follow (35-40) most clearly show.

In vain, then, do Rabbins reason on the unchangeableness of the law given by Moses: their own prophets refute them. And so the famous D. Kimchi owns in his comment on our prophet, as Albo and Nachmanides acknowledge also against the absolute claim of immutability. Indeed Albo expressly refutes the use Maimonides makes of Deuteronomy 12:22 to the contrary, showing that the real bearing of Moses’ warning is to restrain the Israelites from arbitrarily or in self-will presuming to add to or take from the law. In no way did Moses mean to deny the authority of a prophet to do so, especially in view of the vast change to be introduced by the presence of a reigning Messiah and

the new covenant. Ezekiel predicts some strikingly characteristic changes when Israel are restored and the theocracy is once more in force, the details of which will appear as we pass through the book.3 Some have complained of our prophet's obscurity. But there is really no just ground, though the complaint be as old at least as Jerome, who designates the book "a labyrinth of the mysteries of God." The supposed darkness is owing to two things in particular. First, how could such a subject as depicting the divine government be simple? This, if done at all, must embrace immense height, depth, and breadth; and if symbol be used, it must require a compass entirely unexampled for the ordinary demands of the creature. Secondly, the mass of men in Christendom since Origen have adopted the vicious system of "spiritual alchemy," as Hooker terms it, which seeks to change the Jewish hopes into the predictions of proper Christian blessings. No wonder such men find a cloudy mistiness overhanging his pictures. Apply his visions aright, and they will in general be found remarkably explicit and full of force. It is absurd to suppose that details so minute and so circumstantial are mere literary drapery.

The structure of the book is evident. The first half consists of prophecies in strict chronological order before the final destruction of Jerusalem, when Zedekiah brought on himself the just punishment of his rebellion and perjury. (Ezek. 1-34) Ezekiel shows, under magnificent symbols, followed up by the plainest charges of sin, the hopelessness of every effort to shake off the Babylonish yoke, which Zedekiah was essaying through Egypt. But no; it was Jehovah who was judging Jerusalem, He who dwelt between the cherubim, though

He might employ Nebuchadnezzar. Morally it could not be otherwise. The doom of the city, temple, king, and people are all shown in this first half. The second opens with a kind of parenthetic transition, in which he denounces seven objects of judgments among the nations surrounding or near the land, neglecting the time when these burdens were delivered, and grouping them in moral unity (Ezek. 25-32); after which the prophet recurs distinctly to Israel, opens the individual ground on which God henceforth would deal with them (Ezek. 32), denounces first the guilty shepherds or princes (Ezek. 34), and then the hatred of Mount Seir (Ezek. 35), next pledges first the moral (Ezek. 36) and then the corporate (Ezek. 37) restoration of all Israel, the overthrow of Gog and all his hosts (Ezek. 38, 39), and finally the return of the glory of God, with the re-established sanctuary, ritual, and priesthood in the land, now indeed holy, as well as the re-arrangement of the twelve-tribed nationality under the prince; for the name of the city from that day shall be Jehovah-shammah. (Ezek. 40-48) Whether in judgment or in peaceful blessing, it is the day of Jehovah for the earth, not at all the foreshown blessedness of Christianity, as the allegorists teach. Such doctrine, whether patristic or puritan, is misleading and a delusion. These extremes meet in the common error which robs Christ and the church of that answer to His heavenly glory which it is the Holy Spirit’s function now to make good here below, and which shall be enjoyed yet more, yea, perfectly, when the Lord shall have come, changing our bodies into His likeness, and causing us to appear with Him in the heavenly glory of that day.

It is mere ignorance and malicious unbelief to call this Judaising. For it is no question of the sort when we speak of the future prospects of Israel according to the prophets. Judaising really means the mingling of Jewish elements with the gospel, and imposing them on Christians now. But the very point of the truth insisted on is, that Christians, caught up and glorified with Christ, will then have disappeared from the earth. Consequently it is the age to come, and another calling, when Israel shall be grafted into their own olive-tree. Hence, to look for the literal accomplishment of their visions is simply faith in the prophets, not Judaising, but rather a main safeguard against it; for we are thus kept the more from mingling their hopes with ours because we expect them to be fulfilled to Israel. The return from Babylon in no way met the closing prophecies; but this proves not the imperfection of Ezekiel's foreshadowing, but that his glorious anticipations are still to be fulfilled. The "all Israel" yet remains to be fulfilled when the Redeemer comes to Zion. Ezekiel 20:33 is perfectly consistent with this; for Jeremiah and all the prophets teach the cutting off of apostates and rebels. Henderson therefore was not justified in saying that the discrepancies between the ancient temple and that described by Ezekiel are non-essential. They prove on the contrary that we must either give up the inspiration of the prophet, or maintain that he predicts a return yet future with a new temple, and modified ritual, a fresh distribution of the land among the twelve tribes restored and blessed after their last enemies have been destroyed by divine judgments. No one supposes that he ceased to be a man when he became a prophet; but we are bound to believe that he was inspired so that his writings

should give us God’s word, and therefore no mixture of error.

Ezekiel 1

The circumstances in which Ezekiel was called to prophesy were new and strange. It was not in Judah, nor in Israel, but among the captives by the river Chebar. Hence Jehovah was pleased to accompany His word to him with peculiarly vivid marks. To him only in the Old Testament is it said that the heavens were opened, and he saw visions of God. (Ver. 1) But the opening of the heavens was in judgment of Israel’s iniquity, not yet to express the Father’s delight in the Son of God on earth, still less for the Christian to behold the Son of man in heaven.

Nor is the fifth year of king Jehoiachin’s captivity without special reason. There had been ample space for those loft behind in the land to repent of their vain hopes, as well as of their rebelliousness and their idolatry. They had had the warning of their brethren removed from the land: had they laid it to heart? Zedekiah “did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of Jehovah. And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God; but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the Jehovah God of Israel. Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much, after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of Jehovah which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the Jehovah God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he

had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place; but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of Jehovah arose against his people, till there was no remedy."

It was in view of a final and yet more completely desolating stroke that Ezekiel was raised up to bear testimony. "On the fifth of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity, the word of Jehovah came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of Jehovah was there upon him. And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance they had the likeness of a man." (Vers. 2-5.)

Had this been all, it had been much to rebuke the Jewish pride which counted God so bound to their race and land, that they never weighed His threat of the change in progress for Israel till it came. Alas! they realise it not till this day, but, refusing to hear of His judgment of their sins, they would fain cheat themselves into the delusion that their dispersion is a mission to teach the Gentiles that God is the God of Israel, rather than that He has for thousands of years refused to be called their God because of their idolatry, crowned by the rejection of the Messiah and of the gospel. A fresh storm-cloud of divine indignation was about to burst on Judea out of the north, that is, from Babylon.

But there is much more. “Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man.” (Ver. 5) If there could be any doubt left on the mind of him who reads this account, Ezekiel 10 distinctly shows that the living creatures are the cherubim. They are here, not two like the figures made out of the ends of the pure and beaten gold which formed the mercy-seat where God sat as on a throne, but four in relation, I presume, to the creature. The God of Israel, who dwelt between the cherubim on the ark, was in the midst of His people, and approached by blood according to divine righteousness, which was guarded by the witness of His judicial authority. Ezekiel was given to behold His judgments in providence from without. He would judge His guilty people by Babylon as His instrument. Here therefore it is fire (ver. 5) which characterises the display of His destructive judgment as the God of heaven.

It would be almost an endless genealogy, and certainly to little edification, if one set out in detail the strange misconception of these symbols which have prevailed among men, both Jews and Christians. In the former this is not surprising; for the unbelief which wrought the evils which the prophet denounced still works the same stiff-necked opposition to the truth. “This generation” is not passed away, nor will it till all that is predicted be fulfilled. But Christians are far less excusable. Having the true light, they ought to see; but they only see aright, as the eye is single. If Christ’s glory had been before them, not the church’s (that is, their own), they would have made room for His relation to others as well as to themselves. They need not deny the old, because they believe the new. Had the national judgment of

Israel been seen at the beginning of the prophecy, and their restoration at the end, the ancient fathers and the modern divines could not have dreamt of interpreting the four cherubim as the evangelists, or as a description of Christ's redemption work, or of God's glory in the church, or as the four seasons of the year, or the four quarters of the globe, or the four cardinal virtues, or the four passions of the soul, or the four faculties of the mind, or whatever other conjectures men have indulged in. A more plausible but very imperfect view is that of Calvin, who takes them as angels, and four in relation to the various questions of the world, each with four heads, angelic virtue being thus proved to reside in all, and God shown to work not only in man and other animals, but throughout inanimate things. He takes it therefore as a vision of God's empire administered by angels everywhere, all creatures being so impelled as if joined with the angels, and as if the angels comprehended within themselves all elements in all parts of the world.

As to the four cherubs, then, they were composite figures. "And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went everyone straightforward." (Vers. 6-9) The likeness of a man was theirs, though each had four faces and four wings (ver. 6); but the feet were straight, the sole like that of a calf's foot, and the face of an ox answering to that of a cherub. (Ver. 7; compare also Ezek. 10:14) Activity, or

aptness in doing, seems represented by the hands of a man; swiftness of execution from above in the wings, without a moment's deviation from the object in hand, and with four sides, so as to move in all directions. The intimation of verse 10 I take to be that in front the face of a man was seen, and that of an eagle behind, with a lion's face to the right and an ox's or steer's to the left.4 These compose the symbolical supports of the throne, being the heads of the creatures preserved in the ark from the flood; man setting forth intelligence, the lion strength, the ox patience or stability, and the eagle rapidity of execution, the attributes of God or the qualities of His judgments. "As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side; they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle. Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. And they went everyone straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning." (Vers. 10-14) They went forward and returned like a flash of lightning.

Nor do we hear only of wings, but of wheels also. "Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness:

and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel. When they went, they went upon their four sides: and they turned not when they went. As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels." (Vers. 15-21) It is the exact reverse of circumstances left to blind chance. Contrariwise, whatever the revolutions or changes among men, all is wittingly guided where it might be least expected. The instruments of the providential government, below the firmament or expanse were completely in accord with what was above, and over this was the likeness of a throne; and above all the likeness of a man exercising executory judgment, though with the unfailing pledge of mercy to an evil world.

Thus the throne of God was no longer in Israel, but the God of heaven was pleased and about to use the Gentiles to do His will in punishing guilty Jerusalem. It is His throne from heaven, not yet His throne in heaven, as in Revelation 4, where we have no wheels, but six wings to each. The living creatures there are accordingly not cherubim only, but seraphim, crying, Holy, holy, holy, and the whole creation is taken up under His dispensational

titles, save what is distinctively millennial. Hence they are not the mere basis of God's throne in judging the Jew, providentially through the Gentile, but associated and identified with the throne of Him who judges all according to His nature. The world comes under His dealings, though above all apostate Jews and Gentiles, all "that dwell on the earth." The living creatures are in the circle of the throne and in its midst, no longer under it as in Ezekiel.

Hence we may easily understand that by the cherubim is set forth God's judicial executive, to whomsoever entrusted and in whatever circumstances displayed. There is a difference between that which was seen after man's fall, and when God called for the mercy-seat. So the sight vouchsafed to Ezekiel on earth was not the same as John beheld when in the Spirit he passed through the door opened in heaven. But in all there is the common principle, while each is modified exactly by divine wisdom according to the case and aim before Him, which we can learn only by the Spirit from His word, which has for its object His various glory in Christ.

The Supreme who directed all was revealed in the appearance of a man, and so in relation to men. His attributes here made known are governmental, and applied by instruments on earth according to a providence which overlooks nothing. There is no finer refutation of heathen darkness or of Jewish narrowness than this symbolical representation of the divine ways with Israel as seen in Chaldea. Yet is it all positive truth, with the simple effect of manifesting the glory of God as He was then pleased to deal, and as He will when He undertakes the renewed blessing of repentant Israel to

the joy of all the earth. How vain in that day will Israel feel to have been their unbelief throughout the day of grace when they rejected Jehovah-Messiah because He became man in accomplishment of Isaiah 7, and in accordance with His appearance here, who, unseen of the world, but announced to deaf and blind Israel, lets the believer know that He guided the springs of every movement here below to His glory, at the time when He ceased to own what He once designated “the throne of Jehovah” in Zion. Far from governing in and by Israel, His judgment is seen to be directed against them by the Gentile as His servant, however unconsciously.

Ezekiel 2

The new attitude is remarkably exemplified in another way by the title God gives to the prophet fallen on his face, in chapter 2, and thenceforward. For when the voice spoke from the likeness of the glory of Jehovah, the words were, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. So was Daniel styled once (Dan. 8:17), and Ezekiel more than a hundred times. It is the title Jesus appropriated as the rejected Messiah who should suffer, be exalted, and return in glory as the Son of man. His servants have the same title, as identified with the glory of God, who now declares Himself outside Israel and even judging them by the Gentiles.

Strengthened by the Spirit, the prophet receives his mission to the children of Israel, though, yea, because, they had rejected God — “to rebellious Gentiles, Goyim [for such they really were in truth, no better than heathen morally and much worse in guilt], that have rebelled against me; they and their fathers have transgressed against me unto this very day. And the

children are hard of face and stiff of heart. I send thee to them, and thou shalt say to them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah. And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear (for they are a rebellious house), shall yet know that a prophet hath been among them." (Vers. 3-5)

Therefore the prophet was commanded (vers. 6, 7) not to fear them, or their words, or their looks, however rebellious they might be, but the rather to speak Jehovah's words to them, whether they might hear or forbear, for they were rebellious (or most rebellious).

Further, Ezekiel is cautioned himself not to be rebellious like them, but to open his mouth and eat what God gives him. (Ver. 8) Thereon a hand was extended, and in it a roll of a book, which he spread before the prophet, written on the face and on the back, fully and flowing over; and there was written in it lamentations, mourning, and woe. (Vers. 9, 10) Such was the character of his earlier testimony. We shall see how grace triumphs to God's glory in the end.

Ezekiel 3

In chapter 3 this is followed up. The eaten roll proves sweet as honey. The prophet was sent to Israel, with the certainty that they would not hear, impudent and hard-hearted as they were, but confronted by the prophet with a forehead of adamant. (Vers. 1-9) Receiving God's word in his heart, he was to go with a Thus saith Jehovah. (Vers. 10, 11) Then the Spirit took him up with the noise of the glory accompanying, and after seven days among the captives at Tel-abib, the word came that Jehovah made him a watchman to Israel, with the most solemn charge and responsibility to be faithful at his

peril. It was no longer a question of the nation, but of individual fidelity. (Vers. l 2-21) The chapter closes with a final command, when he sees the glory again on the plain as before by the Chebar. He was to be a prisoner in his house, with his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth, for they were rebellious. But God would also open his mouth with a solemn call to hear; but they were rebellious.

Ezekiel 4

Following up the call in the close of the last chapter (vers. 22-27), the Lord directs the prophet to set forth the siege of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans: “Thou also, son of man, take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and portray upon it the city, even Jerusalem: and lay siege against it, and build a fort against it, and cast a mount against it; set the camp also against it, and set battering rams against it round about. Moreover take thou unto thee an iron pan, and set it for a wall of iron between thee and the city: and set thy face against it, and it shall be besieged, and thou shalt lay siege against it. This shall be a sign to the house of Israel. (Ver. 1-3) A still more remarkable command is next given. “Lie thou also upon thy left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it: according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon it thou shalt bear their iniquity. For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year. Therefore thou shalt set thy face toward

the siege of Jerusalem, and thine arm shall be uncovered, and thou shalt prophesy against it. And, behold, I will lay bands upon thee, and thou shalt not turn thee from one side to another, till thou hast ended the days of thy siege." (Vers. 4-8)

It is well known that this has given rise to much debate and difference of judgment. First, the reading of most MSS. of the Septuagint misled the early fathers, who read the more common Greek version, as we see, for instance, in Theodoret; and the same error appears in the Vulgate, though Jerome well knew that there is no doubt as to the Hebrew, followed by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. Next the reckoning even of Jerome is from the ruin of the revolted house of Israel in the reign of Pekah, when the king of Assyria carried off the ten tribes to the east. But I do not doubt that their view is sounder who count the three hundred and ninety years of Israel from Jeroboam, to whom Ahijah announced from Jehovah the gift of the ten tribes rent out of the hand of Solomon, and that the forty years of Judah point to the reign of Solomon himself, which really determined the ruin even of that most favoured portion of the people, little as man might see under the wealth and wisdom of the king the results of the idolatry then practised. "They have forsaken me," was the message of the prophet in that day, "and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon; and have not walked in my ways to do that which is right in mine eyes, and to keep my statutes and my judgments, as did David his father." Thus the seed of David were to be for this afflicted, as they have been, but not for ever. But if a brighter day await them, a long

night of darkness first, and the coldest hour before the dawn; for they have added to their idolatry the still graver wickedness of rejecting their Messiah and of opposing the gospel that goes out to the Gentiles, so that wrath is come upon them to the uttermost. It seems no real obstacle to this that the house of Israel as a distinctive title of the ten tribes were carried off long before the termination of the period; because it is after the habitual manner of Ezekiel, however he may distinguish here as elsewhere, to embrace the whole nation under that name. Judah did not use for God's glory the long and peaceful and prosperous reign of him who in the midst of unexampled benefits turned away his heart after other gods; and the sentence of Lo-ammi was only executed when that portion of the elect nation which crave to the house of David, and even the last king who reigned of that house, by their treachery to Jehovah justified the backsliding tribes who had long before been swept away from the land.

How solemn is the testimony God renders to man viewed in his responsibility to walk according to the light given! It is not only that he departs farther and farther from God, but that he breaks down from the first; while every fresh means of recall but serves to prove his thorough alienation in heart and will. Thus no flesh can glory in His presence. May we glory in the Lord! Not the first man, but the second has glorified God. Justly therefore has God glorified the Son of man in Himself, and this straightway after the cross.

Here it is another question. The prophet must set forth in his own person the degradation as well as the judgment impending because of the iniquity of the people. Hence another sign follows. "Take thou also unto

thee wheat, and barley, and beans, and lentils, and millet, and filches, and put them in one vessel, and make thee bread thereof, according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon thy side, three hundred and ninety days shalt thou eat thereof. And thy meat which thou shalt eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day: from time to time shalt thou eat it. Thou shalt drink water also by measure, the sixth part of an hin: from time to time shalt thou drink. And thou shalt eat it as barley cakes, and thou shalt bake it with dung which cometh out of man, in their sight. And Jehovah said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, whither I will drive them. Then said I, Ah, Lord Jehovah! behold, my soul hath not been polluted: for from my youth up even till now have I not eaten of that which dieth of itself, or is torn in pieces; neither came abominable flesh into my mouth. Then he said unto me, Lo, I have given thee cow's dung for man's dung, and thou shalt prepare thy bread therewith. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem: and they shall eat bread by weight, and with care; and they shall drink water by measure, and with astonishment; that they may want bread and water, and be astonied one with another, and consume away for their iniquity." (Vers. 9-17) In his measure Ezekiel is to taste the condition of Israel under the righteous dealings of God, not because he was personally out of divine favour, but on the contrary because he was near enough to God to enter into the reality of their wretchedness, though only the Son of man could in grace go down into its depths and take it up perfectly and suffer to the full, yea, far beyond all that ever was, or can be, their portion. Jesus in His zeal for God and love for His people

alone could bear the burden, whether in government or in atonement; but for both the glory of His person fitted Him without abating one jot of what was due to God, and with the deepest results of blessing, as for us now, so for the godly Jew in the latter day. Never did He shield Himself, as Ezekiel does here, from an adequate taste of the ruin-state of Israel; never did He deprecate save, if possible, that cup of unutterable woe which it was His alone to drink, but drink it He did to the dregs, that grace might reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Ezekiel 5

Chapter 5 adds fresh particulars of unsparing and destructive judgment; for the preceding chapter had not gone beyond the Chaldean siege of Jerusalem with its attendant though most distressing miseries.

“And thou, son of man, take thee a sharp knife, a barber’s razor be taken to thee, and cause it to pass upon thy head and upon thy beard, and take to thee weighing balances, and divide the hair. Thou shalt burn with fire a third part in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are fulfilled: and thou shalt take a third part, and smite about it with a knife: and a third part thou shalt scatter in the wind; and I will draw out a sword after them. Thou shalt also take thereof a few in number, and bind them in thy skirts. Then take of them again, and cast them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire; for thereof shall a fire come forth into all the house of Israel.” (Vers. 1-4) The application is certain and immediate, being furnished in the following words of the prophet: “Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; This is Jerusalem: I have set it in the midst of the nations and

countries that are round about her. And she hath changed my judgments into wickedness more than the nations, and my statutes more than the countries that are round about her: for they have refused my judgments and my statutes, they have not walked in them." (Vers. 5, 6)

The form in which the God of Israel communicated the dismal lot and unsparing destruction about to fall on the Jews is the more impressive, because both in the manner in which the prophet was ordered to bake his bread and to shave off his hair, there was a departure from ceremonial in a way which could not be justified otherwise than by the authority of God Himself or the moral exigencies of His people. Here no doubt it could be, though assuredly Ezekiel as a priest would feel all deeply. The converse of this one has in the vision of Simon Peter, where we see the deeply-rooted prejudices of the Jew, though in a trance, but overruled of God, who would save from among the Gentiles and bring about communion with such of Israel as believed. In our prophecy it is not grace going out to meet and welcome and bless the heathen by proclaiming to them the only Saviour, but judgment falling on Jerusalem, and this persistently and without relenting — a strange tale for Israel to hear and believe. For reverses hitherto had been but temporary chastenings, and pity's stream kept ever flowing down its accustomed bed, and the mass of Israelites fondly hoped that so it must be, and that God at least was bound to them, though well they knew how often and habitually the people dishonoured Him. Let them see and hear from the abased prophet what was very soon to be fearfully realised according to his message from Jehovah. It was the high and central

position of Israel, of Jerusalem above all, among the peoples and lands round about which made their rebellion and idolatry so grievous, so impossible to be overlooked or spared more.

“Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, because ye multiplied more than the nations that are round about you, and you have not walked in my statutes, neither have kept my judgments, neither have done according to the judgments of the nations that are round about you. Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold, I, even I, am against thee, and will execute judgments in the midst of thee in the sight of the nations. And I will do in thee that which I have not done, and whereunto I will not do any more the like, because of all thy abominations. Therefore the fathers shall eat their sons in the midst of thee, and the sons shall eat their fathers: and I will execute judgments in thee, and the whole remnant of thee will I scatter into all the winds. Wherefore, as I live, saith the Lord Jehovah; Surely, because thou hast defiled my sanctuary with all thy detestable things, and with all thine abominations, therefore will I also diminish thee; neither shall mine eye spare, neither will I have any pity. A third part of thee shall die with the pestilence, and with famine shall they be consumed in the midst of thee: and a third part shall fall by the sword round about thee; and I will scatter a third part into all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them.” (Vers. 7-10)

We clearly see then the divine dealing. A third was to perish by plague and famine inside the besieged city; a third to fall by the sword round about Jerusalem; and the remaining third to be scattered to all the winds with a sword drawn after them by God. Here too we see how

those of Jerusalem under the circumstances represent "all the house of Israel," no account being taken in this place of the ten tribes already carried to the East. The defilement of Jehovah's sanctuary by heathen abominations brought in by kings and priests and people made Jerusalem intolerable.

"Thus shall mine anger be accomplished, and I will cause my fury to rest upon them, and I will be comforted: and they shall know that I Jehovah have spoken it in my zeal, when I have accomplished my fury in them. Moreover I will make thee waste, and a reproach among the nations that are round about thee, in the sight of all that pass by." (Vers. 13, 14) Their judgment should be in the sight of those nations who had beheld their infidelity to the true God, their God. "So it shall be a reproach and a taunt, an instruction and an astonishment unto the nations that are round about thee, when I shall execute judgments in thee in anger and in fury and in furious rebukes. I Jehovah have spoken it." (Ver. 15) The heathen themselves were astonished; for they had no notion of a national deity so dealing with the people who professed that worship. "When I shall send upon them the evil arrows of famine, which shall be for their destruction, and which I will send to destroy you: and I will increase the famine upon you, and will break your staff of bread: so will I send upon you famine and evil beasts, and they shall bereave thee; and I will bring the sword upon thee. I Jehovah have spoken it." (Vers. 16, 17)

Ezekiel 6

Chapter 6 shows that God takes account of all the scenes of their idolatrous evil throughout the land,

though we have seen Jerusalem to have a bad pre-eminence. Hence Ezekiel is here commanded to look toward “the mountains of Israel.” “And the word of Jehovah came unto me saying, Son of man, set thy face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, and say, Ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord Jehovah: Thus saith the Lord Jehovah to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys: Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. And your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken: and I will cast down your slain men before your idols. And I will lay the dead carcases of the children of Israel before their idols; and I will scatter your bones round about your altars. In all your dwelling-places the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate; that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, and your idols may be broken and cease, and your images may be cut down, and your works may be abolished. And the slain shall fall in the midst of you, and ye shall know that I am Jehovah.” (Vers. 1-7) Thus Jehovah would wake up the sword to destroy Israel throughout the land, who had abandoned Him for heathen gods which could not shield from, but assuredly expose to, destruction. Devotees, and altars, and images should all perish, idolaters before their idols, and their bones upon their altars: so complete the discomfiture, and so evident its ground.

Nevertheless will Jehovah in judgment remember mercy. “Yet will I leave a remnant, that ye may have some that shall escape the sword among the nations, when ye shall be scattered through the countries. And they that escape of you shall remember me among the nations

whither they shall be carried captives, because I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and with their eyes, which go a whoring after their idols: and they shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations. And they shall know that I am Jehovah, and that I have not said in vain that I would do this evil unto them." (Vers. 8-10) But in verse 9 it would seem that the true meaning is "when I shall have broken their whorish heart which had departed from me, and their eyes," etc. The verb has not a passive but the reflexive sense of "breaking for myself." What probably led to the rendering preferred in the Authorised Version was the difficulty of such a phrase with the "eyes." This is sought to be softened by the Jewish version of Mr. Leeser, who translates it, "even with their eyes." But this can hardly stand. Heart and eyes are broken together in repentance before God.

Here again Ezekiel is called to mark with characteristic action the sure divine judgment of Israel's abominations. The very land should become more waste and desolate than the desert in all their dwelling-places. "Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Smite with thine hand, and stamp with thy foot, and say, Alas, for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel! for they shall fall by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence. He that is afar off shall die of the pestilence; and he that is near shall fall by the sword; and he that remaineth and is besieged shall die by the famine: thus will I accomplish my fury upon them. Then shall ye know that I am Jehovah, when their slain men shall be among their idols round about their altars, upon every high hill, in all the tops of the mountains, and under every green tree, and under every

thick oak, the place where they did offer sweet savour to all their idols. So will I stretch out my hand upon them, and make the land desolate, yea, more desolate than the wilderness toward Diblath, in all their habitations: and they shall know that I am Jehovah." (Vers. 11-14)

Ezekiel 7

Chapter 7 closes this preliminary strain, or cluster of strains, of coming woe. It is marked by comprehensiveness indeed; but instead of vagueness there is every mark of rapidity in the short, strange, abrupt style in which the Spirit proclaims with frequent and emphatic repetitions an end to the land of Israel as that which was just at hand. "And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Also, thou Son of man, thus saith the Lord Jehovah unto the land of Israel; An end, the end, is come upon the four corners of the land. Now is the end come upon thee, and I will send mine anger upon thee, and will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense upon thee all thine abominations. And mine eye shall not spare thee, neither will I have pity: but I will recompense thy ways upon thee, and thine abominations shall be in the midst of thee: and ye shall know that I am Jehovah. Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; An evil, an only evil, behold, is come. An end is come, the end is come: it watcheth for thee; behold, it is come. The mourning is come unto thee, O thou that dwellest in the land: the time is come, the day of trouble is near, and not the sounding again of the mountains. Now will I shortly pour out my fury upon thee, and accomplish mine anger upon thee: and I will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense thee for all thine abominations. And mine eye shall not spare,

neither will I have pity: I will recompense thee according to thy ways and thine abominations that are in the midst of thee; and ye shall know that I am Jehovah that smiteth." (Vers. 1-9)

Next we see that not only do "the four corners of the land" come under the distinct and decisive dealing of Jehovah, but in this case the results are complete and overwhelming. There is no recovery possible as far as man can see or say. "Behold the day, behold it is come: the morning is gone forth; the rod hath blossomed, pride hath budded. Violence is risen up into a rod of wickedness: none of them shall remain, nor of their multitude, nor of any of theirs: neither shall there be wailing for them." (Vers. 10, 11) The ordinary ways and feelings of men disappear. (Ver. 12) Wrath is on all the multitude. The special hopes of an Israelite are broken, for the jubilee, too, vanishes, and with it all prospect of recovery. (Ver. 18) How could idols help him? The sound of the trumpet which calls on man, which to a Jew should be the assurance of God's hearing and appearing on their behalf as usual, is wholly unavailing; for Jehovah's wrath is upon all the multitude. (Ver. 14) They are thus seen shut up within concentric circles of devouring ruin. (Vers. 15-18) God's prophet announces' terrible to think, stroke upon stroke, from God against His people, enfeebled before by the sense of guilt. In the day of their calamity they are forced to feel that their gods are vanity, nothing but "silver and gold," and "they shall cast their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be as uncleanness." "Their silver and gold," adds the prophet most impressively, "shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of Jehovah; they shall not

satisfy their souls nor fill their bowels, because it was the stumbling-block of their iniquity."

But had not God one place chosen to be His dwelling-place and rest? Alas! their worst evil manifested itself against Him there. Their glory was their shame. "As for the beauty of his ornament, he set it in majesty: but they made the images of their abominations and of their detestable things therein: therefore have I set it far from them. And I will give it into the hands of the strangers for a prey, and to the wicked of the earth for a spoil; and they shall pollute it. My face will I turn also from them, and they shall pollute my secret place: for the robbers shall enter into it, and defile it." (Vers. 10-22)

Lastly, the prophet is bid to make the chains symbolic of the slavery in store for those not cut off, and this, too, that the vilest of Gentiles should take possession of their houses, destruction coming, and peace sought in vain, but mishap on mishap, and rumour upon rumour, and no vision from the prophet, but the law perishing from the priest and counsel from the elders. The king mourning, the prince clothed with the perplexity of grief, and the hands of the people of the land shaking: such is the picture (vers. 23-27) of appalling trouble, and fulfilled to the letter, as we know. "Because of their way will I do unto them, and according to their judgments will I judge them; and they shall know that I am Jehovah." Such is the conclusion of the solemn preliminary warning.

Ezekiel 8

It is evident that chapters 8 - 11 really form the parts, according to the chapters, of one connected vision. First, the excessive idolatry of Judah in Jerusalem is set forth, beginning with the house of God; secondly, destruction

is ordered of God for all left in the city, save a marked remnant of those that sighed and cried for all the abominations done there, a destruction expressly beginning at Jehovah's sanctuary; thirdly, the part played by the cherubim and other agents of divine judgment, ere the glory of Jehovah slowly takes each step of departure; and fourthly, the denunciation of woes on the princes and the people yet left, with assurance to the righteous of a sanctuary in Jehovah Himself where there was no other in the heathen lands of their dispersion, and of final mercy in gathering them back while all else must perish, the glory retiring from the city to the Mount of Olives. From Ezekiel 12 to 19 inclusive are various connected circumstances and expositions of His ways on God's part.

"And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat in mine house, and the elders of Judah sat before me, that the hand of the Lord Jehovah fell there upon me. Then I beheld, and lo a likeness as the appearance of fire; from the appearance of his loins even downward, fire; and from his loins even upward, as the appearance of brightness, as the colour of amber. And he put forth the form of an hand, and took me by a lock of mine head; and the Spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north; where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy." (Ver. 1-3)

The year is the next after that of the first vision: compare Ezekiel 1:2. The reckoning is from the captivity of Jehoiachin. The prophet here had a fresh dealing of God while the elders of Judah sat before him. It was in

the Spirit, not in bodily presence, that he was conveyed to Jerusalem, “in the vision of God” where he beheld at the door of the inner gate looking northward (that is, to Chaldea), the seat or pedestal of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy. “And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there according to the vision that I saw in the plain. Then said he unto me, Son of man, lift up thine eyes now the way toward the north. So I lifted up mine eyes the way toward the north, and, behold, northward at the gate of the altar this image of jealousy in the entry He said furthermore unto me, Son of man, seest thou what they do? even the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from my sanctuary?” We are not told distinctly what the name of the idol was, whether Baal or Ashtoreth. Compare 2 Kings 21, 2 Chronicles 33. It was certainly an idol which defied the God of Israel and courted the homage of all who entered the temple. So bent was Judah on affronting Jehovah and compelling morally the accomplishment of His threat to abandon His house. And here is the force of the vision of His glory in this connection: Jehovah had not yet definitively left, and is pleased to justify His solemn procedure with His people.

“But turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations. And he brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold, a hole in the wall. Then said he unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall: and when I had digged in the wall, behold a door. And he said unto me, Go in, and, behold, the wicked abominations that they do here. So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of

Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about." It is a scene of still more intimate and debasing idolatry, a reproduction of the degradations of Egypt; and bowing down to these, not the dregs but the rulers of the people! "And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand: and a thick cloud of incense went up." God had of old appointed seventy judges; and one of their most momentous functions was to deal with idol-worship. Here as many are found caught we may say, in the very act of priestly devotion to the representation of serpents and abominable beasts (or cattle) and all dung-gods. Shaphan was the scribe who read the book of the law to the tender-hearted Josiah: what an ominous change in Judah that now Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan stood in the midst of the seventy idolatrous elders!

Nor was this all. "Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, Jehovah seeth us not; Jehovah hath forsaken the earth." They had ceased even to hold the truth in unrighteousness, bad as this may be; they had sunk into the lower depth of denying the necessary attributes of God, into Jewish apostasy, saying, "Jehovah seeth us not, Jehovah hath forsaken the earth."

"He said also unto me, Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations that they do. Then he brought me to the door of the gate of Jehovah's house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz." Here it is not Syrian nor Egyptian idolatries, but Phoenician, and of the most

grossly demoralizing character. It was apparently what the Greeks adopted under the fable of Adonis and Aphrodite.

But there remains worse behind, because both of the place and of the persons engaged in the adoration of the sun, the great object of Sabian and subsequently Persian idolatry. “Then said he unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these. And he brought me into the inner court of Jehovah’s house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of Jehovah, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of Jehovah, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east.” The prophet particularly notes their number answering to the courses of priesthood and the high priest, with their backs toward Jehovah’s temple, and their faces toward the east.

There is no sufficient reason, in my opinion, to depart from the ordinary rendering of verse 17, and to change “branch” into song; nor need we heed the Rabbinical notion that the text is to be reckoned among the Tikkun Sopherim, the original reading being supposed to mean “to my [instead of ‘their’] nose.” The LXX seem to have so read, at least they render it αὐτοὶ ὡς μυκτηρίζοντες, “they are as scorners.” But the Hebrew MSS support the common text which makes an excellent and consistent sense. “Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore will I also deal in fury:

mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them." Punishment to the uttermost must befall the Jews without mercy: Jehovah Himself would see to it.

Ezekiel 9

Chapter 9 gives us the divine preparations and plan for executing judgment on all, save the reserved remnant, in Jerusalem. "And he called also in my ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand. And, behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side: and they went in, and stood beside the brazen altar. And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side." The judgment is still from the north; the angelic executioners stand beside the brazen altar, the expression of divine requirement and judgment on the earth. The glory quits its wonted seat. Jerusalem is devoted to the vengeance of Jehovah. "Jehovah said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is

the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house." (Ver. 4-6) Grief is the fruit of communion with God in a day of evil. Those who felt such holy sorrow are expressly and conclusively exempt from the destroyers. All others must perish, old and young, maids, little ones, women; but not any one on whom is the mark. "And begin at my sanctuary." Compare 1 Peter 4. What is nearest to the Lord has the deepest responsibility.

But not content with beginning at the ancient men who were before the house, the word to the avengers was, "Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain: go ye forth. And they went forth, and slew in the city. And it came to pass, while they were slaying them, and I was left, that I fell upon my face, and cried, and said, Ah Lord Jehovah! wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel in thy pouring out of thy fury upon Jerusalem?" No room was left for intercession to prevail. "Then said he unto me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness: for they say, Jehovah hath forsaken the earth, and Jehovah seeth not. And as for me also, mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will recompense their way upon their head." (Ver. 9, 10)

The awful scene is made more impressive still by the report of the task completed. "And, behold, the man clothed with linen, which had the inkhorn by his side, reported the matter, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me." (Ver. 11)

Ezekiel 10

The vision which follows completes the picture of judgment begun in chapters 8, 9. While it recalls that which the prophet first beheld among the captives at Chebar, it has certain modifications which one might expect from the fact that, as he sat with the elders of Judah before him, he was brought by the Spirit in the visions of God to Jerusalem now in its day of visitation for its uncleanness of flesh and spirit, beginning with the sanctuary but taking cognizance of the city throughout, those only excepted who sighed and cried for all the abominations done in the midst. If it was a solemn sight for the captive prophet to see the glory of God in a heathen land, it was no less significant to see it arrayed in vengeance against the city whereon His eyes and His heart are perpetually.

“Then I looked, and, behold, in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubim there appeared over them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne. And he spake unto the man clothed with linen, and said, Go in between the wheels, even under the cherub, and fill thine hand with coals of fire from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city. And he went in in my sight. Now the cherubim stood on the right side of the house, when the man went in; and the cloud filled the inner court.” (Ver. 1-3) Thus from Him who is not even named, but who fills the throne above, came the command intimating consuming judgment for the city; and he who was commissioned to mark the righteous for exemption is now told to fill his hand with coals of fire from between the cherubim and to scatter them over Jerusalem. The cloud of Jehovah’s presence was there; but it afforded no shelter, no

direction now to the people who had abandoned all care for His will and preferred a calf or a dung-god to the Eternal of Israel. How changed from the day when Jehovah went before them, or filled the sanctuary!

“Then the glory of Jehovah went up from the cherub over the threshold of the house; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of Jehovah’s glory. And the sound of the cherubim’s wings was heard even to the outer court, as the voice of the Almighty God when he speaketh.” (Ver. 4, 5) The glory was departing, not coming to dwell there. Jehovah is leaving the seat which He was pleased to choose - not leaving it for ever, for He has chosen it for ever. But meanwhile He is morally driven away by the iniquities and apostasy of His own people. The prophecy of Ezekiel is explicit that He will return and dwell there, never more to quit His home as long as the earth lasts, for His people will then enjoy the rest of God under Messiah and the new covenant. But as David was forced to say in his last words that his house was not so with God, in like manner does our prophet here tell in mysterious symbols the rupture of the ties between God and Israel through the solemn signs of their judgment. In every way did He make it conspicuous to the prophet, if peradventure they might hear and live, arrested by the strange sights and sounds he was given to recount from the Lord. Whatever He might do at other times, it was unmistakably Jehovah who directed the sweeping destruction of His own city and sanctuary. Thus the faith of the believer would be strengthened by the dealings which cleared the ground of every tree which He had not planted.

Next we have the execution of the command in the vision, that all might be rendered the more impressive and sure to such as flattered themselves that, whatever the sharp lessons and chastenings of Jehovah, it could not be that He would disown Israel, and that, whatever the temporary successes of the foe, the land and the city and the temple must prove an unfailing bulwark against permanent advantage over the chosen people. So readily does man forget the immutable principles of God's moral being and turn to his own ease and honour what God could only do for the maintenance of truth and righteousness to His own glory. "And it came to pass, that when he had commanded the man clothed with linen, saying, Take fire from between the wheels, from between the cherubim; then he went in, and stood beside the wheels. And one cherub stretched forth his hand from between the cherubim unto the fire that was between the cherubim, and took thereof, and put it into the hands of him that was clothed with linen: who took it, and went out. And there appeared in the cherubim the form of a man's hand under their wings. And when I looked, behold, the four wheels by the cherubim, one wheel by one cherub, and another wheel by another cherub: and the appearance of the wheels was as the colour of a beryl stone. And as for their appearances, they four had one likeness, as if a wheel had been in the midst of a wheel. When they went, they went upon their four sides; they turned not as they went, but to the place whither the head looked they followed it; they turned not as they went. And their whole body, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels, were full of eyes round about, even the wheels that they four had. As for the wheels, it was cried unto them in my hearing, O wheel. And every one had four faces: the first

face was the face of a cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. And the cherubim were lifted up. This is the living creature that I saw by the river of Chebar. And when the cherubim went, the wheels went by them: and when the cherubim lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also turned not from beside them. When they stood, these stood; and when they were lifted up, these lifted up themselves also: for the spirit of the living creature was in them." (Ver. 6-17) It is plain that, if the glory seen by the river Chebar returned, so emphatically identified in verses 15, 20, 22, it was but passingly and for the sad task both of sealing the judgment and of marking the abandonment of Israel as under the law and now apostate from God. The symbol of divine government in providence was there, but it took not its seat in the holiest. It stood at the threshold, and the court was full of the brightness of Jehovah's glory, but there was no entrance within. It was a judicial visitation, in obedience to His behests who from above controlled every movement. Wrath was gone out against Jerusalem. He it was who directed all, not the dumb idols which carried away the Gentiles, having mouths but they speak not, having eyes and hands and ears but they hear not nor see nor handle, as vain as those who trust in them against God in the heavens who hath done whatsoever He hath pleased.

There are some features of difference from the earliest manifestation. Not that there is any severance of the wheels from the cherubic figures, or the least divergence from common action, or in the end of their complicated movements. All pervading intelligence is yet

more asserted of the whole body, backs, hands, wings, wheels. “As for the wheels it was called in my hearing, Galgal” [wheel, or roll, roll]. In verse 18 we see a move of the gravest significance: “Then the glory of Jehovah departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight: when they went out, the wheels also were beside them, and every one stood at the door of the east gate of Jehovah’s house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river of Chebar; and I knew that they were the cherubim. Every one had four faces apiece, and every one four wings; and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings. And the likeness of their faces was the same faces which I saw by the river of Chebar, their appearances and themselves: they went every one straight forward.” (Ver. 18-22) There might be a lingering over the east gate, but the glory was departing.

Ezekiel 11

This is entirely confirmed by chapter 11 which completes this portion of the prophecy. In the vision of Jehovah Ezekiel is given to behold the excessive and scoffing presumption of the leaders in Jerusalem who counselled the king Zedekiah to his and their ruin in flat contradiction of Jehovah’s message by Jeremiah, whose style and imagery they seem to have adopted to suit their own purpose.

“Moreover the Spirit lifted me up, and brought me unto the east gate of Jehovah’s house, which looketh eastward: and behold at the door of the gate five and

twenty men; among whom I saw Janzaniah the son of Azur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, princes of the people. Then said he unto me, Son of man, these are the men that devise mischief, and give wicked counsel in this city: which say, It is not near; let us build houses: this city is the cauldron, and we be the flesh. Therefore prophesy against them, prophesy, O son of man. And the Spirit of Jehovah fell upon me, and said unto me, Speak; Thus saith Jehovah; Thus have ye said, O house of Israel: for I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them. Ye have multiplied your slain in this city, and ye have filled the streets thereof with the slain. Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Your slain whom ye have laid in the midst of it, they are the flesh, and this city is the cauldron: but I will bring you forth out of the midst of it. Ye have feared the sword; and I will bring a sword upon you, saith the Lord Jehovah. And I will bring you out of the midst thereof, and deliver you into the hands of strangers, and will execute judgments among you. Ye shall fall by the sword; I will judge you in the border of Israel; and ye shall know that I am Jehovah. This city shall not be your cauldron, neither shall ye be the flesh in the midst thereof; but I will judge you in the border of Israel: and ye shall know that I am Jehovah: for ye have not walked in my statutes, neither executed my judgments, but have done after the manners of the heathen that are round about you." (Ver. 1-12)

There appears no sufficient reason in the similarity of the number twenty-five for identifying the scoffers here described with the sun-worshippers between the porch and the altar of Ezekiel 8. Here the leaders at least were princes of the people, not of the sanctuary or of the priests. As the previous scene set forth the religious

apostasy, so this the audacity and infidelity of their civil chiefs, though in the door of the gate of Jehovah's house. They were the evil counsellors who thwarted His word through the prophet to Zedekiah. Jeremiah exhorted the Jews in Jerusalem to submission under the king of Babylon, and the captives to build houses and plant gardens and raise up families in their exile, praying for the peace of the city, till the seventy years were accomplished and a remnant should return to Jerusalem. The false prophets predicted smooth things both at home and abroad, in every way fomenting rebellion under the colour of patriotism and pretending Jehovah's name while encouraging to insubjection under His humbling hand.

Verse 3 is somewhat obscure and has given occasion to much difference of version and interpretation in detail, while the general truth seems plain enough. In the Septuagint it is taken interrogatively: "Have not the houses been newly built?" So nearly the Vulgate. Gesenius and Ewald follow in somewhat similar style: "Is it not near, the building of houses?" Rosenmller, De Wette, and Young, on the contrary, take it thus: "It is not near to build houses;" that is, the time of peace for such work is far off, meaning that they were resolved to resist the Chaldeans to the last, spite of the prophet's warning. Luther and Diodati are substantially like the Authorized Bible; and so too the modern translation of Leeser as well as of Henderson.

Certain it is that they set themselves against the true prophets and even turned the figure of Jeremiah into derision by making it a phrase favourable to their own policy. Therefore the marked emphasis with which Ezekiel was called on to prophesy against them, the

Spirit of Jehovah being said to fall upon him, with a renewed charge to speak in Jehovah's name, for their secrets were out in His light. And Jehovah after recounting their murderous doings retorts on them their proverb; only it was their slain that were the flesh and the city the cauldron, while they themselves are told to get out, but not to escape as they expected. Jehovah would bring on them the dreaded sword, and this outside the city to which they were so closely cleaving, for they should be delivered into the hand of strangers for judgment. Nay, Jehovah solemnly declares that He would judge them on the boundary of Israel, and they should know that He is Jehovah. Thus the city should not be to them for a cauldron, nor they flesh in its midst, but judged by Jehovah at the borders, forced to feel then in whose statutes they had not walked, and whose judgments they had not executed, but rather acting according to those of the nations around.

Thereon, as Ezekiel prophesied, Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died (ver. 13, 14), which drew out the prophet into sorrow and intercession for the remnant. For the captive loved the men, scornful though they might be, who dwelt in Jerusalem. On this the word of Jehovah impresses on him that his brethren emphatically, the men of his relationship, "yea the whole house of Israel," were objects of contempt to the haughty inhabitants of Jerusalem who assumed the most self-complacent airs because they were still in the city of solemnities, as against their brethren in captivity. (Ver. 15) "Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they

shall come. Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. And they shall come thither, and they shall take away all the detestable things thereof and all the abominations thereof from thence. And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. But as for them whose heart walketh after the heart of their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their way upon their own heads, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 16-21)

In a day of sin and ruin it is ever thus. Those who boast in antiquity and order and succession and rule as a lineal and exclusive possession are but ripening for divine judgment; while the most decried and despised are such as have the truth and blessing in circumstances of humiliation and weakness, as Jehovah here promised to be a little sanctuary to the scattered Jews in the countries whither they came; and that they should be gathered from the peoples and have the land given them; and this too with one heart and a new spirit, the heart of stone being supplanted by one of flesh in order to obedient ways and true recognition of and by God, while the obdurate idolaters should meet with the due reward of their deeds.

"Then did the cherubim lift up their wings, and the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. And the glory of Jehovah went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain

which is on the east side of the city." (Ver. 22, 23) Then there is a farther removal of the divine glory, not from the temple only but from Jerusalem. It went up from the midst of the city and stood on mount Olivet "Then the Spirit took me up, and brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to them of the Captivity. So the vision that I had seen went up from me. Then I spake unto them of the captivity all the things that Jehovah had showed me." (Ver. 24, 25) It reminds one of Matthew 28 where the risen Jesus is seen on a mountain of Galilee, giving His great commission to the disciples as to all the nations, without saying a word about His ascension to heaven. It is Jerusalem left aside indeed, a remnant sent out by the Lord resuming His Galilean place in resurrection, the beautiful pledge of His return spite of present rejection. The curtain drops over the Shechinah when it reaches Olivet, till we hear of its reappearance in the last chapters for the latter day. Compare also Zech. 14:4 with Acts 1:9-12.

The prophet brought back in Spirit, though all the while in his own home with the elders before him in bodily presence, declares the awful scenes he was given to behold: what consolation for the captives!

Ezekiel 12

After the introductory cluster of visions the prophet was given to impress on the people the certainty of the approaching and more complete downfall of all their hopes for the present; for to fond and vain expectations clung not only the haughty remnant in the land but even many of the captives on the Chebar.

"And the word of Jehovah came unto me saying, Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house,

who have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not; for they are a rebellious house. Therefore, thou son of man, prepare thee articles for removing, and remove by day in their sight; and thou shalt remove from thy place to another place in their sight: it may be they will consider, though they be a rebellious house. Then shalt thou bring forth thine articles by day in their sight, as articles for removing: and thou shalt go forth at even in their sight, as they that go forth into captivity. Dig thou through the wall in their sight, and carry out thereby. In their sight shalt thou bear it upon thy shoulders, and carry it forth in the twilight: thou shalt cover thy face, that thou see not the ground: for I have set thee for a sign unto the house of Israel." (Ver. 1-6) It was a symbolical representation that the land should be swept once more with the besom of destruction, instead of the speedy return and deliverance for which the mass of the Jews looked spite of every divine assurance to the contrary.

Hence we see that Jehovah in a lively way would here fix on the conscience of the captives the folly of indulging in such dreams. For alas! they were rebellious, yea, the rebellious house. Moses had reproached them in his song as a perverse and crooked and very froward generation, children in whom was no faith; and David in the ascension psalm (Ps. 68) had characterized them as "the rebellious." If Ezekiel hears and has to repeat the divine sentence to the same effect, it is no new thing, but rather the manifestation, when judgment was in course of execution, that the old evil was rampant, which neither the fresh rigour of youth had extirpated, nor their national prime and power. It was no mere rising, or bright spot, but an active, deep, and old plague

of leprosy “And I did so as I was commanded: I brought forth my articles by day, as articles for captivity, and in the even I digged through the wall with mine hand; I brought it forth in the twilight, and I bare it upon my shoulder in their sight.” (Ver. 7)

The next message explains all plainly and fully “And in the morning came the word of Jehovah unto me, saying. Son of man, hath not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said unto thee, What doest thou? Say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; This burden concerneth the prince in Jerusalem, and all the house of Israel that are among them. Say, I am your sign: like as I have done, so shall it be done unto them: they shall remove and go into captivity. And the prince that is among them shall bear upon his shoulder in the twilight, and shall go forth: they shall dig through the wall to carry out thereby: he shall cover his face, that he see not the ground with his eyes. My net also will I spread upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare: and I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there. And I will scatter toward every wind all that are about him to help him, and all his bands; and I will draw out the sword after them. And they shall know that I am Jehovah, when I shall scatter them among the nations, and disperse them in the countries. But I will leave a few men of them from the sword, from the famine, and from the pestilence; that they may declare all their abominations among the heathen whither they come; and they shall know that I am Jehovah.” (Ver. 8-16) It is assumed that an action, so strange on the prophet’s part as preparing for departure by day, and taking it muffled in the darkness of night, would arouse the Jews; and here was

the answer he must give. The prince in Jerusalem, Zedekiah, and all the house of Israel there, were intended by this “burden” or “oracle.” And very strikingly were both this prediction and Jeremiah’s fulfilled to the letter. Josephus says that the king fancying a contradiction made up his mind to believe neither. Certain it is that Zedekiah did not escape the Chaldeans, but was delivered into the hands of the Babylonian king, and spoke to him mouth to mouth, and his eyes beheld his eyes; equally certain that after being taken in a snare he was brought to Babylon, and yet did not see it though he died there. The covering of the prophet’s face so that he should not see the ground was but a shadow of the stern reality. How solemn and humiliating for Jehovah’s people to know that He is Jehovah by His desolating and dispersing judgments! Yet even this would He turn to account, leaving a few from this judgment to declare all their abominations among the heathen; for who could so gravely bear witness against idolatry as those that had thus suffered through yielding to the snare?

Next, Ezekiel was to be a representative man to the people of the land in partaking of bread and water with every token of alarm. “And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, eat thy bread with quaking, and drink thy water with trembling and with carefulness; and say unto the people of the land, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and of the land of Israel; They shall eat their bread with carefulness, and drink their water with astonishment, that her land may be desolate from all that is therein, because of the violence of all them that dwell therein. And the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and

the land shall be desolate; and ye shall know that I am Jehovah." (Ver. 17-20)

The chapter closes with messages which rebuke the incredulity of the people in the prophetic word, so common as to become proverbial. "And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth? Tell them therefore, thus saith the Lord Jehovah; I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision. For there shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel. For I am Jehovah: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged: for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord Jehovah. Again the word of Jehovah came to me saying, Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off. Therefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, There shall none of my words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 21-28) God would give in that day such an earnest of all that is coming that people could not for shame put all off to the end of days. "In your days, O rebellious house, I will say the word, and it shall be performed, saith the Lord Jehovah." What a testimony to man's dislike of God in that he so readily swallows the enemy's bait that the time of fulfilment is far off! He does not like God's interference, whose kingdom in any full sense is intolerable. But what says the prophet

Ezekiel? “None of my words shall be longer deferred: for I will speak a word, and it shall be performed, saith the Lord Jehovah.”

Ezekiel 13

The next chapter takes up the pretenders to the mind of Jehovah in Israel, the men and women who prophesied without divine warrant, instruments of the enemy and adversaries of His will to the ruin of His people. This was one of the most painful trials to the spirit then, as now to us in the church are false brethren and false prophets, whose aim is self, and whose means are flattering on one side, and on the other an overbearing style suited to those whom they wish to influence, ever seeking the depreciation and injury of such as maintain the truth in the Lord’s name. Compare 2 Corinthians 11.

“And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of Jehovah; Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts. Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of Jehovah. They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, Jehovah saith: and Jehovah hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word. Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, Jehovah saith it; albeit I have not spoken? (Ver. l-7) To be a prophet out of one’s own heart is to ensure judgment from God, who, however gracious and

merciful, must needs be jealous of His majesty and truth, thus utterly misrepresented and profaned. What could be the end for themselves and such as followed them but destruction? They were like foxes in the ruins, full of craft and mischief. No wonder that there was no going up into the breaches nor making up a fence round the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of Jehovah; like those who desired at a later day to make a fair show in the flesh, and constrained the Gentiles to be circumcised, only lest themselves should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. Such persons feared not Jehovah nor had His secret but only falsehood and divination, seeing that they said “Jehovah saith” when they were not sent by Him, and yet they made men hope for the fulfilment of the word. Hence the solemn appeal by Ezekiel: “have ye not seen a false vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination? and ye say, Jehovah saith, when I have not spoken.”

Then follows the divine denunciation. “Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, saith the Lord Jehovah. And mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies: they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the Lord Jehovah. Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying. Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar: say unto them which daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower: and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it. Lo, when the wall is

fallen, shall it not be said unto you, Where is the daubing wherewith ye have daubed it? Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, I will even rend it with a stormy wind in my fury; and there shall be an overflowing shower in mine anger, and great hailstones in my fury to consume it. So will I break down the wall that ye have daubed with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundation thereof shall be discovered, and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof: and ye shall know that I am Jehovah. Thus will I accomplish my wrath upon the wall, and upon them that have daubed it with untempered mortar, and will say unto you, The wall is no more, neither they that daubed it; to wit, the prophets of Israel which prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and which see visions of peace for her, and there is no peace, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 8-16) What an awful thing it is when the enemies of God morally compel Him to be their enemy! Long-suffering and plenteous in mercy He is slow to wrath; but when patience continued longer would ruin His saints and compromise His own honour, war is proclaimed against those who thus hypocritically undermine His glory and thwart His holy will as to His people; and the anger of Jehovah is according to His majesty. He is against the prophets of vanity, and His hand upon them. "In the secret council of my people shall they not be, and in the register of the house of Israel shall they not be written, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel." Their names should be blotted out as having forfeited their rights, a public dealing on the earth and not a question of eternal judgment, though it is equally clear that their portion then will be everlasting destruction. To make it a deprivation of church membership here and of communion of saints in

heaven is to lose all just sense of the passage. Further, the character of sin is remembered in the punishment. Did the false prophets soothe the national feeling of the Jews by promising a speedy return from exile? They themselves should never see the land from which they were, or were to be, expelled by the foe; and they should thus learn who and what was their Jehovah God with whose name they had trifled. He will not have His people led away to their ruin with impunity to the seducers, least of all hear the holy name of peace perverted to selfish mischief; as when a wall of defence is built, but only daubed with mortar that will not hold. What is it but a sham? It shall fall, is the word to builders. “An overflowing shower cometh, and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall, and a storm of wind shall rend.” So the prophets elsewhere set forth the future and last troubles of Israel, as in Psalm 83, Isaiah 28, 29, Ezek. 38:22, Revelation 8, 16. To such a judgment Jehovah pledges Himself, so that every refuge of lies shall be razed and the misleaders and misled be destroyed with the awful conviction that it is God who is thus judging the false prophets and their vision of peaceless peace.

And not men only, but women too took their sad part in the moral havoc of Israel. Therefore the word of Jehovah: “Likewise, thou son of man, set thy face against the daughters of thy people, which prophesy out of their own heart; and prophesy thou against them, and say, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Woe to the women that sew pillows to all armholes, and make kerchiefs upon the head of every stature to hunt souls! Will ye hunt the souls of my people, and will ye save the souls alive that come unto you? And will ye pollute me among my people

for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, to slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls alive that should not live, by your lying to my people that hear your lies?" (Ver. 17-19) The influence of women has been great in this world for evil and for good; and as God has deigned to vouchsafe to some of them His best gifts, so we need not be surprised that Satan should employ those he can for ill. The particular form of evil here noticed is their pandering to the ears of their victims and thus catching souls in their toils for the most paltry objects in this life, morally slaying such as should not die and keeping alive such as should not live.

It is thus indeed that error ever acts. False doctrine emboldens the bad and seeks to alarm the good. So the world orders its religion. There may be curses and warnings, but they are powerless because explained away. Yet the rehearsal of them gives an appearance of hating iniquity and loving righteousness; and thus man walks in a vain show till in hell he lifts up his eyes, being in torments. On the other hand, grace is unpalatable to the world and seems a worse than heathenish tolerance of sin. Hence believers, who through love of ease and position go on with the world, never get the food their souls require as born of God, and thus pine in starvation and misery, abstaining in measure from the world's enjoyments and destitute of their proper christian comfort, putting off avowedly till they reach heaven that communion of saints and worship of their God and Father which ought to characterize them on the earth.

"Wherefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold, I am against your pillows, wherewith ye there hunt the souls to make them fly, and I will tear them from your arms, and will let the souls go, even the souls that ye hunt to

make them fly. Your kerchiefs also will I tear, and deliver my people out of your hand, and they shall be no more in your hand to be hunted; and ye shall know that I am Jehovah." (Ver. 20, 21) It is in vain to oppose God: strange that men or women should hope for success in such warfare! The truth is that will blinds by the enemy's wiles, and they realize not that it is with God they are contending till the struggle ends in their own everlasting confusion, and in the exposure of their devices before such as they hoped to make their victims. "Because ye sadden with falsehood the heart of the righteous whom I have not saddened, and strengthen the hands of the wicked that he should not return from his wicked way that I should save his life." (Ver. 22) God declares that the end of this their destruction fully is come, and withal deliverance to His people whom they had expected to delude. "Therefore ye shall see no more vanity, nor divine divinations: for I will deliver my people out of your hand: and ye shall know that I am Jehovah." (Ver. 23) Such is the constant knell of judgment on the enemies of Israel within and without. For sinners going on in their sins to know Jehovah is their doom under His mighty hand.

Ezekiel 14

The visit of the elders to the prophet becomes the occasion of a fresh revelation, though not in the form of a vision. As God was not deceived by their attitude of waiting to hear His word, so must not the prophet be moved from the stern and solemn duty imposed on him.

"Then came certain of the elders of Israel unto me, and sat before me. And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, these men have set up their idols in

their heart, and put the stumbling-block of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them? Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face and cometh to the prophet; I Jehovah will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols; that I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols." (Ver. 1-5) The holy seed had defiled themselves, and their guides were more' worthy of censure than any misled by their example. Whatever their appearance or pretension, they had "set up their idols in their heart." It was no question of outward force or influence. The elders liked these abominations; they ran after idols with secret greediness, and they gratified their lust after false gods by placing the stumbling-block of their iniquity before their face, in bold, open, deliberate rebellion against Jehovah. To come, then, under such circumstances, and professedly inquire into the mind of Jehovah, was but the shamelessness of the unjust. "Should I be enquired of at all by them?" To insult God by worshipping idols, and yet thus to come before His prophet, was too gross and obdurate, instead of any hopeful sign of repentance. The word for such is that Jehovah would answer him that comes according to the multitude of his idols. He is mighty and despises not any; but He will be no party to His own dishonour; and His judgments He makes salutary to those that fear Him. How else could He answer the rebellious elders but in a way to make His majesty felt? They sought an answer in curiosity; He would prove the worthlessness of their many idols, "that I may catch the house of Israel by their heart because

they have become all of them estranged from me by their idols." Elders and people they were gone from God who would deal with their heart — above them wherein they dealt proudly.

Then comes a still more explicit message to the house of Israel in verses 6-11, that they should repent and turn from their idols: otherwise Jehovah should answer such inquirers by Himself, and this by cutting them off, whether a deceived prophet or such as might seek to them. "Therefore say unto the House of Israel, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations. For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to enquire of him concerning me: I Jehovah will answer him by myself: and I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am Jehovah. And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I Jehovah have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity: the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him; that the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, neither be polluted any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be my people, and I may be their God, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 6-11) Thus does God act judicially, showing Himself froward to a froward people, and sending those who lie

to such as love a lie; that both may be punished together, and Israel may learn the needed lesson, and be His people as He their God.

In verse 12 begins another word of Jehovah to Ezekiel. “Son of man, if a land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it: though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord Jehovah.

“If I cause noisome beasts to pass through the land, and they spoil it, so that it be desolate, that no man may pass through because of the beasts: though these three men were in it, as I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters; they only shall be delivered, but the land shall be desolate.

“Or if I bring a sword upon that land and say, Sword, go through the land; so that I cut off man and beast from it: though these three men were in it, as I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they only shall be delivered themselves.

“Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my fury upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast: though Noah, Daniel and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness.” (Ver. 13-20)

The prophet hears the awful sentence that, when the last excess of evil brings any one of God’s strokes of judgment on a land, the three saints, whose intercession appears at critical points of the divine history of man,

could not avail to deliver save their own souls by their righteousness (for it is a question here of government in this world, not of grace for eternal life). If famine were inflicted, if wild beasts, if a sword, if a pestilence, not even Noah nor Daniel nor Job should save son or daughter beyond themselves. But what should it be when all four sore plagues are sent by God on Jerusalem? Who could screen the guilty people? “For thus saith the Lord Jehovah, How much more when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast? Yet, behold, therein shall be left a remnant that shall be brought forth, both sons and daughters: behold, they shall come forth unto you, and ye shall see their way and their doings: and ye shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, even concerning all that I have brought upon it. And they shall comfort you, when ye see their ways and their doings: and ye shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, saith the Lord Jehovah.” (Ver. 21-23)

Thus, whatever the love the prophet bore the people, whatever the sorrow with which he contemplated blow after blow that fell on them, he is brought at length heartily to acquiesce in the dealings of Jehovah, however sorely He judged; who never causes a needless tear, and causes mercy to rejoice over judgment.

Ezekiel 15

The next message from Jehovah assumes a sort of parabolic form, the application of which is rendered certain by the closing verses of this brief chapter.

“And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, What is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest? Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon? behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire devoureth both the ends of it, and the middle of it is burned. Is it meet for any work? Behold, when it was whole, it was meet for no work: how much less shall it be meet yet for any work, when the fire hath devoured it, and it is burned?” (Ver. 1-5)

There is doubtless a real and intended distinction between the different trees as employed symbolically in scripture. Three may be here briefly compared, and all of them trees valued for their fruit; the fig tree, the olive, and the vine. The fig tree is the only one which is applied exclusively to Israel; so much so, that one can scarcely fail to see in it the peculiar representative of that nation as distinguished from the Gentiles. Compare especially Matthew 24 with Luke 21; where we have in the first the fig tree alone, in the second (where Gentiles are introduced in accordance with the bearing of the Gospel) “the fig tree and all the trees.”

The olive, we may see in Romans 11, embraces first the Jews as the natural branches of the tree of promise and testimony on earth growing out of the stock of Abraham; then, on their cutting off because of unbelief, the Gentiles grafted in contrary to nature as now; and lastly, through pure mercy, though in accordance with the promises, Israel to be grafted in again on their repentance, when the Gentile is cut off, and grace restores the chosen nation for ever to their own olive tree.

The vine is more diversified in its application, taking in first Israel, who became empty, then the Lord with the disciples as the branches of Him the only true vine, and lastly the vine of the earth when Christendom abandons the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ, and at the end of the age divine judgment falls unsparingly.

The vine is of no value if it be not fruitful. Other trees, if they never bear or when they cease bearing, may be excellent for purposes of art or utility. But not so with the vine: if there be not fruit, it is only good to be burnt. And if useless before the fire touches it, what when both ends are devoured and the middle is burnt?

Just so, says the Spirit of God, is it with the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Being barren of fruit Godward, they are devoted as fuel for the fires of divine judgment. If the Jews failed to represent the one true God, if they falsified the testimony committed to their charge, if they were traitors to His name, what could Jehovah do but consume as enemies those who of all men had the gravest responsibility to obey His law? To wink at their moral turpitude and their abominable idolatry could not become the all-seeing God who was pleased to dwell there only among all the nations of the earth; and the time was not yet come to lay, in the death and resurrection of Christ, the foundation of a new creation which should neither fall nor pass away. The living God must therefore deal with His people according to the ground taken in covenant between Him and them; and hence the action here announced by the prophet. “Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, As the vine tree among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so will I give the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will set my face against them; they shall go out

from one fire, and another fire shall devour them: and ye shall know that I am Jehovah, when I set my face against them. And I will make the land desolate, because they have committed a trespass, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 6-8)

How energetic is the assurance! Not only would Jehovah give the inhabitants of Jerusalem like the vine for fuel, but he would "set His face against them." And what does not this portend to such as know His name and His necessary hatred of evil! As if it were not definite enough that Jehovah thus proclaims His settled antagonism, it is added that they shall go out from the fire, and the fire shall devour them. So indeed it was with the guilty city of the Great King. If the fire was left here, it was but to encounter the fire there. Escape there was none; for no real repentance followed, nor was God mocked. And He who had of old judged mankind as a whole, or in the narrowest circle of their guilt, must deal with yet more nicety of care in the case of His own elect people in their capital. Had they hearkened to Him and walked in His ways, He would have both subdued their enemies and satisfied themselves with all good things; but they would not hearken to Jehovah and chose them strange gods of the heathen. Thus Jehovah must either acquiesce in His own dishonour if He sustained Jerusalem in spite of its apostasy, or compel them to know that He is Jehovah when He set His face against them. Sorrowful alternative! As the first could not be, the latter was the only course merited by their iniquities — the only road open till Messiah came, and, bearing their judgment, made it righteous for the mercies of God to begin afresh on grounds of sovereign grace. As things were then, the

prophet could but announce “I will make the land desolate, because they have trespassed a trespass, saith the Lord Jehovah.”

Ezekiel 16

If in the preceding chapter the symbol of the fruitless vine destined only for the fire set forth the negative side of Jerusalem’s condition with its sure consequences, its positive iniquity is vividly represented in the allegory of our chapter. “Again the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations.” (Ver. 1, 2)

As the chosen people were intended and bound to supplant the nations which the land spued out because of their abominations, no figure can be conceived more cutting than that which represents the origin and nativity of Jerusalem to be of Canaan, with the Amorite for a father and the Hittite a mother. (Ver. 3) It is of course moral, not historical: so Isaiah branded the rulers as “of Sodom,” and the people as “of Gomorrah.” From the earliest days we see how the two races specified by Ezekiel stood in the eyes of the fathers. (Gen. 15:16; Gen. 27:46)

But scripture itself shows us that a base birth cannot bind to evil where God is drawn and leant on in the least. How was it here? A wretched outcast void of the commonest care or pity, exposed in the field on the day when she was born. (Ver. 4, 5) Then Jehovah passed by, and saw her polluted with her blood and said to her in her blood, Live; and this most emphatically. (Ver. 6) Under His fostering culture she grew up to womanhood, dressed and decked with the most splendid ornaments; and Jehovah entered into covenant with her and took

her as His own. And she who was made thus cleansed and beautiful and adorned, prospered into a kingdom with a fame that went abroad on account of the splendour which Jehovah put on her. (Ver. 7-14)

And what was the return? “But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown.” It is a sorrowful picture, and not more sad than true. The beauty of Jerusalem was for every passer by. (Ver. 15, 16) “And of thy garments thou didst take and make for thyself high places with divers colours” [or patches, as the expression of the prophet may mean, in contempt of the hangings the Jewish ladies wove for heathen gods and goddesses, Astarte in particular]. The idolatrous uncleanness of Jerusalem was beyond anything that had been or was to be. And it was marked by this, that all the countless favours of her divine husband (for such her Maker was to her) she squandered on the filthy idols of the heathen.

“Thou hast also taken thy fair jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given thee, and madest to thyself images of men, and didst commit whoredom with them, and tookest thy broidered garments, and coveredst them: and thou hast set mine oil and mine incense before them. My meat also which I gave thee, fine flour, and oil, and honey, wherewith I fed thee, thou hast even set it before them for a sweet savour: and thus it was, saith the Lord Jehovah. Moreover thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured. Is this of thy whoredoms a small matter, that thou hast slain my children, and delivered them to cause them to pass through the fire for them?” (Ver. 17-21) There was this added to His aggrieved heart, that with

all her abominations and her lewdness Jerusalem remembered not the days of her youth when she was naked and bare, polluted with her blood. (Ver. 22)

Jehovah then details the excessive impurity to which Jerusalem turned with unbridled lust, not only in admitting every uncleanness of idolatry that passed by, but in going and courting idolatrous intercourse with the strangers on every side and to the most distant Gentiles, to the shame even of their Philistine neighbours who were content with their own gods. (Ver. 23-29)

It is a solemn yet certain truth that, when God's people depart from Him, they are apt to go farther astray than all others. Without the guardianship of Him whom they have slighted, they become the special sport of Satan and the most desired victim of his wiles, in order to compass by them the more effectually the dishonour of the living God, and if possible make a hopeless estrangement on His part. What a riddle is the moral history of the world and of man to all who see not the conflict between God and His enemy! Then Jerusalem was in question, now it is the Church; but it is ever the opposition of the devil to the Son of God, and universally in the especial arena, for the time being, of His glory.

"How weak [or, withered] is thine heart, saith the Lord Jehovah, seeing thou doest all these things, the work of an imperious whorish woman; in that thou buildest thine eminent place in the head of every way, and makest thine high place in every street; and hast not been as an harlot, in that thou scornest hire; but as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband! They give gifts to all whores: but thou givest thy gifts to all thy lovers, and hirest them, that

they may come unto thee on every side for thy whoredom. And the contrary is in thee from other women in thy whoredoms, whereas none followeth thee to commit whoredoms; and in that thou givest a reward, and no reward is given unto thee, therefore thou art contrary." (Ver. 30-34) This indeed was a tremendous aggravation of Jerusalem's guilt. They had nothing to gain; so blessed had they been of Jehovah. Others in their blind craving after goods they saw elsewhere might impute them to the gods of the hills or of the valleys, and so add idol to idol; but Jerusalem was inexcusable because she had nothing to desire from any one nation around, great or small, far or near. It was therefore lusting after false gods for mere lust; it was sinning her worst for the love of it, leaving the vilest strumpets excused comparatively with herself.

Jehovah thus summons the harlot Jerusalem to hear His sentence on their mad and insatiable wantonness. "Wherefore, O harlot, hear the word of Jehovah: thus saith the Lord Jehovah; because thy filthiness was poured out, and thy nakedness discovered through thy whoredoms with thy lovers, and with all the idols of thy abominations, and by the blood of thy children, which thou didst give unto them; behold, therefore, I will gather all thy lovers, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated; I will even gather them round about against thee, and will discover thy nakedness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness. And I will judge thee as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy. And I will also give thee into their hand, and they shall throw down thine eminent place, and shall

break down thy high places: they shall strip thee also of thy clothes, and shall take thy fair jewels, and leave thee naked and bare. They shall also bring up a company against thee, and they shall stone thee with stones, and thrust thee through with their swords. And they shall burn thine houses with fire, and execute judgment upon thee in the sight of many women: and I will cause thee to cease from playing the harlot, and thou also shalt give no hire any more. So, will I make my fury toward thee to rest, and my jealousy shall depart from thee, and I will be quiet and will be no more angry. Because thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth, but hast fretted me in all these things; behold, therefore, I also will recompense thy way upon thine head, saith the Lord Jehovah: and thou shalt not commit this lewdness above all thine abominations." (Ver. 35-43)

As to "filthiness" in verse 36, it seems more than doubtful that such a version can be sustained. It means copper or brass, and hence money or wealth, and appears to be an allusion to the unnatural way of Jerusalem in squandering all she had on her objects of idolatry. Such at any rate is the judgment of some of the best translators from the oldest of all, the Seventy, down to Mr. Isaac Leeser, the latest Jewish translator. It is supposed that the "filthiness" of the Authorized Version was derived from the idea of the poisonous incrustation of brass or copper; but this seems far-fetched and only justifiable if the context pointed to so figurative a notice and was incompatible with the more obvious sense. But this last I think even more appropriate and striking. God then threatens His guilty city with exposure before all her lovers and haters, and with such judgments as befit adultery, even abasement, desolation, stoning, cutting in

pieces, and burning, till His fury ceases and His jealousy turns away, and she should not practise this wickedness with, or in addition to, all her abominations.

Then the prophet represents (ver. 44) Jehovah giving the proverb that suits such iniquity — as the mother, her daughter — re-applying the moral relationship of Jerusalem, not to the father of the faithful or other heirs of promise, but to the flagitious races of Canaan. “Thou art thy mother’s daughter, that loatheth her husband and her children; and thou art the sister of thy sisters, which loatheth their husbands and their children: your mother was an Hittite, and your father an Amorite. And thine elder sister is Samaria, she and her daughters that dwell at thy left hand: and thy younger sister, that dwelleth at thy right hand, is Sodom and her daughters. Yet hast thou not walked after their ways, nor done after their abominations: but, as if that were a very little thing, thou wast corrupted more than they in all thy ways. As I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters. Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom; pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good. Neither hath Samaria committed half of thy sins; but thou hast multiplied thine abominations more than they, and hast justified thy sisters in all thine abominations which thou hast done. Thou also, which hast judged thy sisters, bear thine own shame for thy sins that thou hast committed more abominable than they: they are more righteous than thou: yea, be thou

confounded also, and bear thy shame, in that thou hast justified thy sisters." (Ver. 45-52) Jerusalem had exceeded not only Samaria her elder sister, but her younger sister Sodom. Jerusalem knew enough to judge them, but rushed with yet greater eagerness into greater abominations. Those when they knew God had not glorified Him as God, but thankless and vain gave Him up, and were themselves given up to false gods and to vile affections and to a reprobate mind. Yet even they were excusable compared with Jerusalem. "Be thou confounded also, and bear thy shame, in that thou hast justified thy sisters." How complete the change and profound the humiliation when the Jew feels and honestly confesses the truth as here pronounced by Jehovah! And so assuredly he yet will.

Alas! that repentance awaits a later day; but it will surely come, and Jerusalem long faithless will have her heart bowed before the incomparable faithfulness of Jehovah revealing Himself to her in Jesus whom she slew. That will be at the end of this age, when the predicted reversal of captivity is accomplished by grace. "And I will bring back again their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, and the captivity of thy captives in the midst of them, in order that thou mayest bear thine own shame and mayest be confounded in all that thou hast done when thou art a comfort to them. And thy sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate; and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former estate; and thou and thy daughters shall return to thy former estate. And thy sister Sodom was not a report in thy mouth in the day of thy pride, before thy wickedness was revealed, as at the

time of the reproach of the daughters of Aram [or Syria] and all round about her, the daughters of the Philistines that taunted thee round about." (Ver. 53-57) It is a poor view of the prophecy to lower it to the restoration of the Jews under Cyrus and to that participation in their fate which the races beyond the Dead Sea contiguous to Palestine then experienced. A greater and worse captivity was to follow under the fourth empire; but the reversal of their captivity awaits the bright day which will banish all sorrow from the earth for those who humble themselves before the returning and reigning Nazarene.

This is made still clearer by what follows. "Thou hast borne thyself, thy lewdness, and thy abominations, saith Jehovah. For thus saith the Lord Jehovah, I also will act toward thee as thou hast acted, who hast despised the oath, breaking the covenant. Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed, when thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger: and I will give them unto thee for daughters, but not by thy covenant. And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am Jehovah: that thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 58-63) It is the final restoration of Jerusalem under the new covenant, expressly here as elsewhere designated an everlasting covenant, and so in contrast with that of Sinai, under which restoration from guilt, above all from such unparalleled guilt, had been impossible. How

painful to find wrong doctrine like that of Fairbairn and Havernick who confound the two covenants, maintaining their substantial sameness, however different in form; still more to see that the modern error is but the inheritance from the greatest expositor of the Reformation, as his came down from the Fathers! It is fundamental ignorance of grace thus to confound it with law; and the mention of Samaria and Sodom especially ought to have afforded a distinct guard against the error. For it is of the deepest interest to see that the most guilty of the cities before the law and after it, are assured of restoration at the same time and on the same ground as Jerusalem. She will have them for sisters in that day, she who would not take up the name of one at least on her lips in the day of her pride and sin. But grace, God's grace, changes all for man, and changes man for all its consequences up to glory.

Ezekiel 17

We have here another of our prophet's most graphic illustrations of the actual position of things among the people of God, of the ruin impending because of the impiety of the king (and this too in the oath of Jehovah with the Gentile chief), and finally of the kingdom of Messiah which, the lowest in its first presentation, is exalted of God in due time over all the earth. Thus, though we may trace no slight connection between the latter part and such predictions as those of Isaiah 11; 53; Daniel 2:34, 35, 44, 45; Micah. 5; the prophecy has its own very distinct characteristics, as each of these prophecies also.

"And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, put forth a riddle and speak a parable unto the

house of Israel; and say, Thus hath said the Lord Jehovah, The great eagle, great of wings, long of pinion, which was rich in many colours, came unto Lebanon and took the highest branch of the cedar; he cropped the topmost of its young twigs, and brought it to the land of traffic; he set it in a city of merchants. And he took of the seed of the land, and put it in a field of seed; he placed it by great waters, he set it as a willow. And it sprouted, and became a spreading vine of low stature, the tendrils of which should turn towards him, and its roots be under him: so it became a vine and brought forth branches and sent out shoots." (Ver. 1-6)

The great eagle is none other than the king of Babylon whom God in sovereign wisdom made head of the Gentile imperial system, after Israel's proved moral ruin and rebellion against Jehovah. Indeed another prophet had already employed a similar figure of Nebuchadnezzar. (Jer. 48:40; Jer. 49:22) But here it is wrought into a complete allegory, for the cedar on Lebanon denotes royalty in Israel vested in the house of David, which was now for its sins in servitude to the head of the Gentiles. Jehoiakim is the king of Judah who is here described as the broken-off topmost bough, whom Nebuchadnezzar took away with himself to Babylon, then the most famous city of antiquity not only for grandeur but for commerce. (Isa. 13:19; Isa. 43:14) Nor this only; for the conqueror set over Jerusalem another king, yet from the seed of the land, not a stranger lord but from the house of David, Mattaniah, uncle ("brother") of the exiled king, under the new name given by his Gentile master.

There Zedekiah might have flourished under the fealty due to the Babylonish king of kings. But the sole

condition under which God would have secured peace and a measure of prosperity was subjection to the Gentile empire, recognizing it as God's discipline of His people because of their incurable disobedience and of their kings. Zedekiah was as a willow, yet placed beside great waters. His safety lay in acquiescing in faithful vassalage to Nebuchadnezzar, humbling himself under the mighty hand of God; or according to the figure employed, a spreading vine of low stature, with branches, turned towards him who planted it, and its roots under him. Thus the vine might have produced not only branches and roots but fruit.

Alas! it was not so, spite of ample prophetic warning and entreaty. The new king, as the people of old, looked to Egypt for help — to the Egyptians who were men, not God, and their horses flesh, not spirit; as of old to lust after the good things of Egypt — so now to get clear of the yoke of Babylon strove always, high or low, to the dishonour of God. So the prophet teaches us here. "And there was another great eagle with great wings and much plumage; and, behold, this vine did bend its roots toward him and shot forth its tendrils toward him, that he might water it from the terraces of its plantation. It was planted in a good soil by great waters, that it might bring forth branches, and that it might bear fruit, that it might be a goodly vine. Say thou, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Shall it prosper? shall he not pull up the roots thereof, and cut off the fruit thereof, that it wither? it shall wither in all the leaves of her spring, even without great power or many people to pluck it up by the roots thereof. Yea, behold, being planted, shall it prosper? shall it not utterly wither, when the east wind toucheth it? it shall wither in the furrows where it grew." (Ver.

8-10) Here the second great eagle is the king of Egypt, who sought the empire of the world and contended for it with Nebuchadnezzar. But God rules, and gave it to the king of Babylon. It was but providence as yet. The kingdom in the first Adam's hands had come to nothing. Israel, Judah, David's house, had utterly failed and only lived to bring fresh obloquy on His name of Jehovah who had chosen them. The day was not yet come for the Second man, the last Adam, true son of David and of man. Hence God provisionally left this universal supremacy in the hands of the basest of men for the deepest lesson to those who preferred their ways to the living God; and the birthplace of exaltation against the true God and of false gods became the scourge and prison of Israel in the persons of David's house and the people still left in their low state. But they, above all Zedekiah, whom most of all it became to know the will of God, sought the help of Egypt in the fond hope of gaining independence of Babylon. To turn thus toward Pharaoh was rejection of Jehovah, not merely of Nebuchadnezzar, and would entail their own destruction with no great effort on the part of their Chaldean master. A blast of that "east wind" would suffice to wither up the fruitless vine, to dry it up utterly in the beds or terraces where it grew.

"Moreover the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Say now to the rebellious house, Know ye not what these things mean? tell them, behold, the king of Babylon is come to Jerusalem, and hath taken the king thereof, and the princes thereof, and led them with him into Babylon; and hath taken of the king's seed, and made a covenant with him, and hath taken an oath of him: he hath also taken the mighty of the land: that the kingdom might be

base, that it might not lift itself up, but that by keeping of his covenant it might stand. But he rebelled against him in sending his ambassadors into Egypt, that they might give him horses and much people. Shall he prosper? shall he escape that doeth such things, or shall he break the covenant, and be delivered? As I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die. Neither shall Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company make for him in the war, by casting up mounts, and building forts to cut off many persons: seeing he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, when, lo, he had given his hand, and hath done all these things, he shall not escape. Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah: As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head. And I will spread my net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon, and will plead with him there for his trespass that he hath trespassed against me. And all his fugitives with all his bands shall fall by the sword, and they that remain shall be scattered toward all winds: and ye shall know that I Jehovah have spoken it." (Ver. 11-21)

Here the case stands out in the light, the enigma is solved, and the parable has its interpretation appended to it by the Spirit. Jehovah arraigns the son of David then on the throne of perfidy against Himself as well as Nebuchadnezzar. He had violated his covenant with the Chaldeans, and this when sealed with the name of Jehovah. And had it come to this that the heathen king Nebuchadnezzar had more respect for the oath of

Jehovah than David's son, the king of Judah? Such conduct on the part of Zedekiah therefore in every point of view made it impossible for God to shield the guilty king and people more; and the less because they bore His name. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." Judgment must begin at the house of God; for there they say they see, and therefore their sin remains. God will be sanctified in all that come nigh Him; and if sin be always sin, it is least excusable where His word is known and His name held up before men. Justly therefore was Zedekiah to be taken in the net of divine retribution, and to die disappointed in the help he trusted to have from Pharaoh and his great army in the hour of his greatest straits. His prisoner in Babylon, whose covenant he had broken! — so bitterly was Jehovah's oath recompensed on his own head, when He pleaded with him for his trespass, and slew his fugitives, and scattered to every quarter those who remained, and thus proved the reality of His own outraged name.

But the chapter does not close without a far different prospect. "Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent: in the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I Jehovah have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and

have made the dry tree to flourish: I Jehovah have spoken and have done it." (Ver 22-24)

It is Messiah in His kingdom, not suffering on earth nor coming from heaven, but the rightfully reigning king of Israel, and hence later on designated as David, the true Beloved under whose sceptre the whole people will be once more re-united, never again to be divided by folly, never more to fall by idolatrous sin or any other.

This is in no way the mystery of the kingdom that we know now, in no way the day of rejection in grace for Him or His, but of power — judicial yet withal beneficent on earth. It is not the calling out of souls from the world to a glorified Christ on high, but the land and all the earth blessed under the reign of Him, who sets the sanctuary of Jehovah in the midst of Israel for evermore. Without denying that Zerubbabel might be a speedy but passing pledge of the great King and mighty reign of peace and blessing here foreshadowed, I cannot but regard it as a paltry answer and end to so glorious a promise. But ill as one may think of the Grotian interpretation, that of the ancients and moderns seems to me even more injurious and remote from the truth, whereby Israel's hopes are blotted out from God's mercy, and the church is lowered to an usurpation of their promises and earthly blessing and glory, instead of being maintained in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings now, as she looks for heavenly joy and glory in His love at His coming.

Ezekiel 18

This and the following chapter conclude the portion of the prophecy which follows up the introductory vision of the glory of God departing from Jerusalem after His

providential use of Nebuchadnezzar. It consists of a moral judgment which proves the need of an external judgment, wherein they should know that He who speaks and acts is Jehovah.

“The word of Jehovah came unto me again, saying, What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth it shall die But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right, and hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither have lifted up his eyes to the house of Israel,” etc. (Ver. 1-6)

This is much to be weighed. At the captivity God acts on the murmuring of His people and ends any further governmental dealings on the ground of Exodus 34:6, 7. Henceforth He would take them on their own terms; and as they complained of the hardship of suffering for the delinquencies of their fathers, He would now give them their own deserts. It is evident that a sinner must suffer for sin; and if he challenge the justice of paying the penalty of a parent’s evil, he cannot deny that he ought to be punished for his own. All were God’s, alike the souls of fathers and of sons; and the sinner must die. There was no relief or escape on any such pretext.

The first case is a man himself just and doing judgment and justice, in relation to God, and to his neighbour, not only in refusing impurity and unrighteousness, but also in loving care of the distressed, refusing selfish advantage, abstaining from iniquity, and maintaining

equity between man and man, withal, walking in the divine statutes: such an one shall surely live. (Ver. 5-9)

But what if his son should be a housebreaker, a bloodshedder, or the like, should he live" "If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood, and that doeth the like to any one of these things, and that doeth not any of those duties, but even hath eaten upon the mountains, and defiled his neighbour's wife, hath oppressed the poor and needy, hath spoiled by violence, hath not restored the pledge, and hath lifted up his eyes to the idols, hath committed abomination, hath given forth upon usury, and hath taken increase: shall he then live? he shall not live: he hath done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him" (Ver. 10-13) Such is the second.

Suppose a third case — a son warned by the wicked ways of his father. "Now, lo, if he beget a son, that seeth all his father's sins which he hath done, and considereth, and doeth not such like, that hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, hath not defiled his neighbour's wife, neither hath oppressed any, hath not withholder the pledge, neither hath spoiled by violence, but hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment, that hath taken off his hand from the poor, that hath not received usury nor increase, hath executed my judgments, hath walked in my statutes; he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live." (Ver. 14-17)

These are then briefly discussed and compared in verses 18-20. "As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, spoiled his brother by violence, and did that which is not

good among his people, lo, even he shall die in his iniquity. Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? when the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." The wicked father must perish; the son warned by it shall live. There is thus the way clear for the maxim — "the soul that sinneth, it shall die;" neither the son suffering for his father's wrong nor the father for his son's, but each reaping as he had sown.

But new cases come before us in the following verses. Supposing the wicked to turn from all his sins, or the righteous from his righteousness, what then? Each must bear his own burden, of the Spirit reaping the blessed and suited results, of the flesh corresponding corruption. "But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord Jehovah: and not that he should turn from his ways, and live? But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath

trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die." (Ver. 21-24)

The mouth of Israel is closed. Their murmurs were but cavils. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? "Yet ye say, The way of Jehovah is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal? When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die. Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of Jehovah is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal?" (Ver. 25-29) It is apt ever to be thus. Those who arraign the ways of the Lord in mercy or judgment have never seen themselves in His light. How humbling for Israel or any that God should deign to justify His own dealings, or to bring home the conviction of our own sinfulness! "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord Jehovah. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord Jehovah: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye." (Ver. 30-32) It is a call to conscience, not the call of grace wherein God promises that He will give them a new heart and put a

new spirit within them, the truth of which will be self-loathing, true repentance, and fitness for future blessing. (Ezek. 36) The comparison of the two chapters of the same prophet is highly and strikingly instructive, the misuse of ours as common as it is miserably opposed to the gospel. The Spirit is here overwhelming them with the conviction of their sinfulness. The day is still future when God will plant Israel in their land, and bless them, born again, with every good thing on earth.

Ezekiel 19

Ezekiel 19 is a lamentation for the princes, as the previous one demonstrated the people's state, the soul's condition in all.

"Moreover take thou up a lamentation for the princes of Israel, and say, What is thy mother? A lioness: she lay down among lions, she nourished her whelps among young lions. And she brought up one of her whelps: it became a young lion, and it learned to catch the prey; it devoured men. The nations also heard of him; he was taken in their pit, and they brought him with chains unto the land of Egypt." (Ver. 1-4) Such was the end of Jehoahaz or Shallum, son of Josiah, unrighteous son of a righteous father, who died in Egypt whither Pharaoh-nechoh carried him prisoner.

But it fared no better with others from others; for God was forgotten, and evil ways ended as evilly. "Now when she saw that she had waited, and her hope was lost, then she took another of her whelps, and made him a young lion. And he went up and down among the lions, he became a young lion, and learned to catch the prey and devoured men. And he knew their desolate places, and he laid waste their cities; and the land was desolate,

and the fulness thereof, by the noise of his roaring. Then the nations set against him on every side from the provinces, and spread their net over him; he was taken in their pit. And they put him in ward in chains, and brought him to the king of Babylon: they brought him into holds, that his voice should no more be heard upon the mountains of Israel." (Ver. 5-9) Jehoiachin felt the chains of Nebuchadnezzar, as did Zedekiah with greater pain and ignominy, for indeed his guilt was great and bold against Jehovah. Hence the prophet could but bewail. "Thy mother is like a vine in thy blood, planted by the waters: she was fruitful and full of branches by reason of many waters. And she had strong rods for the sceptres of them that bare rule, and her stature was exalted among the thick branches, and she appeared in her height with the multitude of her branches. But she was plucked up in fury, she was cast down to the ground, and the east wind dried up her fruit: her strong rods were broken and withered; the fire consumed them. And now she is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty ground. And fire is gone out of a rod of her branches, which hath devoured her fruit, so that she hath no strong rod to be a sceptre to rule. This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation." (Ver. 10-14) It was not by weakness the chosen people or their princes fell; it was not by reason of strength that Egypt or Babylon prevailed. They turned from Jehovah to sin and must, as they do, serve the basest of the Gentiles in sorrow. The sceptre centres in Shiloh, who will return in power, as surely as He was crucified in weakness.

Ezekiel 20

The new division opens with a full and solemn exposure of Israel's sin, not merely in the light of Jehovah's present estimate but of His ways with them in the past and in the future. Indeed we never adequately judge our actual condition unless we are thus subject to the mind and purpose of God; for as we must weigh where He placed us at the first, so He would have us look onward to His end if we would be wise according to Him, and thus the better feel how our state answers to either.

"And it came to pass in the seventh year, in the fifth month, the tenth day of the month, that certain of the elders of Israel came to enquire of Jehovah and sat before me." (Ver. 1) It was a serious reckoning this which the prophet employed; but if humiliating to the people meanwhile (and this was no evil), it kept before faith the sure intervention of divine mercy when the chastening by Gentile hands had been told out in full score. Appearances bade fair for those who presented themselves from among the elders of Israel. They came to enquire of Jehovah: was not this faith? They sat before Ezekiel: was not this the reverent humility that honours Him in His servant?

"And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, speak unto the elders of Israel and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Are ye come to enquire of me? As I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, I will not be enquired of by you. Wilt thou judge them, son of man, wilt thou judge them? cause them to know the abominations of their fathers." (Ver. 2-4) He who searches the reins and the heart saw that there was no exercise of conscience before Him; and why answer

where there is only hollowness and hypocrisy? It was beneath Him to allow such trifling any more. “As I live, I will not let myself be enquired of longer by you.” At the same time He is pleased to justify His ways; and if the prophet would plead for them (or take them to task), he is directed to set their fathers’ abominations before them. God thus goes to the fountainhead of the mischief, and the people must judge the evil not merely in its effects but in its spring.

The prophet then was to say to them, “Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, In the day when I chose Israel, and lifted up mine hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob, and made myself known unto them in the land of Egypt, when I lifted up mine hand unto them, saying, I am Jehovah your God; in the day that I lifted up mine hand unto them, to bring them forth of the land of Egypt into a land that I had espied for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands: then said I unto them, Cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt: I am Jehovah your God. But they rebelled against me, and would not hearken unto me: they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt: then I said, I will pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I wrought for my name’s sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, among whom they were, in whose sight I made myself known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt.” (Ver. 5-9) With what impressive reiteration Jehovah reminds His people of His oath, swearing, as He could by no greater, by Himself, and thus wishing to show more abundantly the immutability

of His counsel! It is expressly of Israel that the apostle declares the gifts and calling of God are not subject to change of mind. For this very reason He judges and must judge their ways: else He would be compelled to sanction or excuse sin. As this never can be, He deals with the unfaithfulness of Israel, and this noticing it from the outset. Even then, spite of expostulations directed to each one, the abominations of their eyes and following of Egypt's idols drew out His anger, so that it became a question of letting it all out against them in that land. But mercy prevailed against judgment, and regard for His own name before the heathen.

"I therefore brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them my statutes, and showed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them. Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am Jehovah that sanctify them. But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and my sabbaths they greatly polluted: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them. But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, in whose sight I brought them out." (Ver. l0-14) When out of Egypt, Israel was no better than when in it; yea, their evil became more evident and less excusable. For they were in the solitudes of the wilderness with Jehovah, yet they sought false gods; they had his statutes and ordinances, yet they walked not accordingly but despised them; they had His sabbaths as a sign between Him and them, yet profaned them greatly. So

that Jehovah was again provoked to destroy Israel in the desert as before in Egypt: His own name, against which they sinned so proudly and perseveringly, was their shelter and defence. “Yet also I lifted up my hand unto them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands; because they despised my judgments, and walked not in my statutes, but polluted my sabbaths: for their heart went after their idols.” (Ver. 15, 16)

“Nevertheless mine eye spared them from destroying them, neither did I make an end of them in the wilderness. But I said unto their children in the wilderness, Walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols; I am Jehovah your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am Jehovah your God. Notwithstanding the children rebelled against me: they walked not in my statutes, neither kept my judgments to do them, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; they polluted my sabbaths: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the wilderness. Nevertheless I withdrew mine hand, and wrought for my name’s sake, that it should not be polluted in the face of the heathen, in whose sight I brought them forth.” (Ver. 17-22) Jehovah was moved with compassion, but He must assert His authority, the rightness of His judgments, and the special value of His sabbaths,5 as between Him and them. In vain! The children in the wilderness were as bad as their fathers who fell; and nothing but His own

care for the name they profaned stood between Israel and destruction. But now the hand that was lifted up to the seed of Jacob's house for purposes of mercy and goodness was lifted up to them in the wilderness, before they even entered the land of Canaan, that He would scatter them among the nations and disperse them through the countries. Compare Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, 32. On the other hand, when it became a question of carrying out the long-suspended threat, Amos is explicit that the captivity and dispersion of the people befell them because of their idolatrous rebellion against Jehovah in the wilderness. "Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? But ye have borne the tabernacles of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves. Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith Jehovah, whose name is The God of hosts." (Amos 5:25-27)

Some have found difficulty in verse 25, and this from time immemorial amongst writers on the Bible as well as readers of it. But the solution is due to the simple principle that God in His government chastens His guilty people retributively and calls the scourges His own, even when the instruments may be wholly foreign to His mind and heart. Nay it is true even of the Holy One of God, of Christ Himself, who, when given up to utter rejection and suffering from man, is in this said to be smitten of God. (Psalm 69; Zechariah 13) It is a great and serious mistake that the statutes which were not good, and ordinances by which they could not live, mean God's own in which they were bound to walk obediently. This would be indeed to make scripture hopelessly obscure, and God the author of evil. Not so: whatever be

the issue for the sinner, the apostle is most energetic, in proving the misery even of a converted soul in his efforts after good and against his own evil under law, to vindicate that which in itself is holy, just and good. Assuredly then the Jewish prophet and St. Paul do not contradict each other, but those who apply the expression “statutes that were not good” misunderstand the matter in hand. The true reference is to the bitter bondage of His people to the corrupt and destructive regulations of the heathen, even to the demoralization of their households, and the most cruel devotion of their first-born to Moloch, “horrid king.” Thus, if they polluted God’s name and sabbaths, He polluted them in their gifts: so great was the degradation of Israel in departing from the true God. Verse 26 leaves no doubt on my mind as to the real force of verse 25. “Therefore, son of man, speak unto the house of Israel, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Yet in this your fathers have blasphemed me, in that they have committed a trespass against me. For when I had brought them into the land, for the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to them, then they saw every high hill, and all the thick trees, and they offered there their sacrifices, and there they presented the provocation to their offering: there also they made their sweet savour, and poured out there their drink offerings. Then I said unto them, What is the high place whereunto ye go? And the name thereof is called Bamah unto this day.” (Ver. 27-29) Bad as their idolatry was before in Egypt or in the desert, it was more culpable in them and more insulting to God in Canaan. False worship too perpetuates itself, but the truth stands only by grace. (Ver. 29)

“Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Are ye polluted after the manner of your fathers? and commit ye whoredom after their abominations? For when ye offer your gifts, when ye make your sons to pass through the fire, ye pollute yourselves with all your idols, even unto this day: and shall I be enquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, I will not be enquired of by you. And that which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone. As I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you: and I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord Jehovah. And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: and I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am Jehovah. As for you, O house of Israel, thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Go ye, serve ye every one his idols, and hereafter also, if ye will not hearken unto me: but pollute ye my holy name no more with your gifts, and with your idols. For in mine holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord Jehovah, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve me: there will I accept them, and there

will I require your offerings, and the firstfruits of your oblations, with all your holy things." Thus their persevering and heinous sin in always most unnaturally dishonouring Jehovah, like fathers, like children, is pressed on their consciences, as the ground why He could not be enquired of through His prophet. (Ver. 30, 31) But God would take care that they should not carry out all the apostate iniquity of their hearts. They should not be as the heathen after all, they should not succeed in throwing off the yoke of Jehovah to serve wood and stone. They had all the guilt of it in their minds, but God would not forget His own honour, and they should pay the penalty. "[As] I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you." Is this only in the way of judgments? Of judgments without doubt, but with the view and end of purging Israel. He will have His people separate from the Gentiles, whatever may seem the natural course of events, and whatever the desires not only of the Gentiles but of Israel. In the result, Jehovah only shall be exalted; and this when men least expect it. As surely as summer follows winter in the earth, so light shall succeed the darkness of man's day. For this are the ancient people kept of God spite of themselves and the enemy. For, let Satan reign as he may, God is above him and will rule openly as He does in secret providence.

But it is in verse 35 that we see one of the momentous and distinctive intimations of this new word of Jehovah. It is not a question of the temple or Jerusalem or the last reigning branch of her boughs out of which fire went and devoured her fruit, so that there is no more on her a strong branch for a sceptre to rule, till Shiloh come.

Here it is the people as a whole, Israel at least rather than the Jews; and of the deepest interest is the intimation of their special future. With them (not with the remnant in the land and city) will God rehearse the history of the chosen nation. After gathering them out from the people and the countries wherein they are still scattered, and this not by quiet, moral, or evangelic means, but with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, and with outpoured fury, He will bring them into the wilderness of the people, and plead or hold judgment over them face to face, as of old when He so dealt with their fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt. And there He caused them to pass in review, as a shepherd the sheep under the rod, and so brings into the bond of the covenant. It is sovereign grace, but reigning through righteousness. Hence the rebels are severed from the Israel of God, and transgressors against Jehovah (for even the Israelites are not confounded with sinners of the Gentiles) are no longer to be with His people. Out of the country of their sojourn He will cause them to go forth, but into the land of Israel shall not one enter. How strikingly in contrast with the destiny of the remnant of Judah, who are to suffer for their specific sins in the land! There they refused the Christ of God who came in the Father's name; there will they receive the Antichrist who is to come in his own name. Compare Zechariah 11:16, 17; Zechariah 13:8, 9; also Daniel 12:1 for the remnant, and 2 for the body of the people among the Gentiles, as I understand each of these verses.

It was useless then for the Israelites as they were to think their worship acceptable to God. For the sin of witchcraft is rebellion, and idolatry stubbornness. If

therefore they would not hearken to Jehovah, better be in the openness of their evil than keeping up a show utterly offensive to Him: gifts from men in such an idolatrous state only profane His name. But His purpose shall stand. “For on my holy mountain, on the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord Jehovah, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve me: there will I accept them, and there will I require your offerings, and the firstfruits of your oblations, with all your holy things.” (Ver. 40) Who can allege with any semblance of a consistent interpretation that this word of promise in our prophet has been fulfilled or yet begun to be? The people and land of Israel will then be holy in the full force of the expression. Then, not before, will Jehovah be vindicated through Israel before the eyes of the nations. The gospel which has gone forth since the death and resurrection of Christ is in contrast with it; for there all are alike treated as sinners and lost, and those who believe not only find indiscriminate mercy, but are brought into one new man wherein is neither Jew nor Gentile. “In that day,” of which the prophet speaks, the distinction will reappear, and Israel, delivered from all their idols and every high place, will worship Jehovah their God on the mountain of His holiness, on the mountain of the height of Israel.

“I will accept you with your sweet savour when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen. And ye shall know that I am Jehovah, when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to your fathers. And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye

have been defiled; and ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed. And ye shall know that I am Jehovah, when I have wrought with you for my name's sake, not according to your wicked ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O ye house of Israel, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver 41-44) They will then be accepted and know Jehovah, the promises to the fathers be accomplished, not only in us who now believe and go to heaven at Christ's coming, but in the children of Israel on the earth, who shall then indeed repent, only so really because of His mercy who acts freely above the evil of the creatures for His own sake: if He did not, to be a sinner were to be ruined without remedy or hope.

Ezekiel 21

What appears in our ordinary Bibles as the end of chapter 20 (ver. 45-49) goes rather with chapter 21 in the Hebrew and in some ancient versions. It is the conquest of Judea under the image of a forest on fire. The prophet is directed to set his face and prophesy about the south, which is expressed in three forms with great emphasis. "Moreover the word of Jehovah came unto me saying, Son of man, set thy face toward the south, and drop [thy word] toward the south, and prophesy against the forest of the south field. And say to the forest of the south, Hear the word of Jehovah; thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold, I will kindle a fire in thee, and it shall devour every green tree in thee, and every dry tree." Judgment was going forth against all, be they vigorous or withered. "The flaming flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be burnt therein. And all flesh shall see that I

Jehovah have kindled it: it shall not be quenched." The completeness of the judgment would prove the hand of Jehovah, "Then said I, Ah! Lord Jehovah! they say of me. Doth he not speak parables?" The word was plain enough; but man finds difficulties in understanding what he does not like.

The next communication however is much more distinct and complete. (Chap. 21) "And the word of Jehovah came unto me saying, Son of man, set thy face toward Jerusalem, and drop [thy word] toward the holy places, and prophesy against the land of Israel, and say to the land of Israel, Thus saith Jehovah; Behold, I am against thee, and will draw forth my sword out of its sheath, and will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked." Here figures are dropped and plain language spoken. The slaughter would be indiscriminate, not chastening but vengeance. It is no longer a conflagration, but the sword. "Seeing then that I will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked, therefore shall my sword go forth out of its sheath against all flesh from the south to the north; that all flesh may know that I Jehovah have drawn forth my sword out of its sheath: it shall not return any more" (Ver. 1-5) Sentence was gone forth irrevocably against Judea. "Sigh therefore, thou son of man, with the breaking of thy loins; and with bitterness sigh before their eyes." All were to take heed. It was no light matter nor affectation on Ezekiel's part. God meant it to be felt deeply — by the prophet first that others also might fear. "And it shall be, when they say unto thee, Wherefore sighest thou? that thou shalt answer, For the tidings; because it cometh: and every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, and every spirit shall faint, and all knees shall be weak as water: behold it cometh

and shall be brought to pass, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 6, 7) The certainty of judgment, though only a national one, was intended to fill the heart of the prophet with anguish to the uttermost.

"Again the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy and say, Thus saith Jehovah; Say, A sword, a sword is sharpened, and also furbished; it is sharpened to make a sore slaughter, it is furbished that it may glitter: should we then make mirth? it contemneth the rod of my son, as every tree. And he hath given it to be furbished that it may be handled: this sword is sharpened, and it is furbished, to give it into the hand of the slayer. Cry and howl, son of man, for it shall be upon my people, it shall be upon all the princes of Israel: terrors by reason of the sword shall be upon my people: smite therefore upon thy thigh. Because it is a trial, and what if the sword condemn even the rod? it shall be no more, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 8-13) Then comes the direction: "Thou therefore, son of man, prophesy and smite thine hands together, and let the sword be doubled the third time, the sword of the slain: it is the sword of the great men that are slain, which entereth into their privy chambers. I have set the point of the sword against all their gates, that their heart may faint, and their ruins be multiplied. Ah! it is made bright, it is wrapped up for the slaughter. Go thee one way or other, either on the right hand or on the left, whithersoever thy face is set. I will also smite my hands together, and I will cause my fury to rest: I Jehovah have said it." They are now spoken of as great men, not figuratively as trees, dry or green. Jehovah would smite His hands together and cause His fury to rest. (Ver. 14-17)

Then, with a strikingly vivid picture of the Chaldean and his auguries, we have a fresh message of that which drew out His anger against Jerusalem. “The word of Jehovah came unto me again, saying, Also, thou son of man, appoint thee two ways, that the sword of the king of Babylon may come: both twain shall come forth out of one land: and choose thou a place, choose it at the head of the way to the city. Appoint a way, that the sword may come to Rabbath of the Ammonites, and to Judah in Jerusalem the defenced. [Neither king nor people had confidence in Jehovah.] For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination: he made his arrows bright, he consulted with images, he looked in the liver. At his right hand was the divination for Jerusalem, to appoint captains, to open the mouth in the slaughter, to lift up the voice with shouting, to appoint battering rams against the gates, to cast a mount, and to build a fort. And it shall be unto them as a false divination in their sight, to them that have sworn oaths: but he will call to remembrance the iniquity, that they may be taken. Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Because ye have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are discovered, so that in all your doings your sins do appear; because, I say, that ye are come to remembrance, ye shall be taken with the hand.” (Ver. 18-24) The king of Jerusalem would be more false even to Jehovah than the idolatrous king of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar had counted upon his respect for the oath of Jehovah; but he had none.

Hence Zedekiah is called a profane prince of Israel whose day is come when iniquity shall have an end. “Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him

that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it; and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him." (Ver. 26, 27) Messiah shall come and reign: subversion and only subversion till then. His is the right.

The chapter closes with a message concerning the Ammonites. "And thou, son of man, prophesy and say, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah concerning the Ammonites, and concerning their reproach; even say thou, The sword, the sword is drawn: for the slaughter it is furbished, to consume because of the glittering: while they see vanity unto thee, while they divine a lie unto thee, to bring thee upon the necks of them that are slain, of the wicked, whose day is come, when their iniquity shall have an end. Shall I cause it to return into its sheath? I will judge thee in the place where thou wast created, in the land of thy nativity. And I will pour out mine indignation upon thee, I will blow against thee in the fire of my wrath, and deliver thee into the hand of brutish men, and skilful to destroy. Thou shalt be for fuel to the fire: thy blood shall be in the midst of the land; thou shalt be no more remembered: for I Jehovah have spoken it." (Ver. 28-32) It was not a question of one only but of both. Jerusalem was the prime object of destructive vengeance, yet the Ammonites should not escape but fall in their turn. The rejection of God's government by law would issue in the utter blotting out of Israel; but grace would take up the matter and reserve for God in mercy to restore what was hopeless as long as the promises were tied to conditions, for the people had broken all instead of fulfilling any. They were to be carried captive, and the kingdom overturned till Messiah come; but the Ammonites should be judged in

their own land. Yet is it a mistake to deny either their captivity or their restoration another day. (Compare Jer. 49:6)

Ezekiel 22

Next follows a withering exposure of Jerusalem, violence and corruption, idolatry in particular, being charged home. Therefore did Jehovah put the city to shame, a mockery to men far and near. “Moreover the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Now, thou son of man, wilt thou judge, wilt thou judge the bloody city? yea, thou shalt show her all her abominations. Then say thou, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, the city sheddeth blood in the midst of it, that her time may come, and maketh idols against herself to defile herself. Thou art become guilty in thy blood that thou hast shed; and hast defiled thyself in thine idols which thou hast made; and thou hast caused thy days to draw near, and art come even unto thy years; therefore have I made thee a reproach unto the heathen, and a mocking to all countries. Those that be near, and those that be far from thee, shall mock thee, which art infamous and much vexed.” (Ver. 1-5) Nay the dignitaries of law, who governed, set the example of iniquity in every form, degree and relation. Who can wonder that the name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles when the Jews violated Godward as well as manward each command of the law which stood in their way? This is detailed in sufficiently humiliating terms in verses 7-12, closing with what is alike the cause and the consequence of all their other wickedness: Jews even had forgotten Jehovah.

“Therefore, behold, I have smitten mine hand at thy dishonest gain which thou hast made, and at thy blood

which hath been in the midst of thee. Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee? I Jehovah have spoken it, and will do it. And I will scatter thee among the heathen, and disperse thee in the countries, and will consume thy filthiness out of thee. And thou shalt take thine inheritance in thyself in the sight of the heathen, and thou shalt know that I am Jehovah." (Ver. 13-16) Such is the expression of divine displeasure. Stout of heart and hand as they might seem, where would it all be in the day of Jehovah's dealing, whose word would as surely stand as the Jews would be scattered among the countries, that there if not in Jerusalem they might come to an end of their impurity, conscious of and confessing to others their inward pollution and knowing Jehovah as never before?

In the next section of the chapter is a denunciation, if possible, more tremendous. If the chapter before was the prophecy of the sword, this is no less of the furnace. "And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, the house of Israel is to me become dross: all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver. Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Because ye are all become dross, behold, therefore I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin, into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you in mine anger and in my fury, and I will leave you there, and melt you. Yea, I will gather you, and blow upon you in the fire of my wrath, and ye shall be melted in the midst thereof. Its silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so shall ye be melted in the midst thereof; and ye shall

know that I Jehovah have poured out my fury upon you." (Ver. 17-22) Whatever may be the bloody horrors associated with the sword, the fire of divine indignation cannot but portend yet worse even for this world; and the prophecy of course goes no farther. But it was Jehovah's doing because of Jerusalem's sins, not the Gentiles' merely because of their power. Faith seizes this and bows before Him.

The closing verses drop these images and speak out in the plainest terms. "And the word of Jehovah came unto me saying, Son of man, say unto her, thou art the land that is not cleansed, nor rained upon in the day of indignation. There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof. Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things; they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they showed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain. And her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, when Jehovah hath not spoken. The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy; yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully. And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none." (Ver. 23-30)

Guilty and now given up to judgment, Jerusalem resembled land without man's culture or God's natural supplies, a mere waste therefore morally. The conspiring prophets in its midst were like ravening and roaring lions; the priests not only perverted the law but profaned the sanctuary; the princes were no better than rapacious and bloodthirsty wolves, and this for unjust gain. Thus there was no distinction for the better, whether one looked higher or lower. The prophets glossed over men's sins and presumptuously claimed Jehovah's word for their misleading lies; while the people of the land, not preserved from evil in their lowliness, practised all sorts of violence and rapine. Not a man did Jehovah find to build up the wall or stand in the gap before Him on behalf of the land; alas! there was none. "Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath; their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 31)

Ezekiel 23

The prophet still continues the exposure of Israel's sin, especially of Jerusalem's. The holy city is here compared with Samaria, as two sisters of a common parent — the Jewish people; sisters too in their idolatrous iniquity. The evil is traced up to its earliest exhibition. The idols which beguiled them in Egypt exposed them at last to Assyria and to Babylon. In Egypt they manifested their lewdness, and their old age was according to the sins of their youth. Their symbolic names are here given as Aholah the elder, and Aholibah, her sister; the former meaning "her own tent," the latter, "my tent is in her." The reader will not fail to observe the striking

appropriateness of these symbolic names. The worship of Samaria was of self-will, at best an imitation, but really independence of Jehovah. But in Jerusalem the divine service was ordered of Jehovah as His own appointment; nevertheless not one only but both were His. “They were mine, and they begat sons and daughters.” Jeroboam’s usurpation did not destroy the title of Jehovah but rather drew out the special ministry of Elijah and Elisha as well as of others in God’s grace, if peradventure they might be warned. The elder Aholah, or Samaria, speedily showed the old evil unremoved. (Vers. 5, 8) The worship of the calves led to worse and brought finally judgment, through those who last of all allured her from Jehovah, and the Assyrian executed judgment on Samaria. (Vers. 9, 10)

Was Jerusalem admonished? Did the sight of Aholah act for good upon Aholibah? On the contrary, “she was more corrupt in her inordinate love than she.” The younger and more favoured sister followed the elder and was even grosser in the indulgence of her idolatry. (Ver. 11) Nay, on the sons of Assyria she doted; “Then I saw that she was defiled, that they both took one way.” Not content with Assyria, she desired after the Chaldeans and their idolatrous worship. And the sons of Babylon defiled her; but if she was defiled by them, her mind was alienated from them. So it ever is where the favour and the will of God are not. Evil nearness is quickly followed by mutual disgust. But alas! there is worse. “My mind, saith Jehovah, was alienated from her, as my mind was alienated from her sister.” Jerusalem was given over to a reprobate mind. (Vers. 19, 20) From verse 22 the Lord Jehovah threatens Jerusalem: —

“Therefore, O Aholibah, thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold, I will raise up thy lovers against thee, from whom thy mind is alienated, and I will bring them against thee on every side; the Babylonians, and all the Chaldeans, Pekod, and Shoa, and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them: all of them desirable young men, captains and rulers, great lords and renowned, all of them riding upon horses. And they shall come against thee with chariots, wagons, and wheels, and with an assembly of people, which shall set against thee buckler and shield and helmet round about: and I will set judgment before them, and they shall judge thee according to their judgments. And I will set my jealousy against thee, and they shall deal furiously with thee: they shall take away thy nose and thine ears; and thy remnant shall fall by the sword: they shall take thy sons and thy daughters; and thy residue shall be devoured by the fire. They shall also strip thee out of thy clothes, and take away thy fair jewels. Thus will I make thy lewdness to cease from thee, and thy whoredom brought from the land of Egypt: so that thou shalt not lift up thine eyes unto them, nor remember Egypt any more. For thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold, I will deliver thee into the hand of them whom thou hatest, into the hand of them from whom thy mind is alienated: and they shall deal with thee hatefully, and shall take away all thy labour, and shall leave thee naked and bare: and the nakedness of thy whoredoms shall be discovered, both thy lewdness and thy whoredoms. I will do these things unto thee, because thou hast gone a whoring after the heathen, and because thou art polluted with their idols. Thou hast walked in the way of thy sister; therefore will I give her cup into thine hand.” (Ver. 22-31) Those with whom she sinned should be her chastisers and they

should deal in fury, punishing her without mercy, and with every mark of ignominy. The adulterous people should, according to the symbol, lose their nose and their ears, should have their sons and daughters taken away: fire and sword should do the work of destruction. Does a licentious woman pride herself on her dress and her jewels? Of all should Jerusalem be stripped, but not in vain. This wickedness should cease, and Egypt should be looked to no more. Judah should suffer no less than the rebellious ten tribes.

From verse 32 there is a taking up of the cup named in verse 31, and this figure is applied with all fulness to express the judicial dealings of Jehovah with Jerusalem.

“Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Thou shalt drink of thy sister’s cup, deep and large: thou shalt be laughed to scorn and had in derision; it containeth much. Thou shalt be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, with the cup of astonishment and desolation, with the cup of thy sister Samaria. Thou shalt even drink it and suck it out, and thou shalt break the shreds thereof and pluck off thine own breasts: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord Jehovah. Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold thou hast forgotten me, and cast me behind thy back, therefore bear thou also thy lewdness and whoredoms.” (Ver. 32-30)

Thus the judgment of favoured Judah should even exceed that of Samaria, as indeed her guilt was greater. The dregs should be drained, the shreds should be ground with their teeth, and their guilty breasts torn. From verse 36 to the end there is a comparison which closes the account of the two sisters. They were both licentious, both bloody. They carried their idolatrous

adultery to such an extent as to burn their children to Moloch, and on that day to pollute Jehovah's sanctuary and desecrate His sabbaths. "Lo! thus have they done in the midst of mine house." No means were untried to entice those without to the dishonour of Jehovah, iniquitously misapplying to them Jehovah's incense and Jehovah's oil. And as Jerusalem had sought strangers from afar, so she deigned to court the most vulgar drunkards from the desert. Thoroughly profligate were those two women, Aholah and Aholibah. Not God only, but righteous men should judge them with the judgment of adultresses, and the judgment of those who shed blood, for such they really were. (Ver. 45)

Their judgment however should not slumber. The adulterous woman must be stoned till she died. "For thus saith the Lord Jehovah, I will bring up a company upon them, and will give them to be removed and spoiled. And the company shall stone them with stones, and dispatch them with their swords; they shall slay their sons and their daughters, and burn up their houses with fire. Thus will I cause lewdness to cease out of the land, that all women may be taught not to do after your lewdness. And they shall recompense your lewdness upon you, and ye shall bear the sins of your idols: and ye shall know that I am the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 46-49)

Ezekiel 24

The new message of Jehovah has great peculiarity in it in this respect that the prophet is directed to note expressly the day, not as usually for a date of the communication but also as the precise beginning of the accomplishment of the prediction, the form of expressing it being as before from Jehoiachin's captivity.

A higher power it must have been to make known that the siege commenced that very day: even the dullest would feel this.

“Again in the ninth year, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, write thee the name of the day, even of this same day: the king of Babylon set himself against Jerusalem this same day. And utter a parable unto the rebellious house, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Set on a pot, set it on, and also pour water into it: gather the pieces thereof into it, even every good piece, the thigh and the shoulder; fill it with the choice bones. Take the choice of the flock, and burn also the bones under it, and make it boil well, and let them seethe the bones of it therein. Wherefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Woe to the bloody city, to the pot whose scum is therein, and whose scum is not gone out of it! bring it out piece by piece; let no lot fall upon it. For her blood is in the midst of her; she set it upon the top of a rock; she poured it not upon the ground, to cover it with dust; that it might cause fury to come up to take vengeance; I have set her blood on the top of a rock, that it should not be covered.” (Ver. 1-8) Thus the cauldron filled with the pieces of flesh and best bones, all boiled well, partly with the rest of the bones, is the awful figure which Jehovah afterwards explains in allusion to their own fond boast (chap. 11) of security in Jerusalem. For as the flesh never trusts God for eternal life or an absolute remission of sins, so mere religiousness is apt to presume on the indefeasibility of God’s promises without the slightest heed to His will or glory and to the evident dishonour of His name and word. But they deceive their souls, as the Jews did here,

on whom should fall indiscriminate judgment. “Let no lot be cast upon it.” None should go unpunished. As the evil of Jerusalem even to blood (so much the greater offence in Israel, as they knew how God maintained the sacredness of life in man, His image, a truth which the Gentiles soon forgot and lost) was deeply ingrained and unblushingly committed, without care to conceal it, so would Jehovah deal in His retribution.

In verses 9-14 we see that Jerusalem should be taken and destroyed after no superficial sort; and this is described in continuance of the former allegory. For now Jehovah lets it be known that not only should the bones be burnt, but the city itself under the emblem of the cauldron set no longer with water but empty on the coals, that its copper might glow, and its filthiness be smelt in its midst, and its scum be consumed. “With frauds it wearied itself; and the greatness of its scum goeth not off from it: into the fire its scum! In thy uncleanness is incest: because I cleansed thee and thou wouldst not be cleansed, thou shalt not be cleansed from thy uncleanness any more till I have caused my fury to rest on thee. I Jehovah have spoken: it cometh to pass, I will do it; I will not go back, nor have pity, nor repent: according to thy ways and according to thy doings shall they judge thee, saith the Lord Jehovah.” Disciplinary measures had long failed, proper government according to His law was despised. Let the haughtiest and most cruel of earthly marauders come and execute the divine decree now fixed.

The prophet is next called to fear himself a stroke from God of the most intimate kind, if by any means the captives at the Chebar could be forced to feel the seriousness of the crisis and of that rebellious denial of

the true God which had brought judgment on the Jews. “And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men. So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded.” (Ver. 15-18)

Nor did this sudden domestic affliction, with absolutely no token of mourning on Ezekiel’s part, pass unheeded. “And the people said unto me, Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so? Then I answered them, The word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Speak unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength, the desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pitieth; and your sons and your daughters whom ye have left shall fall by the sword. And ye shall do as I have done: ye shall not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men. And your tires shall be upon your heads, and your shoes upon your feet: ye shall not mourn nor weep; but ye shall pine away for your iniquities, and mourn one toward another.” (Ver. 19-23) The fresh oracular act is expounded; and the people are informed that God would teach them of their unexampled trouble which should leave no room for tears or ordinary mourning. So sweeping a destruction was begun, Jehovah Himself profaning the sanctuary by judgment as they had by their transgressions and abominations, that nothing would remain for them but

pining away in their iniquities and groaning one to another. What a picture of despair when the sorrow lies too deep for tears, and an overwhelming sense of guilt compels men to abandon hope!

It is not right to speak of the sacred writers introducing their own names into their productions. Do those who so talk really believe that they were inspired in the true and full meaning of the term? If so, it was God who led and authorized them to do so, as the prophet here. "Thus Ezekiel is unto you a sign: according to all that he hath done shall ye do: and when this cometh, ye shall know that I am the Lord Jehovah. Also, thou son of man, shall it not be in that day when I take from them their strength, the joy of their glory, the desire of their eyes, and that whereupon they set their minds, their sons and their daughters, that he that escapeth in that day shall come unto thee, to cause thee to hear it with thine ears? In that day shall thy mouth be opened to him which is escaped, and thou shalt speak, and be no more dumb: and thou shalt be a sign unto them; and they shall know that I am Jehovah." (Ver. 24-27)

Ezekiel 25

We have now a message from Jehovah which, while connected with the foregoing denunciation of Israel and especially of Jerusalem, forms a natural transition to foreign nations that successively fall under divine judgment. (Ezek. 26-32) Ammon and Moab had an unhappy and humiliating origin which gave them a sort of spurious relation to Israel; Edom, if nobler after the flesh, was no nearer spiritually, yea, rather the bitterest of foes; and the Philistines, without any such connection, had the peculiar lot of hanging on the south-western

skirts of the land, though Gentiles and the most cruel of the oppressors of Israel, till put down by David. Against all these the prophet has here a word from the Lord.

“And the word of Jehovah came again unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face against the sons of Ammon, and prophesy against them; and say unto the sons of Ammon, Hear the word of the Lord Jehovah: Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Because thou saidst, Aha, against my sanctuary, when it was profaned; and against the land of Israel, when it was desolate; and against the house of Judah, when they went into captivity; behold, therefore, I will deliver thee to the men of the east for a possession, and they shall set their villages in thee, and make their dwellings in thee: they shall eat thy fruit, and they shall drink thy milk. And I will make Rabbah a stable for camels, and the sons of Ammon a couching-place for flocks: and ye shall know that I am Jehovah. For thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Because thou hast clapped thine hands, and stamped with the feet, and rejoiced in heart with all thy despite against the land of Israel; behold, therefore I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and will deliver thee for a spoil to the heathen; and I will cut thee off from the people, and I will cause thee to perish out of the countries: I will destroy thee; and thou shalt know that I am Jehovah.” (Ver. 1-7) The main question is as to the sons of the east, which some (Jews and Christians) regard as the Chaldeans. But Theodoret seems to me more right who views them, as the Ishmaelites, who should, on the great overthrow of the actual state by Nebuchadnezzar, pitch their tents, and tend their flocks and herds, and in short pass their nomad life in the land of those who triumphed at the desecration of Jehovah’s sanctuary and

the desolation of Israel's land, and the captivity of Judah. Perhaps it may have been the former thought which influenced our translators in giving "palaces" where encampments or villages would seem correct. It was a greater blow thus to become a possession of the wandering Bedouins than simply to have fallen under the towers and strength and skill of the Babylonians. The sons of Ammon have been destroyed, for man irreparably, and spite of any passing history of Greeks or Romans.

But they are not alone. Moab was no less hostile. Their mountain fastnesses, their proud fortifications, should prove vain when God's time came; and it was soon coming. "Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Because that Moab and Seir do say, Behold the house of Judah is like unto all the heathen; therefore, behold, I will open the side of Moab from the cities, from his cities which are on his frontiers, the glory of the country, Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon, and Kiriathaim, unto the men of the east with the sons of Ammon, and will give them in possession, that the sons of Ammon may not be remembered among the nations. And I will execute judgments upon Moab; and they shall know that I am Jehovah." (Ver. 8-11) How true it is that God resists the proud; and we have heard of Moab's pride, which He the more resented because they ventured to say, as they would have fain believed, that "the house of Judah is like to all the heathen." But not so either in their privileges or in their punishment, though alas! too like in their sins. This however was not what Moab disliked, but the mercy God had shown them and their call to be at the head of nations as the witness of Jehovah; and therefore

did He execute judgments in Moab that they might know Him. The God of Israel governs the nations.

Seir had been coupled with Moab; but Edom's implacable hatred must have a distinct place also. "Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Because that Edom hath dealt against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and hath greatly offended, and revenged himself upon them; therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, I will also stretch out mine hand upon Edom, and will cut off man and beast from it; and I will make it desolate from Teman; and they of Dedan shall fall by the sword. And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel: and they shall do in Edom according to mine anger and according to my fury; and they shall know my vengeance, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 12-14) Should not Edom have been grieved for his brother? Rather did he seize their ruin by the Gentile stranger to avenge himself for his old grudge. But God was not mocked then any more than now, and in this case inflicts His vengeance on Edom by the hand of His people Israel; "and they shall execute upon Edom according to mine anger and according to my fury, and they shall know my vengeance" [not simply "that I am Jehovah"] "saith the Lord Jehovah."

Had the stranger come from Crete and settled within the land of Palestine to the harassing and oppression of Israel? Did they rise up to avenge their old grudges if they could not in their old grandeur? God was not unmindful. "Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Because the Philistines have dealt by revenge, and have taken vengeance with a despiteful heart, to destroy it for the old hatred; therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold, I will stretch out mine hand upon the Philistines,

and I will cut off the Cherethim, and destroy the remnant of the sea coast. And I will execute great vengeance upon them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am Jehovah, when I shall lay my vengeance upon them." (Ver. 15-17) Here the menace of divine judgments is intensely strong. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God when He avenges His people on their haughty and spiteful foes.

Ezekiel 26

Another city in the west has an exceptional importance, the renowned city of Tyre, which drew down upon itself Jehovah's displeasure and judgment. It is a lesson the more serious because Tyre does not appear to have been animated by a spirit of hostility pure and simple against Israel. It was rather commercial greed which saw an opportunity of advantage in the disasters of the chosen people. This enticed the city into an antagonism to Israel which Jehovah resented. For His chastening of His people is no warrant for the selfish covetousness which would profit by their troubles or downfall. This then is here noticed by the prophet.

"And it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the first day of the month, that the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, because that Tyrus hath said against Jerusalem, Aha, she is broken that was the gates of the people: she is turned unto me: I shall be replenished, now she is laid waste: therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold, I am against thee, O Tyrus and will cause many nations to come up against thee as the sea causeth his waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyrus, and break down her towers: I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top

of a rock. It shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea; for I have spoken it, saith the Lord Jehovah: and it shall become a spoil to the nations. And her daughters which are in the field shall be slain by the sword; and they shall know that I am Jehovah." (Ver. 1-6) Did Tyre say that Jerusalem was broken, I shall be replenished now that she is laid waste? the Lord Jehovah replies "I am against thee, O Tyrus, and will cause many nations to come up against thee." For doom is pronounced — her very dust to be scraped from her, herself to be like the top of a rock for spreading of nets in the midst of the sea, her daughters in the field (that is, I suppose, the colonies planted by her) to be slain by the sword. Thus should they know that it was Jehovah.

"For thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold, I will bring upon Tyrus Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, a king of kings, from the north, with horses, and with chariots, and with horsemen, and companies, and much people. He shall slay with the sword thy daughters in the field: and he shall make a fort against thee, and cast a mount against thee, and lift up the buckler against thee. And he shall set engines of war against thy walls, and with his axes he shall break down thy towers. By reason of the abundance of his horses their dust shall cover thee: thy walls shall shake at the noise of the horsemen, and of the wheels, and of the chariots, when he shall enter into thy gates, as men enter into a city wherein is made a breach. With the hoofs of his horses shall he tread down all thy streets: he shall slay thy people by the sword, and thy strong garrisons shall go down to the ground. And they shall make a spoil of thy riches, and make a prey of thy merchandise: and they shall break down thy walls, and destroy thy pleasant houses: and they shall lay thy

stones and thy timber and thy dust in the midst of the water. And I will cause the noise of thy songs to cease; and the sound of thy harp shall be no more heard. And I will make thee like the top of a rock: thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon; thou shalt be built no more: for I the Lord Jehovah have spoken it, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 7-14) The great imperial power of the world should put an end to the outshoots of Tyre and invest that mart of nations with all the appliances of siege investment, and break down its walls and towers with his axes and engines of war, and his success is ensured, and the slaughter of the Tyrians, and the spoil of their wealth and merchandise. It may be that they (ver. 12) goes beyond Nebuchadnezzar and takes in Alexander the Great whose vengeance was still more complete and by whom the stones and timber and dust of Tyre were laid in the midst of the water. Certainly there was no more recovery after that.

Further, the moral effect was immense among the nations. This is described in the concluding verses. "Thus saith the Lord Jehovah to Tyrus, Shall not the isles shake at the sound of thy fall, when the wounded cry, when the slaughter is made in the midst of thee? then all the princes of the sea shall come down from their thrones, and lay away their robes, and put off their broidered garments: they shall clothe themselves with trembling; they shall sit upon the ground, and shall tremble at every moment, and be astonished at thee. And they shall take up a lamentation for thee, and say to thee, How art thou destroyed, that wast inhabited of seafaring men, the renowned city, which wast strong in the sea, she and her inhabitants, which cause their terror to be on all that haunt it! Now shall the isles

tremble in the day of thy fall; yea, the isles that are in the sea shall be troubled at thy departure." (Ver. 15-18) The trading powers would especially feel the utter ruin of a city so renowned and strong in the sea. The isles accordingly are specified as troubled at Tyre's departure. For many of the wealthy fled, as the rest remained to be destroyed.

"For thus saith the Lord Jehovah, When I shall make thee a desolate city, like the cities that are not inhabited; when I shall bring up the deep upon thee, the great waters shall cover thee; when I shall bring thee down with them that descend into the pit, with the people of old time, and shall set thee in the low parts of the earth, in places desolate of old, with them that go down to the pit, that thou be not inhabited; and I shall set glory in the land of the living; I will make thee a terror, and thou shalt be no more: though thou be sought for, yet shalt thou never be found again, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 19-21) The destruction of Tyre was to be complete. Whatever was the importance of its position, (and its past success seemed to invite the rebuilding of such a commercial centre,) all hope would be vain on man's part, for the Lord says, "I will make thee terrors, and thou shalt be no more. Though thou be sought for, thou shalt never be found again, saith the Lord Jehovah." Thus should perish the splendour of a city whose fame spread far and wide amidst all lands, gathering wealth from, and spreading it to, alike the seas and lands of the Gentiles. Such should be the doom of those who meddle with Israel even in their desolation, for their own lust of gain.

Ezekiel 27

We have next an animated and striking picture of the commerce of Tyre. “And the word of Jehovah came again unto me, saying, Now, thou son of man, take up a lamentation for Tyrus; and say unto Tyrus, O thou that art situate at the entry of the sea, which art a merchant of the people for many isles, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, O Tyrus, thou hast said, I am of perfect beauty.” (Ver. 1-3) This lamentation soon passes into an allegory. Tyre is addressed personally. Her position is set forth graphically as well as her self-complacency. From verse 4 the allegory of a ship is before us and this very strikingly in keeping with the peculiar character of Tyre. “Thy borders are in the heart of the seas, thy builders have perfected thy beauty. They have made all thy ship boards of fir trees of Senir [the south of Anti-libanus]; they have taken cedars from Lebanon to make masts for thee. Of the oaks of Bashan have they made thine oars,” etc. So the description follows, trenches of ivory out of the isles of Chittim, embroidered fine linen or cotton from Egypt for sails, blue and purple covering from the isles or coasts of Elishah — such were the adornments of the vessel. From verse 8-11, we have the crew, the pilots, and the traders, the marines and the guards. “The inhabitants of Zidon and Arvad were thy marines: thy wise men, O Tyrus, that were in thee, were thy pilots. The ancients of Gebal and the wise men thereof were in thee thy caulkers: all the ships of the sea with their mariners were in thee to occupy thy merchandise. They of Persia and of Lud and of Phut were in thine army, thy men of war: they hanged the shield and helmet in thee; they set forth thy comeliness. The men of Arvad with thine army were upon thy walls round about, and the

Gammadim were in thy towers: they hanged their shields upon thy walls round about; they have made thy beauty perfect." (Ver. 8-11) Thus those near at hand are supposed to be sailors and pilots, with mercenaries from Persia on the east, Lud and Phut on the west. Tyre laid all under contribution and loved to gather the most remote under her banner.

From verse 12 we enter upon her foreign trade, beginning with Tarshish itself and ending with its ships in verse 25. In these early days Tarshish seems to have given its name to vessels that sailed anywhere, at any rate, on long voyages, pretty much like our own term "East Indiamen." "Tarshish was thy merchant by reason of the multitude of all kind of riches; with silver, iron, tin, and lead, they traded in thy fairs." In verse 13 we have quite a different class of merchandise. "Javan, Tubal, and Meshech, they were thy merchants: they traded the persons of men and vessels of brass in thy market." Here we stretch to the far east from the west. Then in verse 14 we have north Armenia. "They of the house of Togarmah traded in thy fairs with horses and horsemen and mules." Then we come down to the south. "The men of Dedan were thy merchants; many isles were the merchandise of thine hand: they brought thee for a present horns of ivory and ebony." Next we come to Syria (if this be the reading, for fifteen MSS read Edom) which traded with Tyre with emeralds (or carbuncles), purple embroidery, fine linen (or cotton) and coral and ruby.

Then we have the connection of Tyre with Judah and the land of Israel. "They were thy merchants, they traded in the market wheat of Minnith and Pannag, and honey and oil and balm." Damascus seems to have bought Tyrian

wares and to have given in return wine of Helbon (or Aleppo) and white wool.

Verse 19 appears to put together peculiarly Dan and Javan from “Usal” (translated in our Authorized Version, “going to and fro”). It seems contrary to analogy that the copulative should begin the verse. Some therefore, instead of translating it “Dan also” say “Dedan and Javan.” Others decide for Aden. As it would seem that some places in Arabia are here meant, so perhaps the second Dedan. Arabia and all the princes of Kedar traded in lambs and rams and he-goats. Again merchants of Sheba and Raamah traded with Tyre, furnishing the markets with the best spices and with all precious stones and gold. Next we find the Mesopotamian traders. From these eastern sources they had the most showy articles, purple, and damask, and embroidery, wound up with the ships of Tarshish, the great means of conveyance for the ancient world. Instead of the singular expression in our version, “The ships of Tarshish did sing of thee in thy market,” there is good authority for understanding “The ships of Tarshish were thy walls, thy trade.” A similar expression has been used popularly of our own country.

But no fulness from without, no glory even in the heart of the seas, could resist the word of Jehovah. The day of Tyre was come. “Thy rowers brought thee into great waters: the east wind broke thee in the heart of the seas.” From verse 26 just quoted begins the prophet’s description of the ruin of Tyre. We return to the previous allegory. Tyre is a ship that founders at sea. Nebuchadnezzar is the east wind that upset her. “Thy riches and thy fairs, thy merchandise, thy mariners, and thy pilots, thy Balkers, and the occupiers [or barterers]

of thy merchandise, and all thy men of war [or warriors] that are in thee, even with all thy company which is in the midst of thee, shall fall in the heart of the seas in the day of thy fall." (Ver. 27)

Slowly had Tyre risen to this immense and concentrated trade; how quickly all fell to ruin when Nebuchadnezzar struck the first blow and irretrievably when Alexander the Great struck the last! "The suburbs shall shake at the sound of the cry of thy pilots. And all that handle the oar, the mariners, and all the pilots of the sea, shall come down from their ships, they shall stand upon the land: and shall cause their voice to be heard against thee, and shall cry bitterly, and shall cast up dust upon their heads, they shall wallow themselves in the ashes; and they shall make themselves utterly bald for thee, and gird them with sackcloth, and they shall weep for thee with bitterness of heart and bitter wailing. And in their wailing they shall take up a lamentation for thee, and lament over thee, saying, What city is like Tyrus, like the destroyed in the heart of the sea? When thy wares went forth out of the seas, thou filledst many people; thou didst enrich the kings of the earth, with the multitude of thy riches and of thy merchandise. In the time when thou shalt be broken by the seas in the midst of the waters, thy merchandise and all thy company in the midst of thee shall fall. All the inhabitants of the isles shall be astonished at thee, and their kings shall be sore afraid, they shall be troubled in their countenance. The merchants among the people shall hiss at thee; thou shalt be a terror, and never shall be any more." (Ver. 28-36) This bitter and widespread mourning may remind the reader of the Revelation of another city, far more corrupt as being the corruption of what was

incomparably more excellent in New Testament times, whose judgment still lingers, but will surely come, for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.

Ezekiel 28

This, the third chapter of the series, closes the burden of Tyre, adding a brief denunciation against Zidon, its mother city, but generally inferior in power and splendour to the daughter, not more than twenty miles apart. Each had its distinctive points: as the first brought out the shortlived pleasure of the great city of ancient commerce at Jerusalem's fall, and the second its all-concentrating traffic suddenly come to nought amidst the general consternation of men, so here "the prince of Tyrus" comes into relief, and the irremediable downfall of his pride.

"The word of Jehovah came again unto me, saying, Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God. Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel: there is no secret that they can hide from thee: with thy wisdom and with thy understanding thou hast gotten thee riches, and hast gotten gold and silver into thy treasures: by thy great wisdom and by thy traffick hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches." (Ver. 1-5) It would appear that Ithobalus, as Josephus calls him (c. Ap. 21), or Ithbal the second, according to the Phoenician annals, ruled in the time of the prophet: probably he may have given occasion to this stirring and severe, yet withal sublime, sketch. It is the typical prince of the

world in that day; and many of the expressions are borrowed for the after predictions about the Antichrist or man of sin yet to come. The prince was the head and centre and personification of that pride and wealth found in Tyre as a whole. Nor is there any character of pride baser, more blinding, more corrupting. It lives in selfishness, appeals to it and is exalted by it in its grossest form. No wonder that the New Testament brands covetousness as idolatry, and characterizes the love of money as a root of all evil. The haughtiest station marked this prince. Did he say he was God, and sit in His seat (or throne) in the heart of the seas? He was man, not God, and must soon leave it, however impiously he set his heart as that of God. It is common to all who amass wealth to give themselves credit for wisdom. So did the prince: wiser than Daniel, he discerned what was hidden from others. Alas! what folly and poverty. Was he rich toward God? nay, he had amassed riches, and gold and silver had crowded into his exchequer. This was the aim of his wisdom, this its triumph, for it was his own doing. Self, not God, was in all his thoughts.

Had the prince of Tyre then only thus perverted all he knew from his proximity to Israel? God would teach him that his responsibility was according to what should have been his profit, not pride, his doom only the more stern and sure and speedy. ‘Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God; behold, therefore, I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness. They shall bring thee down to the pit, and thou shalt die the deaths of them that are slain in the midst of the seas. Wilt thou yet say

before him that slayeth thee, I am God? but thou shalt be a man, and no god, in the hand of him that slayeth thee. Thou shalt die the deaths of the uncircumcised by the hand of strangers: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 6-10) If he aspired to be God in pretension, he should feel what it is to be man in weakness when the sword of the terrible stranger should defile his brightness, and he should die the deaths of such as are slain in the heart of the seas, for it should prove then no impregnable shelter but his most ignominious grave. He should die the deaths of the uncircumcised, of men farthest from God.

There is more difficulty as to verses 11-19. Is it the same personage or a different one? I am disposed to think it the same historically, but with a deeper reference to Satan's fall incorporated into it; and this may be one reason why the Spirit of God changes "prince" into "king." The picture is beyond comparison more elaborate than the former sketch, yet not without links that connect both together. "Moreover the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created." (Ver. 11-14) Creature beauty and conferred if not acquired advantage to the uttermost, inwardly as well as outwardly, were there; the highest and most delightful position in nature; the variegated

lights of Him who is light in His own nature were there, though of course not in the fulness of grace or glory; the suited expression of joy and gladness was not wanting from the first. “Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire.” (Ver. 14) There was intelligence in judicial action and protection in him by God’s ordinance; and this too in no distant sphere but where God displayed His authority; there was familiarity with His searching judgments. Nor was there a gradual slip or yielding to temptation from without: “Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.” (Ver. 15)

Now we return to that which we have seen in the previous description of the prince. “By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffic; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more.” (Ver. 16-19) Can it be doubted however that in this denunciation God had before Him the fall and ruin

of His arch-enemy? The want of seeing such allusions, past or future, above all of seeing Christ in the prophecies, often exposes souls little established in the truth to charge God's word foolishly. They conceive oriental exaggerations, where such as know the truth find the deepest ground for thankfulness of heart for God's grace in thus binding all His revelations in one harmonious whole.

The concluding section is the prophecy against Zidon. "Again the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face against Zidon, and prophesy against it. And say, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold, I am against thee, O Zidon; and I will be glorified in the midst of thee: and they shall know that I am Jehovah, when I shall have executed judgments in her, and shall be sanctified in her. For I will send into her pestilence, and blood into her streets; and the wounded shall be judged in the midst of her by the sword upon her on every side; and they shall know that I am Jehovah. And there shall be no more a pricking briar unto the house of Israel, nor any grieving thorn of all that are round about them, that despise them; and they shall know that I am the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 20-24) God is now known in and by His grace in Christ Jesus our Lord. As before the gospel it was by His judgments, so will it be again when the acceptable year of Jehovah opens with the day of vengeance of our God. And how solemn the difference of the lines measured out to Zidon and Israel! The Zidonians should know He is Jehovah by the judgments by which He would be sanctified in their city; Israel should know Him Jehovah their God when He has gathered them in from the nations where they are still scattered and is sanctified in them in the sight of the

Gentiles. “Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, When I shall have gathered the house of Israel from the people among whom they are scattered, and shall be sanctified in them in the sight of the heathen, then shall they dwell in their land that I have given to my servant Jacob. And they shall dwell safely therein, and shall build houses, and plant vineyards; yea, they shall dwell with confidence, when I have executed judgments upon all those that despise them round about them; and they shall know that I am Jehovah their God.” (Ver. 25, 26)

Ezekiel 29

The next series consists of four chapters directed against Egypt, as the last three against Tyre with its prince and king. The evil denounced is no longer commercial pride, but confident nature, and this especially in political wisdom. We shall see how God brings to nought the power which is thus characterized and set itself up in haughty independence of Him; for we have here the judgment of the nations, Israel included, before Babylon acquired its imperial supremacy.

“In the tenth year, in the tenth month, in the twelfth day of the month, the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face against Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and prophesy against him, and against all Egypt: Speak and say, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself. But I will put hooks in thy jaws, and I will cause the fish of thy rivers to stick unto thy scales, and I will bring thee up out of the midst of thy rivers, and all the fish of thy rivers shall stick unto thy scales. And I will leave thee

thrown into the wilderness, thee and all the fish of thy rivers; thou shalt fall upon the open fields; thou shalt not be brought together, nor gathered: I have given thee for meat to the beasts of the field and to the fowls of the heaven." (Ver. 1-6)

Thus should God deal with the self-confidence of Egypt, whose king is compared to the sea monster that crouches in the midst of the Nile's branches. When its hour came, abasing destruction should fall not on it only but on all the fish that should cling to it for protection. The blow was to be fatal, and birds and beasts of prey, should feast on it.

"And all the inhabitants of Egypt shall know that I am Jehovah, because they have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel. When they took hold of thee by thy hand, thou didst break, and rend all their shoulder: and when they leaned upon thee, thou brakest", and madest all their loins to be at a stand." (Vers. 6, 7) The chosen people had repaired to Egypt for succour before now: what had been the issue? In vain the alliance of Israel with a nation who avowedly trusted in themselves, not in the Lord, save indeed to the sore wounding of Israel when Egypt was broken.

"Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold, I will bring a sword upon thee, and cut off man and beast out of thee. And the land of Egypt shall be desolate and waste; and they shall know that I am Jehovah: because he hath said, The river is mine, and I have made it. Behold, therefore I am against thee, and against thy rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt utterly waste and desolate, from the tower of Syrene even unto the border of Ethiopia. No foot of man shall pass through it,

nor foot of beast shall pass through it, neither shall it be inhabited forty years. And I will make the land of Egypt desolate in the midst of the countries that are desolate, and her cities among the cities that are laid waste shall be desolate forty years: and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries." (Ver. 8-12) Egypt should be not only smitten, but most of all in what was its chief boast, its river. That granary of the world, and garden of the earth, should become a wilderness for forty years, and the Egyptians be scattered exiles: so great chastening should Nebuchadnezzar inflict.

But how evident the mouth and the hand of God! It was a measured sentence, and not more surely should the woe come than its worst should terminate according to His word. "Yet thus saith the Lord Jehovah, At the end of forty years will I gather the Egyptians from the people whither they were scattered: and I will bring again the captivity of Egypt, and will cause them to return into the land of Pathros, into the land of their inhabitation; and they shall be there a base kingdom. It shall be the basest of the kingdoms; neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations: for I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations. And it shall be no more the confidence of the house of Israel, which bringeth their iniquity to remembrance, when they shall look after them: but they shall know that I am the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 13-16) How wonderful, and how punctually fulfilled! yet no wit of man could have forecast it in any of its parts. It was the reversal of its own experiences, and no other nation had a similar destiny or sentence. The more we ponder the word, the more we know its real history: not the prophecy from

the history — no man ever yet learnt truly thus — but the history from the prophecy, for God alone sees and speaks without error or change; and our best wisdom is to learn of Him, honouring His word, let who will prefer the sight of their eyes or the hearing of men with their ears. Dull as Israel were, they should thus know that He was Jehovah. Egypt though restored rose to dominion no more, became a kingdom but the basest, and no more an object of confidence to Israel.

The rest of the chapter connects with the beginning of it a prophecy wholly distinct in time but kindred in subject. “And it came to pass in the seven and twentieth year, in the first month, in the first day of the month, the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon caused his army to serve a great service against Tyrus: every head was made bald, and every shoulder was peeled: yet had he no wages, nor his army, for Tyrus, for the service that he had served against it: therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold, I will give the land of Egypt unto Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; and he shall take her multitude, and take her spoil, and take her prey; and it shall be the wages for his army. I have given him the land of Egypt for his labour wherewith he served against it, because they wrought for me, saith the Lord Jehovah.” (Ver. 17-20) It naturally follows the burden of Tyre, for it represents Jehovah as balancing the vast expenditure of Nebuchadnezzar on that hardly won city whose wealth in great part escaped his grasp with the conquest of Egypt, a rich booty to the conqueror and his greedy and before this disappointed host. No wonder the land of Egypt was to be long waste, though not for ever.

“In that day will I cause the horn of the house of Israel to bud forth, and I will give thee the opening of the mouth in the midst of them. and they shall know that I am Jehovah.” (Ver. 21) We have no account that so it was. But we need none. So Jehovah spoke; and so we are sure it was: Israel revived, and Ezekiel delivered His message in their midst, and they then knew who He is that would have them aware of what was coming before it came.

Ezekiel 30

The first of the two prophetic strains of our chapter is a good example of that which characterises the word of prophecy, the binding up of present or impending disasters with the great day when God will interfere in power and judge (not first the dead but) the quick. There was the direct government of God then in Israel, which dealt also with the nations that meddled with His people, as there will be by and by an incomparably better display of it when the Lord comes to reign over the earth. Meanwhile we have only the course of providence regulating sovereignly and unseen, while the Jews are for the time abandoned for their apostasy and also now their rejection of the Messiah.

“The word of Jehovah came again unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy and say, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Howl ye, Alas for6 the day! For the day is near, even the day of Jehovah is near, a cloudy day; it shall be the time of the heathen. And the sword shall come upon Egypt, and great pain shall be in Ethiopia, when the slain shall fall in Egypt, and they shall take away her multitude, and her foundations shall be broken down. Ethiopia, and Libya, and Lydia, and all the mingled people, and Chub,

and the men of the land that is in league, shall fall with them by the sword." (Ver. 1-5) The intervention of Jehovah in the downfall of Egypt identifies itself in principle with the day of Jehovah which closes this age and spreads over that which is to come. Not only should the African races fall, but the sons of the land of the covenant, which seems to point to such Jews as had gone to live there away from the distresses of home.

"Thus saith Jehovah; They also that uphold Egypt shall fall; and the pride of her power shall come down: from the tower of Syene shall they fall in it by the sword, saith the Lord Jehovah. And they shall be desolate in the midst of the countries that are desolate, and her cities shall be in the midst of the cities that are wasted. And they shall know that I am Jehovah, when I have set a fire in Egypt, and when all her helpers shall be destroyed. In that day shall messengers go forth from me in ships to make the careless Ethiopians afraid, and great pain shall come upon them, as in the day of Egypt; for, lo, it cometh." (Ver. 6-9) Not only should the country renowned for its wisdom among the ancients but their allies or supports: from Migdol to Syene they shall fall in her, is the apparent force. Were other lands desolate? So should the Egyptians be in the midst of the general waste; no oasis in the desert, but desert all alike. Even a remoter people, apt to think themselves secure, should be terrified, and not without reason: great pain should be on them. It was coming!

"Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; I will also make the multitude of Egypt to cease by the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon. He and his people with him, the terrible of the nations, shall be brought to destroy the land: and they shall draw their swords

against Egypt, and fill the land with the slain. And I will make the rivers dry, and sell the land into the hand of the wicked: and I will make the land waste, and all that is therein, by the hand of strangers: I Jehovah have spoken it." (Ver. 10-12) Here the instrument of divine vengeance is named distinctly: not as if God had the smallest sympathy with the terrible of the nations and their unsheathed swords, nor with the wicked into whose hand the country was sold, nor with the strangers that wasted it. But the hour to judge its proud wickedness was at hand; and the worst was the suited executioner to do the dread office.

"Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, I will also destroy the idols, and I will cause their images to cease out of Noph; and there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt: and I will put a fear in the land of Egypt. And I will make Pathros desolate, and will set fire in Zoan, and will execute judgments in No. And I will pour my fury upon Sin, the strength of Egypt; and I will cut off the multitude of No. And I will set fire in Egypt: Sin shall have great pain, and No shall be rent asunder, and Noph shall have distresses daily. The young men of Aven and of Pi-beseth shall fall by the sword: and these cities shall go into captivity. At Tehaphnehes also the day shall be darkened, when I shall break there the yokes of Egypt: and the pomp of her strength shall cease in her: as for her, a cloud shall cover her, and her daughters shall go into captivity. Thus will I execute judgments in Egypt: and they shall know that I am Jehovah." (Ver. 13-19) It is with the gods of Egypt, as at first so now at last, God's main controversy lies. This was before Him when the destroyer went through the land and smote the firstborn on the night of passover; it is before Him here when He

adds that there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt. Fear should be in Egypt, desolation in Pathros, fire in Zoan, judgments in No (Thebes or Diospolis), fury on Sin (Pelusium), No-Amon cut off, daily distresses in Noph (the ancient Memphis). They all should be laid low and put to shame and pain, Upper, and Middle, as well as Lower, Egypt. The youths of cities famous for idol temples, Aven or On (Heliopolis), and Pibeseth or Pasht (Bubastis), should perish by the sword, and the women go into captivity, Tehaphnehes (Daphnis), the seat of royal authority and strength should be shrouded in darkness, and her daughters go into captivity. What a picture of utter overthrow, the word and work alike testifying to Jehovah!

As the former message bears on the land and people and cities of Egypt, se the latter which follows on the king. “And it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the first month, in the seventh day of the month, that the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and, lo, it shall not be bound up to be healed, to put a roller to bind it, to make it strong to hold the sword.” (Vers. 20, 21) Had Pharaoh-Necho pushed onward the successes and conquests of Egypt? So much the more humiliating the reverses which should break the power of Egypt thenceforward. In vain did they hope for healing or recovery: Jehovah had put Pharaoh down beyond remedy. And this is pursued with greater detail in the next verses (22-26): “therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Behold, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and will break his arms, the strong, and that which was broken; and I will cause the sword to fall out of his hand. And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and

will disperse them through the countries. And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and put my sword in his hand: but I will break Pharaoh's arms, and he shall groan before him with the groanings of a deadly wounded man. But I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and the arms of Pharaoh shall fall down; and they shall know that I am Jehovah, when I shall put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall stretch it out upon the land of Egypt. And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them among the countries; and they shall know that I am Jehovah." (Ver. 22-26) It was not only foreign mercenaries that should be scattered among the nations, but the Egyptians themselves: so thorough the rent and complete the demoralisation and overwhelming the ruin caused by the king of Babylon. If it was Nebuchadnezzar, no less was it Jehovah's sword stretched by him over the kingdom of the south. Painfully did the men of Egypt learn in their dispersion, and know that it was Jehovah's doing.

Ezekiel 31

The prophet next gives us in striking figures the ruin of Egypt. The awful warning of the downfall of the Assyrian, the greatest of earth's monarchs in that day, is applied to Pharaoh's kingdom, illustrating the principle of which scripture makes such frequent use with individuals: that the Lord abases the proud as He exalts the lowly.

"And it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the third month, in the first day of the month, that the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, speak unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, and to his multitude; Whom art

thou like in thy greatness? 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. The waters made him great, the deep set him up on high with her rivers running round about his plants, and sent out her little rivers unto all the trees of the field. Therefore his height was exalted above all the trees of the field, and his boughs were multiplied, and his branches became long because of the multitude of waters, when he shot forth. All the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs, and under his branches did all the beasts of the field bring forth their young, and under his shadow dwelt all great nations. Thus was he fair in his greatness, in the length of his branches: for his root was by great waters. The cedars in the garden of God could not hide him: the fir trees were not like his boughs, and the chestnut trees were not like his branches; nor any tree in the garden of God was like unto him in his beauty. I have made him fair by the multitude of his branches: so that all the trees of Eden, that were in the garden of God, envied him." (Ver. 1-9)

Assyria had been beyond the powers hitherto known for magnificence, but as a kingdom, not as an imperial system. Egypt, disposed as it might be to take an imperial place, must fall after the same example. Political wisdom might be proud, but it could no more secure that object of ambition than force of numbers or extent of territory. God controls and governs, not only in what pertains to His things but in those of man. As the cedar of Lebanon among the trees, for tallness, size, and extent of shade as well as beauty, so had the Assyrian been among the nations. God had grudged nothing that

could adorn or aggrandise Nineveh or the people of whom it was the capital, yea, gave it to exercise enormous outreaching power and influence over countries round about, so as to be envied by all.

But the Assyrian coveted for himself the glory of a king of kings; and this lifting up of his heart in his height brought his doom upon him. “Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Because thou hast lifted up thyself in height, and he hath shot up his top among the thick boughs, and his heart is lifted up in his height; I have therefore delivered him into the hand of the mighty one of the heathen; he shall surely deal with him: I have driven him out for his wickedness. And strangers, the terrible of the nations, have cut him off, and have left him: upon the mountains and in all the valleys his branches are fallen, and his boughs are broken by all the rivers of the land; and all the people of the earth are gone down from his shadow, and have left him. Upon his ruin shall all the fowls of the heaven remain, and all the beasts of the field shall be upon his branches: to the end that none of all the trees by the waters exalt themselves for their height, neither shoot up their top among the thick boughs, neither their trees stand up in their height, all that drink water: for they are all delivered unto death, to the nether parts of the earth, in the midst of the children of men, with them that go down to the pit. Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; In the day when he went down to the grave I caused a mourning: I covered the deep for him, and I restrained the flocks thereof, and the great waters were stayed; and I caused Lebanon to mourn for him, and all the trees of the field fainted for him. I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall, when I cast him down to hell with them that descend

into the pit: and all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water, shall be comforted in the nether parts of the earth. They also went down into hell with him unto them that be slain with the sword; and they that were his arm, that dwelt under his shadow in the midst of the heathen." (Ver. 10-17) Tremendous was the overthrow from such towering grandeur to the utmost degradation and impotence: a lesson for all that might aspire beyond their measure, a call to mourn and quake.

Had Egypt profited morally? On the contrary did it not after all hasten to follow in the same steps? And if Pharaoh emulated the Assyrian's glory and affected as much or more, should he not justly know the same annihilation? "Whom art thou thus like in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden? yet shalt thou be brought down with the trees of Eden unto the nether parts of the earth: thou shalt lie in the midst of the uncircumcised with them that be slain by the sword. This is Pharaoh and all his multitude, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 18) To the nether parts of the earth must Egypt go with the rest. The power and the policy of nature can give no exemption. In God alone is continuance, and He will display it in His people on earth, as in heaven, when they have bowed to learn themselves as well as Him. Till then, Israel's circumcision is made uncircumcision, and they are even more guilty than the Gentiles they despise.

Ezekiel 32

It was not enough to have set forth the fall of the Assyrian as a pattern of Egypt's ruin. The Spirit of God adds in conclusion a fresh message in two parts: one, in

the first half of this chapter, setting forth the impending catastrophe of Pharaoh under the figures of a lion and a crocodile, (or a river dragon, not “a whale”) once the terror of nations, now caught, slain and exposed before all, and this under the king of Babylon; the other a developed picture of that which had been more curtly sketched in the preceding chapter, the once mighty monarch with his multitude pitiably weak now in the lower parts of the earth, yea in Sheol like all that were fallen before himself, consoling him with no better solace than that he and his were sharing the inevitable doom of princes and people.

“And it came to pass in the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, in the first day of the month, that the word of Jehovah came unto me saying, Son of man, take up a lamentation for Pharaoh king of Egypt, and say unto him, Thou art like a young lion of the nations, and thou art as a whale in the seas; and thou camest forth with thy rivers, and troubledst the waters with thy feet, and fouledst their rivers. Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; I will therefore spread out my net over thee with a company of many people; and they shall bring thee up in my net. Then will I leave thee upon the land, I will cast thee forth upon the open field, and will cause all the fowls of the heaven to remain upon thee, and I will fill the beasts of the whole earth with thee. And I will flay thy flesh upon the mountains, and fill the valleys with thy height. I will also water with thy blood the land wherein thou swimmest, even to the mountains; and the rivers shall be full of thee. And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark

over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord Jehovah. I will also vex the hearts of many people, when I shall bring thy destruction among the nations into the countries which thou hast not known. Yea, I will make many people amazed at thee, and their kings shall be horribly afraid for thee, when I shall brandish my sword before them; and they shall tremble at every moment, every man for his own life, in the day of thy fall. For thus saith the Lord Jehovah; The sword of the king of Babylon shall come upon thee. By the swords of the mighty will I cause thy multitude to fall, the terrible of the nations, all of them: and they shall spoil the pomp of Egypt, and all the multitude thereof shall be destroyed. I will destroy also all the beasts thereof from beside the great waters; neither shall the foot of man trouble them any more, nor the hoofs of beasts trouble them. Then will I make their waters deep, and cause their rivers to run like oil, saith the Lord Jehovah. When I shall make the land of Egypt desolate, and the country shall be destitute of that whereof it was full, when I shall smite all them that dwell therein, then shall they know that I am Jehovah. This is the lamentation wherewith they shall lament her: the daughters of the nations shall lament her: they shall lament for her, even for Egypt, and for all her multitude, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 1-16) The prophet announces that the king of Egypt should be an object of horror and pity, and an occasion of mourning, no longer of fear and envy. Pharaoh should be like the sea-monster disabled on shore, captured by a crowd of men, deluging with blood the land of its swimming, a prey to all birds and beasts, its flesh on the mountains and the valleys filled with its height, the rivers also.

It may help the reader to compare Revelation 8:12, 13 with verses 7, 8. The political destruction of Egypt is compared to the darkening of the stars, the clouding of the sun, and the withdrawal of the moon's light. The notable difference in the Revelation is another and distinct feature, which appears to mark that it was to be only in the west (comp. Rev. 12:4), the eastern empire not being involved in this judgment, but bearing its own afterwards. Here the gloom has for sphere the land of Egypt.

Then, in verses 9, 10, we hear of the effect produced, dropping symbol for ordinary language, when countries which Egypt had not known should know of its destruction, and many people and their kings should be amazed and violently troubled at its fall, trembling each for his own life in that day.

Verses 11-16 proclaim the coming conqueror who should destroy Egypt's pride as well as its multitudes a source of grief among the nations. There lie the ruins in witness of both, of old splendour, and of utter sudden desolation, to the extinction of once busy trade and even of agriculture celebrated over all the world. In verse 14 it does not mean "deep," as I conceive; but the waters were to sink or subside and so become clear, with which agrees the rivers flowing like oil, instead of being turbid as of old by the demands of commerce. How manifest Jehovah's hand! Egypt itself should know that it was He.

In the latter half the dirge, a fortnight after, is still more profound, as unveiling the unseen world, the most solemn elegy over a heathen people ever composed. "And it came to pass also in the twelfth year, in the fifteenth day of the month, that the word of Jehovah

came unto me, saying, Son of man, wail for the multitude of Egypt, and cast them down, even her, and the daughters of the famous nations, unto the nether parts of the earth, with them that go down into the pit. Whom dost thou pass in beauty? go down, and be thou laid with the uncircumcised. They shall fall in the midst of them that are slain by the sword: she is delivered to the sword: draw her and all her multitudes. The strong among the mighty shall speak to him out of the midst of hell with them that help him: they are gone down, they lie uncircumcised, slain by the sword. Asshur is there and all her company: his graves are about him: all of them slain, fallen by the sword: whose graves are set in the sides of the pit, and her company is round about her grave: all of them slain, fallen by the sword, which caused terror in the land of the living. There is Elam and all her multitude round about her grave, all of them slain, fallen by the sword which are gone down uncircumcised into the nether parts of the earth, which caused their terror in the land of the living; yet have they borne their shame with them that go down to the pit. They have set her a bed in the midst of the slain with all her multitude: her graves are round about him: all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword: though their terror was caused in the land of the living, yet have they borne their shame with them that go down to the pit: he is put in the midst of them that be slain. There is Meshech, Tubal, and all her multitude: her graves are round about him: all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword, though they caused their terror in the land of the living. And they shall not lie with the mighty that are fallen of the uncircumcised, which are gone down to hell with their weapons of war: and they have laid their swords under their heads, but their iniquities shall be

upon their bones, though they were the terror of the mighty in the land of the living. Yea, thou shalt be broken in the midst of the uncircumcised, and shalt lie with them that are slain with the sword. There is Edom, her kings, and all her princes, which with their might are laid by them that were slain by the sword: they shall lie with the uncircumcised, and with them that go down to the pit. There be the princes of the north, all of them, and all the Zidonians, which are gone down with the slain; with their terror they are ashamed of their might; and they lie uncircumcised with them that be slain by the sword, and bear their shame with them that go down to the pit. Pharaoh shall see them, and shall be comforted over all his multitude, even Pharaoh and all his army slain by the sword, saith the Lord Jehovah. For I have caused my terror in the land of the living: and he shall be laid in the midst of the uncircumcised with them that are slain with the sword, even Pharaoh and all his multitude, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 17-32)

The heart of the pious Jew, who knew from God the judgments of the nations before and why they came, was not to be insensible, still less to insult their fallen foe and snare, old and recent. The Christian feels for men in view of eternity, but, thank God, he is charged with the gospel, with the ministry of reconciliation founded on the atonement of Him who once was here revealing God in perfect grace, but despised and rejected of men, most of all and most guiltily by the Jews themselves.

Here it is the judgment that sweeps off the earth after long patience and sends down the vain-glorious to the pit. There lie the fairest, without a token of relationship to God, "with the uncircumcised." There in abject weakness and humiliation lie Assyria, Elam, Meshech

and Tubal (though with a peculiarity to be explained more fully in Ezekiel 38, 39), Edom, Zidon and others north of Palestine, ashamed of that might of which they were erst so proud, bearing their confusion with those that go down to the pit. Jehovah's terror abides, and for those most who most inflicted terror here with the sword. What can be more graphic? Whose irony so keen as the prophet's?

Ezekiel 33

The prophet now returns to speak of Israel, their shepherds, and their mountains, their restoration, national revival, and re-union under one head, the Beloved, their Prince for ever, when the last enemy before the reign of peace comes to his end with all his lusts. (Chapters 33-39)

Under the figure of a watchman, Ezekiel is set to warn the house of Israel, so that if any slighted the sound of the trumpet, their blood might be on their head; if the watchman blew not, his blood should pay the penalty.

"Again the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: if when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet and warn the people, then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet and taketh not warning, if the sword come and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning, his blood shall be upon him; but he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul. But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the

sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand. So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul." (Ver. 1-9) It is individual responsibility that becomes now the ruling principle, though this does not hinder, as we see, the call and duty of one to warn many. Such was the prophet's place.

"Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? Therefore, thou son of man, say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth. When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered; but for his

iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it. Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; if the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live. Yet the children of thy people say, The way of the Lord is not equal: but as for them, their way is not equal. When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby. But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby. Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. O ye house of Israel, I will judge you every one after his ways." (Ver. 10-20) It was a day of judgment, not of grace, with which some strangely confound it. Despair would avail nothing; repentance would. Past righteousness should not screen present sin, nor past sin hinder present turning away from it. But let such walk softly. The ways of righteousness are immutable; the wages of sin, death. The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding; whilst they that confess and forsake sins find mercy. In vain therefore did any complain of the Lord's ways as not equal; it were well if they felt their own iniquity. Life is theirs who walk righteously; death for such as turn from the Lord. They should be judged each according to their deeds, challenging the Lord, as insensible to their own state as to His goodness.

If the reading be correct (for there is a variation in some copies, perhaps to lessen the interval), the tidings of

Jerusalem's fall were long in reaching the prophet, when he opened his mouth, long closed, and gave a solemn warning of further judgment, and the rather because of the pretension to take up the language of faith, when their heart was far from the Lord. Grace is sufficient for any one and for all circumstances, but it is inseparable from the faith that gives glory to God, as in Abraham. But what were they? What their ways? What their judgment of themselves? Alas! steeped in sin, contemning the ordinances of the Lord, and abandoned to wickedness, they thought as highly of themselves, as (we have seen) they said ill of Him. What then could be announced but judgment at His hand?

"And it came to pass in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, in the fifth day of the mouth, that one that had escaped out of Jerusalem came unto me, saying, The city is smitten. Now the hand of Jehovah was upon me in the evening, before he that was escaped came; and had opened my mouth, until he came to me in the morning; and my mouth was opened, and I was no more dumb. Then the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying, Abraham was one, and he inherited the land: but we are many; the land is given us for inheritance. Wherefore say unto them, thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Ye eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood: and shall ye possess the land? Ye stand upon your sword, ye work abominations, and ye defile every one his neighbour's wife: and shall ye possess the land? Say thou thus unto them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; As I live, surely they that are in the wastes shall fall by the sword, and him that is in the open field will I give to the beasts to be

devoured, and they that be in the forts and in the caves shall die of the pestilence. For I will lay the land most desolate, and the pomp of her strength shall cease; and the mountains of Israel shall be desolate, that none shall pass through. Then shall they know that I am Jehovah, when I have laid the land most desolate because of all their abominations which they have committed." (Ver. 21-29) To plead the promises in such a state of things is ruinous. Equally so was it to affect care for the prophet's word, listening as men do to a charming song.

"Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from Jehovah. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not. And when this cometh to pass (lo, it will come), then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them." (Ver. 30-33) To hear and not do is but to increase condemnation; as the issue would prove when the warning that pleased their ears was verified in their destruction.

Ezekiel 34

We have next a solemn, righteous, but severe denunciation of the kings or shepherds of Israel, at

whose door Jehovah lays the blame of selfishly afflicting and ruining His people.

“And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them.” (Ver. 1-6)

Thus without the fear of God or love for His people, they forgot the relations both of themselves and of Israel to Jehovah. Hence all was wrong, as could not but be when His rights had no place in their eyes. Like the Gentile monarchs, they regarded the people whom they governed as their own, not as the flock of God: hence confusion and every evil work. What a contrast with Him, deigning to be Son of David and King of Israel, who will rule over them justly, reigning in righteousness, as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry land; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, yea, as the light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds,

as the tender grass out of the earth by clear shining after rain! The shepherds had fed themselves, not the flock. They fed not the sheep, no matter what the benefits they had drawn from them. No sorrows of theirs drew out their sympathies. They ruled with harshness and rigour, and scattered them, a prey to all the wild beasts without a shepherd's care; and scattered the sheep over the whole face of the earth: no one sought or searched them out.

But He who called to the sceptre over Israel was not heedless of His people groaning under their wicked rulers. "Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of Jehovah; as I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves and fed not my flock; therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of Jehovah. Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them." (Ver. 7-10) Their sin is set out, the shepherds are convicted and sentenced; but Jehovah promises to deliver His sheep.

The manner of this deliverance is now further assured and explained. "For thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I

will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord Jehovah. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment. And as for you, O my flock, thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he-goats. Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet? And as for my flock, they eat that which ye have trodden with your feet; and they drink that which ye have fouled with your feet." (Ver. 11-19)

Thus the utter failure of the shepherds casts their care on Jehovah Himself who undertakes, not merely to require the sheep at the hands of those set over them, but to search for them and seek them out wherever dispersed. In verses 13, 14, this is detailed in language so simple and express that it is in vain here as in kindred passages to evade His testimony to the work He will yet accomplish for Israel on earth when He has finished gathering His assembly for heaven. Never have these words been fulfilled as yet; they therefore must be. Their

certainty and security rest on Himself, and on that mercy which endures for ever, as they will soon sing — how joyfully! In vain do sages reason on His non-execution of a threat when men, as at Nineveh, repented: for after all it came, though it be His delight to hear the cry of those that humble themselves at His word, and defer the stroke till patience would lose its character and lapse into indifference at evil which is far from Him. But He who promises knows how to make good all circumstances and conditions, even as He has meanwhile brought in the only righteous basis; as for past forbearance, so for the future harvest of blessing. That day of rich goodness and mercy will not be without the judgment of the wicked, but contrariwise. As we learn in Ezekiel 33 that individual state before God will have a force in Israel which it never had under the first covenant, so here it will be when He judges between sheep and sheep, between the rams and the he-goats, and calls up the wantonness of those who destroyed what they could not use to the hurt of the flock. He will judge the quick no less than the dead.

But there is more still. There might be judgment of oppression and deliverance of the wretched, and blessing of the people restored to the land of Israel; but grace does not stay its flow according to the measures of men. “Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah unto them; Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat cattle, and between the lean cattle. Because ye have thrust with side and with shoulder, and pushed all the diseased with your horns, till ye have scattered them abroad; therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them,

even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I Jehovah will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I Jehovah have spoken it. And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing. And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am Jehovah, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them. And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen, neither shall the beast of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid. And I will raise up for them a plant of renown, and they shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the heathen any more. Thus shall they know that I Jehovah their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord Jehovah. And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 20-31)

Not Zerubbabel nor Nehemiah, not the Asmonaean house, still less the Herods are meant, but the King, Messiah-Jehovah, as we know from elsewhere, but here distinguished from Jehovah who speaks and will accomplish. Otherwise your interpretation exposes you to insinuate or think that the word of prophecy is the grossest exaggeration. Interpret it of the Lord reigning over Israel thus gathered back in divine mercy and

power, and then one feels that the words cannot rise beyond the reality: when it comes, “the half was not told” will be the genuine feeling of those who behold His glory even on the earth. And what will it be on high!

It is absurd on every point of view to interpret these prophecies of the church or of the gospel. Then the very beasts will have their nature changed, and the earth yield its increase: for it will be the day for which creation waits, groaning still and travailing in pain, but then it is to be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

It is the day when Messiah is raised up for them, not now rejected and despised as once, a plant of renown, and Israel shall no more either pine with hunger in the land or be a reproach of the Gentiles. Jehovah will be with them, their God, and they His people. Has He spoken, and will He not make all good? Is aught too hard, too good, for the Lord?

Ezekiel 35

In chapter 35 the prophet had threatened Seir and the sons of Edom who inhabited that land of natural fastnesses, so jealous of the favour shown by Jehovah to His people. Here he resumes the theme yet more fully.

“And the word of Jehovah came unto me saying, Son of man, set thy face against mount Seir, and prophesy against it, and say unto it, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Behold, O mount Seir, I am against thee, and I will stretch out mine hand against thee, and I will make thee most desolate. I will lay thy cities waste, and thou shalt be desolate, and thou shalt know that I am Jehovah. Because thou hast had a perpetual hatred, and hast shed

the blood of the children of Israel by the force of the sword in the time of their calamity, in the time that their iniquity had an end." (Ver. l-5)

The denunciation is all the more solemn as standing out in contrast with the immediately preceding promise of goodness and mercy to Israel. It was this very blessing by divine grace to the chosen people which from the beginning had raised the ever growing rancour of their kinsmen who looked sullenly on their predicted blessedness from their own heights of proud self-confidence. Soon were they to prove what it is to have Jehovah against one, yea, His hand stretched out to render desolate and waste. And so the issue declared; for the word and the hand of Jehovah were shortly after manifest in the desolation of their cities and themselves. Yet I may add, for the warning of any careless soul who may glance over these pages, that awful as it was thus to know that He who had so spoken and wrought is Jehovah, displayed in the chastening of Israel and the judgment of the heathen, incomparably more so must be His dealing with every soul in Christendom who trifles with the name and word of the Lord now.

God notices the feelings of the heart, and distinguishes too in judgment as everywhere else. There were many haughty enemies of Israel; and which of them was not disposed to injure the people of Jehovah's choice? But He fixes His eyes on "the old enmity" of Edom, and the relentlessness which was even more cruel than its wont in the day of their calamity, "at the time of the iniquity of the end." Not an atom of generosity was there; natural feeling had turned to gall and wormwood. He who had been so basely dishonoured by His people was chastening them in measure: who and what were the

Edomites to avail themselves of it to crush without measure and destroy without mercy? “Therefore, as I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, I will prepare thee unto blood, and blood shall pursue thee: since thou hast not hated blood, even blood shall pursue thee. Thus will I make mount Seir most desolate, and cut off from it him that passeth out and him that returneth. And I will fill his mountain with his slain men: in thy hills and in thy valleys, and in all thy rivers, shall they fall that are slain with the sword. I will make thee perpetual desolations, and thy cities shall not return: and ye shall know that I am Jehovah.” (Ver. 6-9) The emphasis is very strong, not only blood flowing and pursuing the blood-thirsty Edomites, but themselves made perpetual desolations, their mountains and valleys filled with their slain, and their cities not to be restored: so should they know Him to be Jehovah.

Again, God heeds what men say as well as their feelings; as said the Lord still more comprehensively and profoundly and solemnly in Matthew 12 “Because thou hast said, These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess it; whereas Jehovah was there: therefore, as I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, I will even do according to thine anger, and according to thine envy which thou hast used out of thy hatred against them; and I will make myself known among them, when I have judged thee. And thou shalt know that I am Jehovah, and that I have heard all thy blasphemies which thou hast spoken against the mountains of Israel, saying, They are laid desolate, they are given us to consume. Thus with your mouth ye have boasted against me, and have multiplied your words against me: I have heard them.” (Ver. 10-13)

Is there no immediate lesson now from these declarations? Is there no analogy in Christendom? I believe there is, and one little considered or conceived among those who are bitterly jealous of what is really according to the word and Spirit of God at this day. They too forget that God is of a truth in His saints, and that their gathering to the Lord's name in dependence on the Holy Ghost's presence and action is the way in which to show our faith, and walk faithfully in this respect. Yet it would be hard to say what is so hated and dreaded by worldly christians, yea, even where they are real if indifferent or opposed to the truth of God's assembly. This is not surprising in the clergy of all sorts, who naturally dislike what condemns their own position and existence as wholly unscriptural. It applies to all who support and defend a state of things which scripture proves unjustifiable. A bad conscience rouses the evil of the natural heart; and no words are too bitter, no insinuations too vile, against those who are at this moment cleaving to the revealed will of the Lord for the church. Let them know that the Lord will act according to the anger and envy Babylon feels against such as stand faithful. The proud anti-church is judged when the marriage of the bride, the Lamb's wife, is come. What is said against the church and its privileges truly understood and acted on is no light sin in God's eyes: as with Israel of old, so now what is said contemptuously against His people, cleaving in their weakness to His grace and word, He regards as said against Himself: "I have heard."

The chapter concludes with this sentence on the foe: "Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; When the whole earth rejoiceth, I will make thee desolate. As thou didst rejoice

at the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so will I do unto thee: thou shalt be desolate, O mount Seir, and all Idumea, even all of it: and they shall know that I am Jehovah." (Vers. 14, 15) Never was a falser judgment, though all was false, than that Jehovah will not yet restore and bless Israel, not for any deserts of theirs, but in His own mercy through the once rejected Messiah, who will as surely desolate the enemies of Israel as He will make good all that He promised to their fathers. But neither one nor other dealing is the gospel, which contrariwise is now gathering in indiscriminate grace from Jews and Gentiles for heavenly glory with Him who is not Saviour only but head of the church on high. We know Him not after the flesh, nor by any judgments that He executes on Edom nor even by His mercy to Israel, but as dead, risen, and glorified in heaven according to the purposes of God once hidden but now revealed in Him and His body.

Ezekiel 36

Following the denunciation of mount Seir Jehovah now addresses Himself to the personified mountains of Israel and declares the consolation in store for them, whatever the proud malice of the Edomite might have said against them.

"Also, thou son of man, prophesy unto the mountains of Israel, and say, Ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of Jehovah." (Ver. 1)

It is well to bear in mind that in Israel of old it was a question of government under the revealed name of Jehovah, but on the conditions of law, which, being taken up by man in the flesh, could only issue as it did in ruin.

Now it is a wholly different state of things; for on a rejected Christ, who is the Son of God, the assembly is built, His body and bride in grace pure and absolute, and hence formed out of believers, Jews and Gentiles indiscriminately, who are destined to be with Him on high and reign with Him over the earth. But the government of the world in Israel is not abandoned by God for ever. He will take Israel up once more at the coming of the Lord, the glorious Son of man, and display His government perfectly then to His own glory under the new covenant, and hence on a principle superior to the weakness or the evil of the creature. This will be the epoch and turning-point of the world's blessing, not merely as now grace gathering out of it for heavenly glory with Christ, but judgment returning to righteousness on earth, and all the upright following it. Hence the second advent of the Lord for the world is characterized by the execution of judgments; and the rather as all scripture shows that the state of the earth will just before it be one of unexampled evil in apostasy, not only the rebellious rejection of the truth, but the great lie consummated of man sitting as God in the temple of God. And God will deal not with the most flagrant offenders only, but with each and all who have risen up against Him, when He delivers and exalts His ancient people still justly abased because of their sins.

To this time these prophecies look onward, whatever may have been their partial application in the past. If Israel will come forth from their hiding-place for His mercy, so will Edom for His judgment. I mean now of course for the judgment of the quick, not of the dead, which will follow at the close of all when the wicked of

every age and clime shall rise again and be judged by the Son of man.

But here it is the earth dealt with, not that eternal judgment; and the prophet was to speak comfort to the long desolate mountains of Israel. For God has not made the earth or man upon it to be ever the victims of sin and sorrow, of vanity and corruption. He will surely show Himself a deliverer from all the mischief Satan has wrought; but there must be judgment as well as mercy, and both we see here. Had the enemy taunted the land of Israel, saying Aha, even the ancient heights are become our possession? (Ver. 2) Jehovah's answer through His prophet is, "Because, even because they have made you desolate, and swallowed you up on every side, that ye might become a possession unto the residue of the nations, and ye are taken up on the lips of talkers, and a reproach of the people therefore, ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of Jehovah: thus saith the Lord Jehovah to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys." (Vers. 3, 4)

If the unuttered taunt is recorded before Jehovah, how much more that malicious boasting over the needed humiliation of Israel and the consequent desolation of the land, as if it were their victory over the only true God! But He heard and was soon warned by His servant the prophet; yet was He slow to judge. But His hand will ere long make good what His mouth then declared; and a yet more tremendous downfall yet awaits the haughty Edomite. The unbelieving Jews may divert their maledictions to their so-called christian adversaries meanwhile; for both Jews and Christendom have lost all simplicity and consequently power of faith in the word of God. But neither good nor evil have perished from

before His eyes. Edom and Israel but slumber in the dust and will soon come forth, Edom with still indomitable pride and vengeance, Israel at length repentant and subdued by the patient infinite grace of God. And then in this world shall each race receive its portion in that day, and Edom finally by the hand of Israel. (Compare Isa. 11:10-14; Isa. 34; Isa. 35; Isa. 63; Obadiah)

For it would be a sorrowful and unworthy conception of that day, were it only viewed as divine wrath dispensing its death-blows on the wicked. Nor does the prophecy hold out such monotony of gloom, but contrariwise the dark ways of man's iniquity followed by the judgment, and ushering in the day, of Jehovah. "Prophesy therefore concerning the land of Israel, and say unto the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Behold, I have spoken in my jealousy and in my fury, because ye have borne the shame of the heathen: Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah; I have lifted up mine hand, Surely the heathen that are about you, they shall bear their shame. But ye, O mountains of Israel, ye shall shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit to my people of Israel; for they are at hand to come. For, behold, I am for you, and I will turn unto you, and ye shall be tilled and sown: and I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, even all of it: and the cities shall be inhabited, and the wastes shall be builded: and I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and bring fruit: and I will settle you after your old estates, and will do better unto you than at your beginnings: and ye shall know that I am Jehovah. Yea, I will cause men to walk upon you, even my people Israel; and they shall possess thee, and thou

shalt be their inheritance, and thou shalt no more henceforth bereave them of men. Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Because they say unto you, Thou land devourest up men, and hast bereaved thy nations; therefore thou shalt devour men no more, neither bereave thy nations any more, saith the Lord Jehovah. Neither will I cause men to bear in thee the shame of the heathen any more, neither shalt thou bear the reproach of the people any more, neither shalt thou cause thy nations to fall any more, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Vers. 6-15)

The Lord thus pledges His oath, jealous for the blessing of Israel and indignant at their reproach not yet come, still continued from the heathen. In vain do men apply such glowing words to the return from Babylon, which was but an earnest of what is coming for the entire people. Can any one who respects scripture and knows the facts pretend that the Lord multiplied men on the mountains of Israel, "all the house of Israel, even all of it?" (Ver. 10) Such words seem expressly written to guard souls from such meagre and misleading views. Did Jehovah settle the returned remnant after their old estate, and do good more than at their beginning? (Ver. 11) Did the land, did the mountains, become Israel's inheritance and no more bereave them? (Ver. 12) Do we not know that under the fourth empire a still worse destruction came and a longer dispersion, instead of the land devouring no more, neither bereaving its own nations nor bearing the insult of the Gentiles any more? (Ver. 15)

No! the fulfilment of the prophecy is yet to come, but come it will as surely as Jehovah lives and has thus sworn through His prophet concerning the land of

Israel. To suppose that the gospel or the church is meant by such language is very far from simplicity or intelligence.

In the next message of Jehovah the moral reasons are stated why the land of Israel was left desolate, and themselves dispersed among the nations; the dishonour they did to His name even there; finally His restoring grace with its effects on the heart and ways of Israel, as well as His power in renewing their land to more than pristine prosperity and fruitfulness, Jehovah being sanctified by all before the nations.

“And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their land, they defiled it by their own way and by their doings: their way was before me as the uncleanness of a removed woman. And I poured my fury upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols [wherewith] they had polluted it; and I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries: according to their way and according to their doings I judged them. And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These [are] the people of Jehovah, and are gone forth out of his land.” (Ver. 16-20) Such was Israel’s way in the land and out of it, everywhere a shame to Him who chose them as His own, idolatrous corruption and murderous violence in Canaan, profaning His name among the nations. And what did He against whom they had sinned? He is Jehovah and changes not: therefore were they not consumed. Nay, He had pity for the name which they had outraged. and He would sanctify it and be sanctified in them. As He says here, “But I had pity for mine holy

name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; I do not [this] for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I [am] Jehovah, saith the Lord Jehovah, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land." (Ver. 21-24)

When and how this work of divine grace was to be wrought, we need not conjecture; nor does it now want elaborate discussion to determine. There are landmarks which make the answer quite plain. The return from Babylon was no fulfilment, but at most an earnest; for then only a numerically inconsiderable remnant returned. Ezra 9 in no way takes the same ground nor claims to be what the faithful looked for, any more than later still Nehemiah 9. They speak in one of "our bondage," in the other of being "servants this day; and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the food thereof, behold, we are servants in it; and it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress." How far this falls short of what is pledged by Ezekiel should require no argument "For I will take you out from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land." The mass of

Israel remained after the decree of Cyrus up and down the nations.

But there is a further and clearer proof that it has not yet been fulfilled, for it is added, “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean, from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you: and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do [them]. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.” (Ver. 25-28) Was the Jew, not to speak of Israel, then cleansed from all his filthiness? Malachi tells a different tale; and so in fact did our Lord prove in person. Here when fulfilled we have no less a blessing promised than the new birth of the Jewish people. God will give them a new heart and a new spirit, take away the heart of stone, and give a heart of flesh. He will put His Spirit within them, and cause that they shall walk in holy obedience, they His people, and He their God. It is the grossest exaggeration to assume that this has ever yet been accomplished, though in addition to this is an allusion to these verses in our Lord’s words in John 3:5: most real, yet wholly distinct from its predicted application.

But there is more. For the prophet proceeds to say that this blessedness in store for Israel will include outward favour and earthly abundance in a way never known before. “I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of the

tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen."

It is in vain to fritter away this prediction of restored and increased fertility, or to treat it as either incredible or not an effect of Divine power extraordinarily shown, as being beneath the attention of God. The New Testament shows us the principle in Romans 8. The groaning creation is yet to be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. But this is under no message of the gospel, but a fruit of Divine power when Christ is no longer hidden but appears in glory and the sons of God are revealed too. The difference here is that the apostle connects this blessed deliverance with the revelation of the risen saints, the prophet with the restoration and renewal of Israel.

But further, it is grace alone which, applied by the Holy Spirit to the soul, produces true fear of God and judgment of self. "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." It is this too which as here leads Israel to abhor and confess their past iniquities with a full heart. How glad are they to bow to His sovereignty who uses it in saving mercy! "Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that [were] not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. Not for your sakes do I [this], saith the Lord Jehovah, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel. Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded. And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that

passed by. And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities [are become] fenced, [and] are inhabited. Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I Jehovah build the ruined [places], and plant that that was desolate: I Jehovah have spoken [it], and I will do [it.] Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; I will yet [for] this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do [it] for them; I will increase them with men like a flock. As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts; so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I [am] Jehovah." (Ver. 29-38) Thus will Jehovah wipe off all reproach from without to the praise of His own name, while He works feelings and ways suitable to repentance in Israel. Nothing approaching this was experienced by the returned remnant; and those who were brought under the gospel were called into other and better blessings which induced many to get rid of their houses and lands. There was no rebuilding of the once desolate cities as a part of their heritage. But God will surely make good every word when the day comes to restore the kingdom to Israel.

Under the law Israel was ruined; under the gospel there is neither Jew nor Greek, but union with Christ in heaven; when the kingdom is manifested in power, they will be restored to their land and cities, no longer waste, but under the blessing and glory of Jehovah.

Ezekiel 37

This section contains a striking vision and a plain explanation of it. It is a question neither of the conversion of the soul nor of the resurrection of the

body, but of God's causing Israel to live once more by-and-by as a people. They were at that time swept away and without a political existence; and greater troubles than those inflicted by Assyrian or Babylonian were before them, of which law and prophets clearly forewarned; but the word of Jehovah shall stand. And here again it was revealed to the sorrowing captives for their consolation after their earlier exile and before the later that they might be sustained in presence of such overwhelming disasters by the sure hope of their national revival under the gracious working of the Lord.

"The hand of Jehovah was upon me, and carried me out in the Spirit of Jehovah, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, [there were] very many in the open valley; and, lo, [they were] very dry." (Vers. 1, 2) There is no disguise as to the estimate intended of those meant by the bones in the valley. There was not only no strength, but not even life. In order to bring out this the more we read, "And be said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord Jehovah, thou knowest." (Ver. 3) The impotence thus implied and confessed opens the way for the word of the Lord. "Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of Jehovah. Thus saith the Lord Jehovah unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: and I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live, and ye shall know that I [am] Jehovah." (Ver. 4-6)

Truly it was man's extremity and God's opportunity. He is the God that quickens the dead; and where should He

exercise His glorious power if not on behalf of His people? And the prophet was given to see as well as to hear and speak. “So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but [there was] no breath in them.” (Vers 7, 8) Still more solemnly is this followed up in verses 9, 10: “Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet an exceeding great army.” (Vers. 9, 10) It is impossible to apply such a statement as this with any show of propriety to the return of less than 43,000 from Babylon: especially as the armies of old far exceeded those usual in modern times. The returning remnant was a very small army compared with that of Judah alone under their kings. And we shall find later on that Ephraim as well as Judah are expressly contemplated: indeed it is implied immediately after in “the whole house of Israel.” The past return from captivity is therefore out of the question.

But we are not left to reasoning of ours on the scope of this book and the general aim of Ezekiel. He who gave us the vision through His servant has added the most explicit interpretation. “Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say

unto them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I [am] Jehovah, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I Jehovah have spoken [it], and performed [it], saith Jehovah." (Ver. 11-14)

To a mind simple and subject to scripture there can be no hesitation here. To whatever use or application we may turn the vision, its direct and express meaning is God's revival of His ancient people Israel then utterly destroyed, dead and buried, but yet to quit their graves according to the word of Jehovah "These bones are the whole house of Israel." And God would comfort His people as well as rebuke the unbelief which said, "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts." His own faithful grace will undertake to do what is manifestly beyond the power of man. He declares that He will not only disinter them from the graves wherein they now lie buried as a nation, but will bring them into the land of Israel — an issue suitable neither to those risen from the dead nor to souls converted to God now by the gospel, for what have we to do with the land of Israel? But restoration to their land is the simple and necessary complement of the national resuscitation of Israel. And so all the Old Testament testifies. Continually we see the people and their land bound up: blessing by-and-by on both, as now alas! a curse on both.

The meaning therefore seems incontestable, save to men whose minds have been corrupted by the Patristic or

Puritan schools, who can see none of the ways of God in Israel for the earth, any more than they read aright His heavenly counsels for the church; and this because the starting-point of both, though in different forms, is the substitution of self for Christ. Their interpretation of prophecy in particular is vitiated by this fatal mistake, which practically razes the hopes of Israel from the Bible and lowers ours to a mere succession to their hope and inheritance with somewhat better light and privilege. It is a part of the first and widest and most tenacious corruption of Christianity against which the apostle fought so valiantly. And it comes in the more insidiously, because it seems to those under its influence that they are of all men the most distant from the false brethren Paul denounced. To their minds the truest guard against judaising is to deny that the Jews will ever be reinstated as a people, or be restored consequently to their own land. All the predictions of future blessedness and glory to Israel they turn over to Christendom now or to the church in glory. Most pernicious error! For this is exactly to judaise the Christian and the church by making them simply follow and inherit from Israel. The truth is thus swamped; Israel's bright prospects are denied; Gentile conceit is engendered; and the Christian is rendered worldly, instead of being taught his place of blessing on high in contrast with Israel's on the earth.

But there is another and connected revelation. The revival of Israel as a people is not all that the prophet here learns and communicates. This was given in the first half of the chapter, not their quickening individually, however true it may be, but their national resuscitation under the operation of the Spirit, not of man's will or the world's politics, as becomes the people

chosen and now finally to be blessed of Jehovah. There was a distinct fresh blessing to be conferred on them, the disappearance of an old reproach which had long dishonoured Israel from the days of Rehoboam as long as it had subsisted in the land. When God sets to His hand for their restoration in the latter day, He will re-unite them as they were of old under David and Solomon, never to have their unity broken or even threatened again; This is reserved for the true Beloved when He reigns as the Prince of peace.

“The word of Jehovah came again unto me, saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and [for] the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and [for] all the house of Israel his companions: and join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand.” (Ver. 15-17)

It is indeed no obscure proof of human perverseness that words like these should ever have been mistaken. Yet they have been and are, not among the despised Jews who cleave to their future hopes, but in contempt of their present responsibility by Christians under the gospel of God’s indiscriminate grace in the dead and risen Christ to every soul that believes, be he Jew or Gentile. Thus it is then that Satan deceives all. The Jews are right in maintaining that Israel are yet to be blessed in their land under Messiah and the new covenant, and this, not vaguely nor partially, but after apostasy as well as divine judgments shall have thinned them down, all Israel that shall then be saved, gathered and united, Judah and Joseph as one whole. They are utterly, fatally, wrong now in not seeing their Messiah, the Saviour, in

Jesus of Nazareth, and consequently perish because they obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. But Satan deceives Christendom in this that, while they rightly confess the Crucified One to be the Son of God, they not only mix up the law with the gospel and so lose all the comfort and power and certainty of God's salvation in Christ, but yearn after the predicted glories of Israel on earth as if they were descriptive of their own privileges to the almost total ignoring of their heavenly standing as well as to the denial of God's faithfulness and future mercy to Israel.

There is indeed no excuse for misunderstanding a symbol so plain as that in verses 16, 17. But, as if to clench the application, we have as before an explanation appended. "And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not show us what thou [meanest] by these? say unto them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which [is] in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, [even] with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes. And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: and I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their

transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwelling-places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God." (Ver. 18-23)

It is as vain to wrest such language to the remnant of Jews that returned from Babylon as to the church at Pentecost. There is not even analogy. It is a union of the two long-divided houses of Israel, and nothing else. Not even a shadow of its accomplishment has appeared yet. Words cannot be conceived more explicit. Every sense but the future ingathering and union of all Israel as a single nation under one king is excluded. Never more shall they be divided, never more defiled. Nay more, they shall be Jehovah's people, and He their God. As the Jew cannot say that this has yet been, so it is absurd for any Gentile to say it of or for them. Still more absurd is it for the Gentile to claim it for himself. In no case is it applicable to the christian body. A remnant of Jews returned from Babylon to be defiled not merely with transgressions, but with a more detestable thing than their old idolatry, even the rejection and crucifying of their Messiah: was this a fulfilment of Ezekiel's glowing words?

But further it is added, "And David my servant [shall be] king over them, and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them." (Ver. 24) Here again what confirmation if this were needed! For no sober believer can doubt that Christ only can be meant, and Christ, not as Head of the church in heaven, but as king of Israel when He reigns over the earth. Never, since the prophecy was uttered, has there been an approach to its accomplishment. Never since have they all had one

shepherd; nor have Israel walked in His judgments, nor observed His statutes and done them. Christians all over the world cannot be meant here, still less when they go to heaven, but Israel only. “And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, [even] they, and their children, and their children’s children, for ever; and my servant David [shall be] their prince for ever.”

It is, as Isaiah says, the sure mercies of David — that everlasting covenant Jehovah makes with Israel; and this the resurrection of Christ explains. Thus was He to reign — not merely to ascend and become the beginning and Head of a new work on high, but to reign — over Israel in their land. Indeed, in language strongly resembling the prophet referred to, Ezekiel follows with the assurance of Jehovah. “Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And the heathen shall know that I Jehovah do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.” (Ver. 26-28) The humbling thought is that Christians could question what is here meant. Only one thing explains it all — the deep and wide-spread departure of men in Christendom from an adequate or indeed any real sense of their own blessings. From the peace and joy proper to the Christian, they have through judaizing and the influence of Babylon slipped away into doubt and darkness and error; and in their lack of comfort in the Holy Ghost, through unbelief of the grace

in which the Christian stands, they are tempted to covet their neighbours' goods to the ruin of truth and to the confusion of relationship with God, whether of the church now or of Israel by-and-by. The issue of the prophecy is of so plain and positive and glorious a nature that the very heathen shall know that Jehovah sanctifies His people, when His sanctuary shall be in their midst for ever. Who can affirm that this is true now, either of Israel, of whom it is said, or of the church, of whom it is not?7

Ezekiel 38

Next follow two chapters which contain a prediction of God's judgment to fall in the last days, when Israel is restored, on a great north-eastern chief with his vast array of satellites and allies on the mountains of the Holy Land.

But it may be well to clear away some mistakes which have long, and for most readers, overhung the translation of verse 2 to the detriment of the sense. Happily the oldest version (the Septuagint) gives the true meaning; and the Greek versions of Theodotion and Symmachus did not abandon but confirm it. It is impossible on any just principles to deny that the Septuagint and those who hold with it rightly give ἄρχοντα Ῥώς κ. τ λ. for 'nasi rosh'. I am aware that the Chaldee Targum of Jonathan and the Greek version of the Jew Aquila take it, like our English Bible, as "the chief prince," the Vulgate as prince of the head or chief (like our margin), the Syriac as "ruler and chief," the Arabic as "prince of the princes," etc.

But none of these affords a tolerable or even intelligible meaning, save the latter two which desert the text. It is

true that ‘rosh’, when the context requires it to be a common appellative, means “head” or “chief;” but it is this sense which in the present instance brings in confusion. There can be no doubt therefore that it must be taken as a proper name, and here not of a man as in Genesis 26:2, if the common reading stand, but of a race. This at once furnishes a suitable sense, which is strengthened by the term which precedes it as well as by those that follow. For, as ‘nasi’ regularly means the head of a tribe, or a prince in general, So Meshech and Thubal fix ‘rosh’ as meaning a Gentilic name (Rosh). They were in fact three great tribes, by the ancients called Scythians, the first of them apparently deriving its name from their proximity in those days to the river Rha, or Volga (though some think the Araxes), and supplying that of the modern Russ, as the others are reproduced in Moscow or Muscovy, and in Tobolsk.8 There is of course no difficulty in supposing migrations northward from the original seats, supposing that they may have been the races in the north of Asia Minor during the days of Ezekiel, and familiar to us as the Moschi, Tibareni, and perhaps other tribes named in later authors of Greece.

The great questions are, what, where, and when, they are viewed when the vision applies, not when it was written. And of this the place it occupies in the prophetic series, the precise language of the vision and the character of the judgment pronounced, ought to leave no doubt for any believer. It can apply only in the last days when the chosen nation are peacefully restored to their land, and it speaks of such a judgment on their enemies, countless though they may be, as has never been witnessed since Ezekiel prophesied, nor anything

approaching to it. The Grotian effort to merge it in Antiochus Ep. is of course a pitiable failure. Equally unsatisfying is the very vague “ideal” of Fairbairn and the modern German school. Nor are the Futurists more right who confound with the beast and the false prophet this great leader of the north-eastern nations, not without followers from the south.

Let us now look into the opening of this remarkable prediction. Who can deny that the rapid and immense development of the Russian empire bears its unmistakable witness to the judgment that is coming, as here declared so long before?

“And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold I am against thee, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal; and I will turn thee back, and put my hook into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed elegantly, a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords; Persia, Cush, and Phut with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer and all his bands; the house of Thogarmah of the north quarters; many people with thee. Be thou prepared, and prepare thyself, thou and all thy company that are assembled unto thee, and be thou a guard unto them. After many days shalt thou be mustered; in the latter days thou shalt come into the land that is brought back from the sword, that is gathered out of many peoples against the mountains of Israel which have been always waste: but it is brought forth out of the nations, and they shall dwell safely all of them. Thou wilt ascend and come like a storm; thou wilt

be like a cloud to cover the land, thou and all thy bands, and many people with thee." (Ver. 1-9)

Here the case stands clearly defined in all but the name, which seems to be probably symbolic. It is the last enemy of Israel who confronts us. He dwells in the land of Magog, that son of Japhet who overspread in due time the vast steppes of what was anciently called Scythia. He is autocrat of all the Russias, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal. Thus we have himself, his land, and his people. But the Lord Jehovah is against him who, instead of seeing when good comes to a long-troubled people, would fain aggrandize himself, and thus finds himself in array against not merely the Israel of God but the God of Israel. Cursed must he be who thus trusts in man and makes flesh his arm; and so does Gog prove. For Jehovah declares that He will turn him back, put hooks in his jaws, and cause him to go forth, him and all his host.

Then will it appear as a final lesson that no king is saved by the multitude of his host, that a mighty man is not delivered by much strength, and that a horse is a vain thing for safety. Israel at length are poor in spirit; and Jehovah brings the counsel of the heathen to nought, whilst His counsel stands for ever. There they come clothed to perfection, a great company, with shield and buckler, all of them grasping swords; Persia too is there, obliged to follow the train of the mighty northern leader, Cush and Phut with them; Gomer, and all his bands; the house of Thogarmah from the sides of the north, and all his bands: many people indeed with Gog! With grave irony he is told to be prepared and prepare himself, and he and all his vast confederacy, and be their guard — if he can!

Long, long ago had been the prophetic warning. No great nation in the old world had been so slow to take up the leadership of the populous East. But, delayed as it might be, the epoch is seen vividly by the seer of the Chebar. “After many days thou wilt be mustered; in the last of the years thou wilt come into the land” of Israel, where they are then dwelling safely. As a storm Gog comes, as a cloud he covers the land. But no weapon formed against Israel shall prosper. Such is their heritage, when their righteousness is of Jehovah. They may as yet be few, their adversaries countless; but what is this to the Lord but an opportunity for showing Himself the enemy of His people’s enemies? This Gog finds out, as we shall see, too late not only for himself and his enormous following, but for those he had left quietly at home. It is the day of just retribution and of divine government on earth, when the manslayer, so long estranged yet preserved, returns to the land of his possession. And shall not God avenge His own elect when he whose trust is in his numbers numberless casts his greedy look on the land where Jehovah’s eyes rest continually?

The prophecy then supposes the return of the people as a whole to their land, not of a remnant only, as after the Babylonish captivity. But there is more. It supposes a condition of unsuspected quiet such as differs from any period of Israel’s history in the past. Of this Gog is to take advantage, but to his own ruin. He has no faith in God’s love for His people, and never thinks of His taking His place in their midst for their defence against their foes.

“Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, It shall also come to pass in that day that things shall come into thy mind, and

thou shalt devise a wicked device, and thou wilt say, I will go up to the land of villages, I will invade those who are at ease, that dwell securely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates to take spoil and to take prey, to turn thy hand against the wastes that are inhabited and against a people gathered out of the nations, gathering cattle and goods, dwelling in the midst [or on the height] of the land." (Ver. 10-12)

If the day is come for Israel to be blessed in the mercy of God, it is no less the day for the judgment of the nations. Of these we have here the last in order, and perhaps the widest in extent, the awfully impressive lesson at the final confederacy before the reign of peace and righteousness. Nothing can exceed the graphic force with which the prophet describes all. Gog calculates on finding an easy prey in a people apparently so exposed and powerless. He little thinks that on those heights of Israel he and his immense host are about to perish at the hand of Jehovah, if not by one another. Nor is it only that the actual combatants are thus taken in their own snare, but those who look on have to learn that He whose name alone is Jehovah is the Most High over all the earth. "Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto thee, Art thou come to take a spoil? hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey? to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to take a great spoil?" (Ver. 13) They may be eager to treat with the spoiler, and profit by the purchase of the expected booty, but they too shall soon say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily He is a God that judgeth in the earth.

“Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say unto Gog, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; In that day when my people of Israel dwelleth safely, shalt thou not know it? And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army: and thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes.” (Ver. 14-16) It will be noticed that the downfall of Gog is here expressly set down to “the latter days,” as well as to “that day when my people Israel dwell safely.” Not only was none of this true in the days of Zerubbabel, as Theodoret imagines, or when Antiochus persecuted the returned remnant, but the scale of destruction is wholly inapplicable. In no case whatever since Ezekiel’s time is there so much as a point of contact. The prediction therefore, beyond just question, awaits its fulfilment in days to come.

“Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Art thou he of whom I have spoken in old time by my servants the prophets of Israel, which prophesied in those days many years that I would bring thee against them? And it shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord Jehovah, that my fury shall come up in my face. For in my jealousy and in the fire of my wrath have I spoken, Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel; so that the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the field, and all creeping things that creep upon the earth, and all the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall shake at my presence, and the

mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground. And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord Jehovah; every man's sword shall be against his brother. And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am Jehovah." (Ver. 17-23)

It is the notion of not a few authors that Gog must be the great western antagonist of the Jews as in Daniel, etc. But this is to mistake the scope of our prophet who never enters on the system of the four imperial powers that were to tread down Jerusalem till the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. Even Nebuchadnezzar is viewed as Jehovah's servant for accomplishing His work: as head of the image he does not appear. Gog belongs to another character of enemy and perishes afterwards when, blinded by the lust of territorial aggrandisement, he sees not that he is assailing Jehovah in seeking to plunder and destroy Israel. Isaiah speaks of him in Isaiah 33 as the rest do in more general terms. Here attention is drawn to the long standing predictions of this final effort. (Ver. 17). But after all God alone governs, whatever the pride or greed or will of Gog: Jehovah brought him against Israel for his own destruction. Yet when be does come, "my fury," says the Lord Jehovah, "shall come up in my face" (literally, nose). No more fears for the land of Israel, no need of fresh blows on the Gentiles, at least till the muster of the nations a thousand years afterwards to which this

invasion lends its name, the one at the beginning, the other at the end, of Messiah's reign.

That this is none other than the last destruction of Israel's foes before the millennium should be plain enough from the words that follow, not to speak of the chapter after this, and all the rest of the prophecy. To take the words as merely symbols of political revolution is quite uncalled for, yea, contrary to the context. There is no change of government whatever in Israel, nor do they suffer more, but these distant enemies who are congregated on their hills are to perish for ever. The mighty concussion in Canaan adds to the solemnity of the scene, land and sea, heaven and earth, thus owning the presence of Him who made all things espousing the cause of Israel, not mutual slaughter only in the ranks of the foe, but pestilence and blood, overflowing rains and great hailstones, fire and brimstone. No wonder that the rationalistic Rosenmller is forced to own how plain it is on the strongest evidence that Antiochus Epiphanes cannot be meant here. There is no difficulty whatever to the believer who looks for the future dealings of God in behalf of Israel. The efforts to apply it to the church would be ridiculous, if they were not flagrant and sinful unbelief, falsifying every right thought of our place as called to suffer on earth and to reign in resurrection glory with Christ at His coming.

I may add that the thought of some that the Turks are meant is evidently unfounded; for they on the contrary have been for ages allowed by God to possess the land in insulting defiance over a Christendom as guilty and idolatrous as the Jews were before Babylon carried them captive. Here, on the contrary, it is the mighty leader of the north in the latter days, followed by his myriads

from the east down to the south of Asia, who perishes with all his host under the most signal judgment of God when essaying to possess himself of the kind of Israel brought back from their long dispersion.

Ezekiel 39

This chapter resumes the divine denunciation of the great northern enemy. There is no concealment of his formidable numbers and resources; but, whatever these may be, they will but enhance the victory Jehovah gains for His people by his utter destruction.

“And thou, son of man, prophesy against Gog and say, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal; and I will turn thee back and lead thee [? astray9], and cause thee to come up from the sides of the north, and bring thee upon the mountains of Israel. And I will strike thy bow out of thy left hand, and will cause thine arrows to fall out of thy right hand. Upon the mountains of Israel shalt thou fall, thou and all thine armies, and the people that are with thee: I have given thee for food to the ravenous bird, the bird of every wing, and to the beast of the field. Upon the open field shalt thou fall; for I have spoken it, saith the Lord Jehovah.” (Ver. 1-5)

The judgments of God are as usual in keeping with the sin and the people that come under His displeasure. Thus the doom of the beast and the false prophet is beyond all experience appalling; the solemn and final adjudication without further process to the lake of fire. And so, it would seem, will it be with the little horn of Daniel 8 (or king of the north in Daniel 11). They had meddled with the things of God against His people, having a character of apostate contempt for His truth or

perverting it to their destructive ends. Gog is judged as a more vulgar aggressor, actuated as he will be with greed of territorial acquisition and relying on brute force. So he is confronted with a power mightier than his own, which beats him down ignominiously without relenting.

Nor is this all. God will deal with the land whence Gog came as well as with those isles which contributed their contingents to his host. “And I will send a fire on Magog, and among them that dwell carelessly in the isles: and they shall know that I am Jehovah. So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not let them pollute my holy name any more: and the heathen shall know that I am Jehovah, the Holy One in Israel.” (Vers. 6, 7) No distance nor isolation shall screen from consuming judgment in that day; for the Lord is awaking to call the quick to account, as one out of sleep, like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine. Then at length shall the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness. Can argument be wanted by the believer to prove that these solemn dealings ending in so blessed a result have never yet been fulfilled? Magog is not Rome or spiritual Edom or any other than the Scythia of the ancients.

“Behold, it is come, and it is done, saith the Lord Jehovah; this is the day whereof I have spoken. And they that dwell in the cities of Israel shall go forth, and shall set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and the bucklers, the bows and the arrows, and the handstaves, and the spears, and they shall burn them with fire seven years: so that they shall take no wood out of the field, neither cut down any out of the forests; for they shall burn the weapons with fire: and they shall

spoil those that spoiled them, and rob those that robbed them, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 8-10) It is no vague warning of the foe where and when ever he may be; it is no general principle reproducing itself often in divine providence. The Holy Spirit takes pains here to make it precise and specific, the judgment of a distinct enemy, long suspended, and falling as the last of Jehovah's blows on the most overwhelming force that shall ever have mustered against Israel, immediately before His glory returns in more pristine splendour and peace to dwell in the midst of His people in their land. Hence the minutely graphic detail of their going forth from the cities in Palestine and burning the arms defensive and offensive of their foe; and this not only as a witness of his total destruction, but as their provision of firewood so as to dispense with all other store for seven years.

But there is another and still more permanent result as the trophy of that great victory. "And it shall come to pass in that day I will give unto Gog a place there, a grave in Israel, the valley of the passengers on the east of the sea; and it shall stop the passengers; and there shall they bury Gog, and all his multitude; and they shall call it the valley of the multitude of Gog. And seven months shall the house of Israel be burying of them, that they may cleanse the land. Yea, all the people of the land shall bury them; and it shall be to them a renown the day that I shall be glorified, saith the Lord Jehovah. And they shall sever out men of continual employment, passing through the land to bury with the passengers those that remain upon the face of the earth, to cleanse it: after the end of seven months shall they search. And the passengers that pass through the land, when any seeth a man's bone, then shall he set up a sign by it, till

the buriers have buried it in the valley of Hamon-Gog. And also the name of the city shall be Hamonah. Thus shall they cleanse the land." (Vers 11-16)

Did Gog think to take the land for a possession? Jehovah will give him there a grave; and this in no obscure spot but in the direct pathway of many passers by. The idea is not, as our translators fancied, that people would stop their noses because of the bad smell, but that the barrows of so many buried men would stay all who pass that way and lead them to think of the vengeance poured out on them. The LXX seem here confused ("the burial-place of all that approach the sea"); but there is no countenance given to the notion already mentioned. No calculation of unbelieving believers who would evaporate the prediction need embarrass the Christian. Has Jehovah spoken and will He not perform!

The care to purify the land from the sight of a man's bone is remarkable, but natural if glory is to dwell there. People in general if they were but going through are to help those formally told off for the work, "men of continuance," whose task is to bury every relic of the prodigious slaughter of the enemy, all the dwellers in the land also taking part in the work. The multitude thus slain and buried will give its name to a city in the land. But it is the day when all impurity disappears from the land which Jehovah recognizes as His own, when He is then and there glorified. Can there be a legitimate doubt of the epoch when these conditions meet? It is plain to see that it is a question of God's judging the last leader of the Russias in the Holy Land when Israel have been brought back from the lands of their dispersion. But pre-occupation with our own place as Christians hinders here as elsewhere — hinders not only our seeing the

faithfulness of God to Israel and His mercy to them yet, but also our discernment of the church's peculiar blessedness. If we are to appreciate either, we must distinguish them, and see the connection of each with Christ. The mystical interpretation gives its due place to neither, and hence envelops all in fog.

Next a message of remarkable force is sent through the prophet to all birds and beasts of prey. Now is their time for a feast on a sacrifice such as they have never had before nor can have again. Vast hosts have been decimated, and the rest dispersed or taken, where they failed to make good their retreat; but has the world seen such a slaughter as this? It is assuredly to come.

"And, thou son of man, thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Speak unto every feathered fowl, and to every beast of the field, Assemble yourselves, and come; gather yourselves on every side to my sacrifice that I do sacrifice for you, even a great sacrifice upon the mountains of Israel, that ye may eat flesh and drink blood. Ye shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bullocks, all of them fatlings of Bashan. And ye shall eat fat till ye be full, and drink blood till ye be drunken, of my sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. Thus ye shall be filled at my table with horses and chariots, with mighty men, and with all men of war, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Vers. 17-20)

If Jehovah invites to a great sacrifice for the creatures of prey, will He not make good the word! A similar call is made in Revelation 19:17, 18, but there only to all the birds that fly in mid-heaven. It is in view of the carnage which is to befall the armies of the west at the end of

this age; and I suppose only the birds are named as in keeping with the judgment of the apostates from the heavenly testimony of Christianity. Here it is larger, as His dealings take effect on the countless eastern hordes, who have not only despised the gospel but seek to possess themselves of the land when His earthly people are being settled there in peace. No mistake can be more glaring than the denial of these judgments on the quick before the reign of the Lord as the true Solomon here belong; no truth more evident in the word of God than that the gospel is not destined to put down all rule and all authority and power, but Christ Himself when He comes in glory. In title all things have been put under His feet as He sits on the throne of God; but the process of putting all His enemies under His feet is not yet begun. He is occupied with another work now; He is calling out the joint-heirs who are to be glorified, risen or changed, at His coming, and then to reign together with Him in His kingdom. And this active subjecting of all is not the work of heavenly grace, but of power put forth on earth, of course not always in destruction, though the kingdom opens and closes with it on an immense scale, as we see here and in Revelation 20:8, 9.

The moral effect of the judgment executed on Gog and his host we find afterwards: “And I will set my glory among the heathen, and all the heathen shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid upon them. So the house of Israel shall know that I am Jehovah their God from that day and forward. And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me, therefore hid I my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies: so fell they all by

the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions have I done unto them, and hid my face from them." (Vers. 21-24) The gospel meanwhile if believed puts souls in association with Christ for heaven. The sight of the judgments will be used by the Lord to teach the nations righteousness on earth. Israel too need to learn, and so they will, that He who so deals is Jehovah their God "from that day and forward." It will be plain and undeniable in that day that Israel went into captivity for nothing but their iniquity; that for this only did Jehovah withdraw His favour from them and give them up to the sword of their enemies. It is His retribution that explains their past history with all its sorrows.

But there is a bright future in prospect for Israel: I do not speak of the gospel or the church, where there is neither Jew nor Greek, but of the kingdom on earth when Israel shall be restored to their land, and have the first place among the nations in favour, peace, righteousness, and the manifested power and glory of Jehovah. "Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name; after that they have borne their shame, and all their trespasses whereby they have trespassed against me, when they dwelt safely in their land, and none made them afraid. When I have brought them again from the people, and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations; then shall they know that I am Jehovah their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there.

Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Verses 25-29.)

It may be observed here as a practical remark of much moment for souls that, if the New Testament is to be believed, God never hides His face from the Christian; and this because the believer possessing eternal life in Christ is now brought into the full efficacy of His sacrifice, and has the Holy Ghost dwelling in him as its continual witness. We accordingly anticipate in this what will be true of Israel by-and-by, instead of standing on the probationary ground of Israel's past. But the traditional unbelief of Christendom puts souls so as to cloud the true grace of God wherein we stand; and this alike among Protestants and Catholics, while the latter add the further error of antedating and appropriating to the church that place of earthly honour and ease which is reserved for Israel under the Messiah when the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established in the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it. Some Protestants indeed are so dark as to follow Romanists even in this error, though they in general put it before them as a millennial hope rather than as a present claim. But, assume it as they may, the effect of the error is to degrade the church from heaven to earth, and either to deny the hopes of Israel or to make those who hold it inconsistent if they own them.

We may add that, though the Spirit is assuredly to be poured out on Israel when the new age begins, there will then be no baptizing the saints into one body. By One Spirit we have been all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free, and

have been all made to drink into one Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12. So in Colossians 3 it is laid down that Christ is all and in all; and in Ephesians 2 that the middle wall of the partition is broken down, and the two formed in Himself into one new man. But it will not be so then here below. On the contrary, in the millennium the Jewish saints will be in a nearer and more honoured position than the Gentiles on the earth. It is a state in contrast with the assembly now, where such distinctions are unknown: the cross has ended them for heaven.

Ezekiel 40

The remaining chapters of the book present a vision of the most striking character, in which the prophet sees and communicates the pledge of more than restoration - of crowning glory — for Israel in their land. Such is its plain meaning, though there may be deep details, as indeed there are, most minute, and not without difficulty as is usual in all such descriptions. But there is scarce more of obscurity in Ezekiel 40 - 48 than in Exodus 25 - 40. It is a difficulty because of circumstantial detail outside our ordinary habits or even study. There is really none as to its general scope except to those who misapply the vision. That it is unfulfilled prophecy is very true, but that this is not the real source of its difficulty to us will appear from the parallel to which reference has been made. The details of the future temple in the land are not harder to understand than those of the past tabernacle in the wilderness.

It is well known that some consider that the vision applies to the church that now is. Those who think so should on their own showing find it easy to explain its figures and symbols, for such writers generally assume

that we cannot have an accurate understanding of a prophecy till it be accomplished, and certainly the church has been in existence for more than 1800 years. On this score therefore they ought to have the amplest materials for illustration. But these are the very persons who find insuperable difficulty in interpreting the prophecy. Nor need we wonder; for the whole thought is a mistake. Jerome and Gregory can make nothing of it but ingenious accommodation. There is no real exposition: what is in their remarks can scarcely have satisfied even their own minds. As one of the most learned of the commentators that follow them says in respect of part, so we may say of all, “How it is to be understood, nobody explains, nor dare I conjecture.” Yet this man, Cornelius Lapide, was not to be despised, but rather to be admired, because of the honest confession of their failure and his own. The whole of the allegorizing interpreters go on an evidently false track. It would be strange, if a symbolic vision of Christianity were to leave out the day of atonement, the feast of weeks, and the action of the high priest in the presence of God — its most essential features in type!

Scarcely better is the very large class of divines who have striven hard to appropriate the vision to the Jews who returned from the Babylonish captivity, for the facts then realized stand immeasurably below this prophetic pledge. The inevitable result therefore of such applications as of this and the preceding schools is to lower the character of the divine word.10 For to speak plainly there is more contrast than analogy between the glowing promises of the prophet and the very small instalment that was paid under Zerubbabel as recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah. It is not only then that both these

interpretations fail to meet the prophecy, but that they do not fail to depreciate scripture itself. For if the prophets be thus hyperbolical and untrustworthy, what is to save the Gospels and the Epistles any more than the Law and the Psalms? The tendency of both schools is unwittingly but none the less really to undermine inspiration.

Who can think that the modern attempt to save appearances for the latter view is at all successful? "Ezekiel," says the late Dr. Henderson (p. 187), "was furnished with an ideal representation of the Jewish state as about to be restored after the captivity." Was this "ideal" then realized? Did it or did it not differ immensely from the actual state of the Jews in Palestine after their return? Did the post-captivity temple correspond with the building here so carefully measured? Had they such priests? And what about the prince, to say nothing of the feasts and the sacrifices without a high priest — so marked a peculiarity in this prophecy? Had the Jews the glory returned to their land? Did the twelve tribes, with the special provision for the priests and the Levites and the prince, take up their position so carefully laid down by the prophet? Did healing waters flow from the temple towards the Dead Sea at that period, or in any sense whatsoever? Did the priests and Levites dwell no longer up and down Palestine, but only round about the sanctuary, both henceforth having land assigned to them? We know that not one of these things applies to the post-captivity interval.

No doubt it was the restoration of the material temple then in ruins that the prophet had in his eye, and a restoration not only of its worship but of the nation in

full under the richest theocratic (and not only spiritual) privileges. No doubt a just and true interpretation supersedes all necessity of confounding the Christian and the church with the hopes of Israel; but no view is less satisfactory than that which points to the five centuries which preceded Christ, and denies a literal fulfilment in the future for Israel in their land. It is an unfounded assumption that a single feature in these visions was fulfilled by a single fact among the returned captives in their past history. Less than fifty thousand men, women, and children came up from Babylon: a little, remnant of a remnant, and in no sense those twelve tribes, whom the prophet sees to take up their allotted portions in the land — seven in the north, five in the south, extending beyond the ancient bounds of Palestine, with Jerusalem between.

Indeed there never was the very smallest semblance of the holy oblation any more than of the allotments of the land from east to west here predicted. It is ridiculous to say that there is no valid objection against such an interpretation because in many points the city, temple, services, etc., did not accord with the prophecy. The fact is that those who returned from Babylon fell back on the order as existing before the captivity, and in no respect made good the peculiar condition predicted by Ezekiel. Thus no one appeared answering to the prince, while the high priest was as before a notable personage; the land was not parcelled out to the remnant, still less to all Israel, by lot, and no strangers held inheritance any more than in ancient times. Pentecost was still as of old one of the three great feasts of the Jews, whereas it will have no place according to the prophecy. Such differences are of the most decided character and, at

any rate to believers, demonstrate that the last vision is yet absolutely unaccomplished in the history of the Jews: to say that it is never to be is to confess oneself an unbeliever in prophecy at least.

It is quite true that the vision is not to be regarded as a description of what was remembered of Solomon's temple — a work of supererogation indeed for those who possessed the books of Kings and Chronicles. It was a divine disclosure of a new condition, when Israel shall be restored finally and for ever. It is a material temple, a literal but in some grave respects unprecedented arrangement of feasts, sacrifices, rites, and priesthood, as well as of general polity for the new capital and the nation, under wholly novel circumstances crowned with the glory of Jehovah who deigns again to dwell in their land. Nor does it appear consistent to interpret the temple and its ordinances literally, but as a figure the waters that carry fertility and beauty into the Dead Sea and the barren wilderness. Why this should be a mere symbol and not a fact it would be hard to tell, except that men like Secker and Boothroyd with a certain following will have it so. But we need say no more as to all these things for the present. Ample opportunity will be afforded when we come to the chapters themselves in detail.

This however we must insist on, that it is altogether illegitimate to sever these chapters in an absolute manner from those we have already had before us. The closing series (Ezek. 40 - 48) is the glorious but fitting and most intelligible sequel to the prophecies immediately before: so much so that the previous series (Ezek. 33 - 39) prepares for it, announcing the judgment but happy return of the chosen nation in the last days,

far beyond what was at hand. We have had the new ground laid of individual conduct before God in Ezekiel 33, the leaders judged in Ezekiel 34, and Edom in Ezekiel 35; then the prediction of Israel's restoration to their own land with a new heart and a new spirit — yea, with God's Spirit within them — in Ezekiel 36. We have seen the parabolic vision in Ezekiel 37 of the dry bones suddenly invested with life and strength, which are expressly said to mean not Christians nor men at large, but the house of Israel, under the figure of resurrection, caused to live and placed by Jehovah in their own land, and this too united as they have never been — Ephraim and Judah — since the days of Jeroboam, under one head, one king, in the land, on the mountains of Israel. We have had before us the last and most formidable attack to be made upon Israel whilst thus settling in peace in Canaan, when the great north-eastern chief with his myriads of followers shall be exterminated by divine intervention (Ezek. 38, 39). No allegory this, as they shall then learn to their cost; and Israel shall know and the spared Gentiles too, for Jehovah shall be thus glorified in His people on earth. Most appropriately follows the last vision, where is laid down with precision the polity of Israel, both sacred and civil, and the descending Shechinah shall once more find its place in their midst, the seal of glory never to be broken, till means melt away before blessing complete and everlasting, and judgment sees no more evil to be judged.

Beyond a doubt, the main stumbling-block in this section to most Christians is the plain prediction of sacrifices, feasts, and other ordinances according to the Levitical law. These, they conceive, must be explained (that is, are

really to be explained away), so as not to clash with the Epistle to the Hebrews. But the argument assumes that there can be no change of dispensation — that, because we are Christians, those whom the prophecy contemplates must be in the same relationship. This however is nothing but error. For the Epistle referred to looks at believers since redemption while Christ is on high till He comes again in glory; the prophecy of Ezekiel, on the contrary, is occupied with the earthly people and supposes the glory of Jehovah dwelling once again in the land of Canaan. The truth is that to bless Israel as such and the Gentiles only mediately and subordinately to the Jews, as this prophecy and almost all others suppose and definitely declare, is a state of things in distinct contrast with Christianity, where there is neither Jew; nor Gentile but all are one in Christ Jesus. Hence the whole ground and position here are quite different from what we see in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Earthly priests distinct from the people, with a position quite peculiar to the prince, a material sanctuary with tangible sacrifices and offerings, are distinctly predicted by Ezekiel; but these are evidently wholly foreign to Christianity. One as much as the other would be inconsistent with the doctrine set down in that Epistle for the “partakers of the heavenly calling;” but will they therefore be out of place and season for those who have the earthly calling, when Jehovah again makes choice of Jerusalem, and glory shall dwell in the land? This no one has proved, and few have even essayed to argue; but it is the real question. Entirely do we allow the incongruity of sacrifices with our faith in that one offering which has for ever perfected us. A temple on earth is a practical

inconsistency with the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man, into the holiest of which, now that for us the veil is rent, we are invited to come boldly. Further, the assertion of an earthly priesthood for Christians is in principle, if not effect, a denial not only of our nearness to God by the blood of Christ but of the gospel itself as we know it.

But the coming of the Lord to reign over the earth will necessarily bring with it changes of immense import and magnitude. Yet this is the great object of all prophecy, which accordingly puts forward a new condition wherein Israel stands at the head of the nations under Messiah and the new covenant, the church having entirely disappeared from the earth, and, in fact, reigning over it with Christ, the Bridegroom of His then glorified bride.

Now the prophets, from Isaiah to Malachi, bring to light for that glorious day an earthly temple with sacrifices, priesthood, and rites appropriate to it. No doubt it is not Christianity; but who with such an array of inspired witnesses against him will dare to say that such a state of things will not be according to the truth, and for the glory, of God in that day? It is in vain to plead the usual resource of unbelief — the cloud that overhangs unfulfilled prophecy. Not so. To unbelief all scripture is obscure; to faith it is the light of God through men empowered by the Holy Ghost to communicate it. And the particular difficulty in the present case is only, if we believe the Apostle Paul, Christendom’s conceit, which assumes, or rather presumes, that the fall of the Jew is final and that the Gentile has supplanted him for ever. The truth is that God will not spare the Gentiles in their present and growing unbelief, but will assuredly recall in His mercy Israel ere long about to repent. Those that

now wait for Christ, with the risen saints, shall be caught up to Him; and the Deliverer will come out of Zion and turn away ungodliness from Jacob. If the King of kings and Lord of lords enter on so new a position, it would be singular indeed if all were not changed in consequence of it and in accordance with it. This is precisely what the prophets show, in contradistinction from the Epistle to the Hebrews as well as all the rest of the apostolic Epistles. Our wisdom is to learn of God by His word and Spirit, not to judge of scripture by conclusions drawn from our own position, circumstances, or even relation to God. Let us leave room for the various evolutions and displays of His glory in the ages to come, instead of making His present ways (profound and blessed as they are) an exclusive standard: a snare natural enough to man's narrow and selfish mind, but withering to all growth in and by the knowledge of God. Christ, not the church, is His object; and the church is blessed in proportion as this is seen.

But we must turn to the opening words of the vision. "In the five and twentieth year of our captivity, in the beginning of the year, in the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after that the city was smitten, in the selfsame day the hand of Jehovah was upon me, and brought me thither. In the visions of God brought he me into the land of Israel, and set me upon a very high mountain, and upon it was as it were a city on the south. And he brought me thither, and, behold, there was a man, whose appearance was like the appearance of brass, with a line of flax in his hand, and a measuring reed; and he stood in the gate. And the man said unto me, Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine oars, and set thine heart upon all that I shall show

thee; for to the intent that I might show them unto thee art thou brought hither: declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel." (Ver. 1-4)

The declared aim of the vision is thus evident. God certainly did not reveal the mystery of Christ and the church to Israel or to any other, but kept it secret in Himself till the due moment came to make it known. Much of man's eventful trial yet remained. God had yet to send His one Son — the Heir, not to speak of prophets who followed Ezekiel and preceded John the Baptist. Afterwards too He would add the final testimony to the risen and glorified Lord by the Spirit, besides His presence in humiliation in their midst. Accordingly the vision is of Israel's hopes when restored to their land, to show them how complete the work shall be in the last days, above all (spite of their past sins) in respect of God's presence in a new and suited sanctuary — a presence never more to be lost, least of all when time yields to eternity and to the new heavens and earth in their fullest meaning.

It is commonly laid down that the four main lines of divergence among interpreters are these — 1, the historico-literal, adopted by Villalpandus, Grotius, etc., who make these chapters (Ezek. 40-48) a prosaic description, intended to preserve the memory of Solomon's temple; 2, the historico-ideal of Eichhorn, Dathe, etc., which makes them a vague announcement of future good; 3, the Jewish theory of Lightfoot, etc., which assumes that the idea was actually adopted by the returned remnant; and 4, the Christian or allegorical hypothesis, which was that of Luther and other reformers, and followed elaborately by Cocceius, etc., and indeed generally by many to the present day, which

essays to discover in them an immense system symbolic of the good in store for the church. But this leaves out the fifth and, I have no doubt, the only true interpretation, which sees in these chapters the suited conclusion to the entire prophecy, and especially akin to the chapters which precede — the prediction of the complete re-establishment in the last days of Israel then converted and in the possession of every promised blessing for ever in their land, with the glory of Jehovah in their midst. This is the only proper Messianic fulfilment of the vision, which accordingly must be taken in its simple and just grammatical import, literal, symbolic, or figurative, as the context in each passage may decide.

Thus, in the vision that follows in the chapter before us, we have a measured description chiefly of the temple courts and their appendages, the ἱερόν, (as in Ezekiel 41, of the ναός, or οἶκος). the porch of which alone had been given in the chapter before, with a sequel in chapter 42, which may be viewed as concluding the first part of the description, and is important in destroying the notion that there was, or could be, any real resemblance between the prophetic vision of Ezekiel and any temple yet realized. The “wall on the outside of the house round about” (Ezek. 40:5) is not measured till we come to the end of Ezekiel 42, where it is declared to be 500 reeds square, which, given as it is with the most express exactitude, cannot be allowed to be a “hyperbole,” without shaking the character of the prophet, and of scripture in general; that is, the precincts are to take in considerably more than the entire city did. How this can be may perhaps be shown when we come to the passage.

It is enough here to remark that, if true, the temple intended by the prophet must be looked for in the future, to which indeed all its surroundings point. One can understand also a past tabernacle typical of present heavenly things in Christ; but here it is a prophecy of what will only be accomplished for Israel in their land, when the church is changed at Christ's coming and reigns with Him over the earth. There is no room therefore for the Christian or allegorical application; that to the past Jewish we have seen to be a failure, yea, impossibility; and the vague ideal we may dismiss as scarce a remove from infidelity. As regards the prophets, disciples now, as of old, are foolish, and slow of heart to believe them. The future view is not only the sole sound one, but really alone possible. At the same time, while maintaining that all the evidence is in favour of a future temple for Israel under Messiah and the new covenant, there may be also many a lesson of truth and righteousness couched under the building and ritual and general order here laid down, without endorsing all the excellent John Bunyan's fancies, still less his confusion of all the temples of scripture, Solomon's, Zerubbabel's, Herod's, and this of Ezekiel. But as to such applications, we need a vigilant watch lest we pervert the holy word of God; and I trust myself to be reticent rather than thus offend.

On the details of our chapter there seems little to remark. In the first section (ver. 6-16) the eastern gate is measured, threshold and posts, porch within and without, chambers on both sides, breadth of the entry, length of gate and pillars, the reed consisting of six cubits, and each cubit of a handbreadth above the ordinary length. In the second (ver. 17-28), where the

outer court comes before us, its gate towards the north is measured, its chambers, posts, porches, and steps, with the distance between the gate of the inner court opposite to those looking east and north. In the third (ver. 24-27) we have the measure of the south gate, with its appurtenances, as before, with the distance from a southern gate of the inner court. This gate is next measured (ver. 28-31) similarly; and the eastern gate of the same court, and the northern also (ver. 35-38). Then follows a description, in verses 38 to 43, of the cells and entrances by the columns of the gates, and the eight tables of hewn stones for slaying the burnt-offerings, etc., four on each side; and (ver. 44-47) without the inner gate cells for the singers;11 one, looking to the south for the priests that had charge of the house; and one, toward the north, for those that had charge of the altar (the court itself being 100 cubits square, with the altar before the house). The chapter concludes with measuring the porch of the house, length and breadth, with the gate (ver. 48, 49).

It will be noticed that the sons of Zadok are specified for the service of the house. They had the pledge of that everlasting priesthood which was annexed to Aaron’s line. What Phinehas, son of Eleazar, had guaranteed to him for ever falls in due time to Zadok who, under Solomon’s reign, set aside the line of Ithamar according to the judgment of Jehovah predicted to Eli, after Abiathar’s part in the rebellion of Absalom. We shall find the same restriction repeatedly made throughout the vision, and indeed uniformly kept up. See Ezekiel 43:19; Ezekiel 44:15; Ezekiel 48:11.

Ezekiel 41

It has, I confess, struck me much that our prophet speaks nothing of gold or silver in his prediction of the future temple. It is notorious how prominent is the use of each in the tabernacle of old, and how characteristic of Solomon's building was the use at least of gold. Why is this? A few suggestions on the divine idea of each may be helpful; yet we must take care, not only that it be truth that we own, but how we use it.

Gold then seems to be regularly used in scripture as symbolic of divine righteousness; and this in the aspect, not of earthly judgment, which vindicates Him (this is rather set forth by brass), but of what we draw near to on high. Hence we see the difference between the altar of burnt-offering and that of incense, while the fullest illustration of the gold appears in the ark with its mercy-seat of solid gold. Silver we see in certain parts of the tabernacle, as in the sockets for the boards and the pillars, with their hooks and fillets also. It typifies grace, being the ransom money of Israel. Hence we see the propriety of silver as well as of gold in that which figures the tabernacle for the people passing through the wilderness, of gold (and not silver) characterizing the heavenly city in Revelation 21, while neither is named by the prophet in his description of the millennial sanctuary we have now before us. It is not that one can doubt that gold is implied here also, but this only makes the absence of all express account of it more striking.

On the chapter little need be said for my present purpose. The prophet is brought from the outer precincts to view the house itself. "And he brought me to the temple; and he measured the posts, six cubits broad

on the one side, and six cubits broad on the other side, the breadth of the tabernacle. And the breadth of the door [was] ten cubits, and the sides of the door five cubits on the one side, and five cubits on the other side; and he measured its length, forty cubits, and the breadth, twenty cubits." (Vers. 1, 2)

Next we look within. "Then went he inward, and measured the posts of the door, two cubits, and the door six cubits, and the breadth of the door seven cubits. So he measured its length twenty cubits, and the breadth twenty cubits, before the temple; and he said to me, This [is] the most holy." (Vers. 3, 4)

"After this he measured the wall of the house, six cubits, and the breadth of a side-chamber, four cubits, round about the house on every side. And the side-chambers [were], one over another, three and thirty times; and they entered into the wall which [was] on the house, for the side-chambers round about, that they might be fastened on, but they were not fastened on the wall of the house. And as one wound upward it became continually wider for the side-chamber, for the row of chambers went more and more upward round about the house; therefore the breadth of the house [was] greater upward; and so they went up, the lowest to the highest, by the middle. And I saw the height of the house round about; the foundations of the side-chambers a full reed of six great12 cubits. The thickness of the wall which [was] for the side-chamber without [was] five cubits; and that which was left, the place of the side-chamber, belonging to the house. And between the chambers is a breadth of twenty cubits about the house all round. And the doors of the side-chambers [were] toward the place left, one door toward the north, and another door

toward the south; and the breadth of the place that was left was five cubits round about. And the building that was before the separate place at the end westward [was] seventy cubits broad; and the wall of the building [was] five cubits thick round about, and its length ninety cubits. So he measured the house, an hundred cubits; and the separate place, and the building with its walls, a hundred cubits long; and the breadth of the face of the house, and of the separate place toward the east, a hundred cubits. And he measured the length of the building over against the separate place which was behind it, and its galleries on the one side, and on the other side, one hundred cubits, with the inner temple, and the porches of the court, the door-posts, and the latticed windows, and the galleries round about on their three sides, opposite to the doorposts, a wainscoting of wood all round, and from the ground up to the windows, and the windows were covered. Over above the door, even to the inner house and the outer [a wainscoting], and on all the wall round about, within and without, by measures. And [it was] made with cherubim and palm-trees, a palm-tree being between two cherubim, and a cherub had two faces; and a man's face was towards the palm-tree on the one side, and a young lion's face towards the palm-tree on the other side; [it was] made through all the house round about. From the ground to above the door the cherubim and the palm-trees were made in the wall of the temple. The temple had four-cornered posts; and the front of the holy of holies, the appearance [was] as the appearance." (Vers. 5-21) It will be observed that the symbols used here express judicial power and victory: how appropriate to the millennial day needs not to be argued.

In verse 22 we read that “the altar of wood [was] three cubits high, and its length two cubits; and its corners, and its top-piece, and its walls [were] of wood; and he said to me, This [is] the table that is before Jehovah.” This identification of the altar with the name of the table on which the show-bread was set before the Lord is remarkable; and the reader can compare Malachi 1:7, 12.

“And the temple and the holy of holies had two doors. And the doors had two leaves, two turning leaves, two for the one door, and two leaves for the other. And [there were] made on them, on the doors of the temple, cherubim and palm-trees, as [were] made upon the walls, and a thick plank-work [was] upon the face of the porch without; and latticed windows and palm-trees on the one side, and on the other side, on the sides of the porch, and on the side-chambers of the house and the thick planks.” (Vers. 23-26) It is thus a wholly different measure of access to God from what we know who estimate the sacrifice of Christ according to its value in heaven and thus enter through the rent veil. For Israel, though surely redeemed, the barrier will be set up again.

Ezekiel 42

The survey of the house or sanctuary being ended, the prophet is given to see the cells or chambers for the priests.

“And he brought me forth into the outer court, the way toward the north, and brought me into the cell that [was] opposite the separate place, and that [was] opposite the building toward the north. Before the length of a hundred cubits [was] the north door, and the

breadth fifty cubits. Opposite the twenty [cubits] which [were] for the inner court, and opposite the pavement, which [was] for the outer court, [was] gallery against gallery, in three [stories]. And before the cells [was] a walk of ten cubits in breadth inward, a way of one cubit, and their doors [were] toward the north. And the upper chambers [were] shorter, for the galleries contained more than these, than the lower and the middle one, of the building. For they [were] in three [stories], but had not pillars as the pillars of the courts: therefore it was contracted from the lower and the middle ones from the ground. And the wall which [was] without, opposite the cells, by the way of the outer court before the cells — its length [was] fifty cubits. For the length of the cells which [belonged] to the outer court [was] fifty cubits; and, behold, before the temple [were] a hundred cubits. And below these cells [was] the entrance from the east, in one's going into them from the outer court. In the breadth of the wall of the court eastward, before the separate place, and before the building [were] cells. And the way before them [was] as the appearance of the cells which [were] northward, as long and broad as they; and all their outlets according to their fashions and according to their doors. And according to the doors of the cells which [were] toward the south, a door at the head of the way, the way directly before the wall eastward, when one entereth into them." (Vers. 1-12)

This account of the chambers for the priests is followed by express regulations as to their eating in them, their laying the offerings in their service, and their dress within and without.

"And he said to me, The cells northward [and] the cells southward, which [are] before the separate place, [are]

cells of the holy place, where the priests who draw near to Jehovah shall eat the most holy things; there they shall place the most holy things, both the meat-offering, and the sin-offering, and the trespass-offering, for the place [is] holy. When the priests enter in, they shall not go forth from the holy [place] into the outer court, but they shall leave there their garments with which they ministered, for they [are] holy, and put on other garments, and shall approach the [place] that [is] for the people." (Vers. 13, 14)

The closing paragraph is a summary of the general extent. "And he finished the measurements of the inner house, and brought me out by way of the gate that looketh eastward, and measured it round about. He measured the east side with the measuring-reed, five hundred reeds, with the measuring-reed, round about. He measured the north side, five hundred reeds, with the measuring-reed round about. He measured the south side, five hundred reeds, with the measuring reed. Turning to the west side, he measured five hundred reeds with the measuring-reed. He measured it by its four sides; it had a wall round about, five hundred long, and five hundred broad, to make a separation between the holy and the profane place." (Vers. 15-20)

It is well known that there has been no little debate as to the reading in verse 16, and whether the word here used should be taken in the sense of "reeds"13 or not; for that of the text ("five cubits") is clearly an error of transcription, and the "five hundred" of the Keri must be adopted. Some would strike out the measure altogether (and the LXX waver in the verses). Doubtless the space would be far larger than Mount Moriah as it is; but this is a small difficulty to the believer, who looks for great

physical change according to prophecy. To view it as hyperbolical, and yet as leaving the literal interpretation intact, seems to me not only unbelieving but absurd. But when men yield themselves up to unbelief in the presence and power of the Spirit, we must not expect faith in the word of God to be strong; and when they attenuate the effects of the first coming of the Saviour as to the reconciliation of His own, why be surprised if the glorious results of His return and kingdom are perverted and frittered away?

Ezekiel 43

An incomparably more august sight now opens for the prophet. The Shechinah of Jehovah displays itself, returning to dwell in the midst of His people.

“And he brought me to the gate, the gate that faceth the east. And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east, and his voice [was] as the sound of many waters, and the earth shined with his glory. And [it was] according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city; and the visions [were] like the visions that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face. And the glory of Jehovah came into the house by the way of the gate whose aspect [is] toward the east. And the Spirit took me up and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of Jehovah filled the house.” (Ver. 1-5)

The force of this is clear enough, if men were but simple. It is the sign of God’s return to Israel whom He had left ever since the carrying of the Jews to Babylon. But the return from Babylon in no way satisfies the prophecy; nor yet even the mission of the Messiah. He

Himself lets us know, as we learn from elsewhere also, that the seasons of Gentile supremacy were then, as they are still, in progress. Jerusalem is trodden down of the Gentiles till the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. The Son of man at His appearing will gather Israel again and judge all the nations. Jehovah will then govern the earth with Jerusalem as His earthly centre. Of this the return of the Shechinah is the symbol. When it left, the Jews ceased to be the recognized people of Jehovah; when they are taken up again under Messiah and the new covenant, the glory comes back. No mistake can be greater than the idea that this vision applies to the first advent of Christ in humiliation when the Jews rejected and crucified Him. The prophecy requires us to believe that the glory will be actually restored; but it was not, when the Jews returned by Cyrus' proclamation, any more than when the Lord Jesus was here; it will be, when He returns to reign. Theocracy will then be established and flourish as long as the earth endures; for it will rest on Christ, not on the first man with all his failures under law. With grace as its foundation, "glory will dwell in the land," and this henceforth immutably. Then and not before shall the creature rejoice. Meanwhile it groans, but in hope, for all of it shall be delivered; and Christ is the sole deliverer at His coming in power and glory. The Spirit now works in testimony.

"And I heard [him] speaking to me from the house, and a man was standing by me. And he said to me, Son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever; and the house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name, they nor their kings, by their whoredom, and by the carcases of their kings in their

sepulchres;14 while they set their threshold beside my threshold, and their doorpost beside my doorpost, and the wall between me and them, they even defiled my holy name with their abominations which they committed, so that I consumed them in mine anger. Now let them remove their whoredom and the carcases of their kings far from me; and I will dwell in the midst of them for ever." (Ver. 6-9)

There was a dwelling of God in the midst of Israel of old, after He had wrought redemption for them and brought them out of the land of Egypt. At once they sung His praise when delivered from the house of bondage. "Thou leadest forth thy people whom thou hast redeemed; thou guidedst it in thy strength unto the habitation of thy holiness.... Thou wilt bring them and plant them on the mountain of thine inheritance, the place, O Jehovah, which thou hast wrought for thy dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, thy hands have established." (Ex. 15:13, 17) But there was more than anticipation; for He adds (Ex. 29:45, 46) "I will dwell among the children of Israel, and I will be their God, and they shall know that I am Jehovah their God that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt that I may dwell among them." The temple was the same thing in substance; only it was suited to the established state of Israel in the land, not the tabernacle which wandered with the Israelites up and down the wilderness. But in either case, as this was but an external redemption, so His dwelling was of an outer sort and contingent on their fidelity to Him as witnesses of the one true God and placed under the responsibility of His law. The result was, as it must always be for the first man, ruin.

Afterwards in due time came the Lord Jesus, the Son of man, the true temple of God, and this in His case alone without blood, for He only was without sin, the Holy One of God. Alas! He was refused, and all the hopes of Israel and man after the flesh were buried in His grave. But the grace of God wrought redemption by Him crucified; and a new dwelling for God was formed in those who confessed His name, whether Jews or Gentiles, builded together for a habitation of God by the Spirit. It is the church and it goes on still, whatever be the ruined state of this holy temple.

That however of which Ezekiel speaks is none of these things, but the dwelling which Jehovah will make for Himself "in the land of the children of Israel for ever." Of this we hear much and often in the later Psalms, especially Psalm 132. As yet it is wholly unaccomplished. Why should it be thought an incredible thing that God should thus dwell in the midst of Israel here below? Doubtless He is now forming a body for heaven by virtue of redemption in Christ. But its worth will be unexhausted for the earth; and grace will work afresh in power for Israel and the nations, as now for the church, that all the universe may know the virtues of Christ's blood, and behold the glory of God to the blessing of the once sick and weary creation delivered from its long and otherwise hopeless thraldom. Moral evil and religious pravity shall vanish away. All will be to the praise of the only worthy One. The people who had so long wrought mischief in the earth will be ashamed of their defilements and rebellion against Jehovah, and be in that day the witness of His mercy yet more than they have been of His consuming anger.

So even then the prophet is commanded to set the house before Israel in its measured pattern, that they might feel of what their iniquity deprived them. Deeply will the vision act on them by-and-by.

“Thou, O son of man, tell the house of Israel of the house that they may be ashamed of their iniquities, and let them measure the pattern. And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, let them know the form of the house, and its arrangements, and the goings out of it, and the comings in of it, and all the forms of it, and all the laws of it; and write it in their sight, that they may observe all its forms and all its statutes and do them. This [is] the law of the house: on the summit of the mountain shall its whole limit round about be most holy. Behold, this [is] the law of the house.” (Ver. 10-12) Far more than of old shall holiness reign in that day. Compare also Zechariah 14.

Next in order we have the measurement of the altar, and then its statutes for the offering of burnt-offerings and sprinkling of blood.

We have already seen that it is in vain to apply this description to the past return from Babylon. Much more evidence will follow in refutation of such a thought. The present chapter is evidence enough; there has been no return of the Shechinah. The Jews were then groaning under Gentile power. Since the destruction of the city by the Romans still less can it apply. Why then should men evade the only alternative? The fulfilment is future. Israel shall yet return to the land, and be converted indeed, and blessed, under Jehovah their God, but as Israel, not as Christians, which all believers do become meanwhile, whether Jews or Gentiles. They belong to

Christ in heaven, where such differences are unknown, and therefore one of the great characteristics of Christianity is that such distinctions disappear while Christ is the head on high, and His body is being formed on earth by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. When Ezekiel's visions shall be accomplished, it will be the reign of Jehovah-Jesus on earth, and the distinction of Israel from the Gentiles will again be resumed, though for blessing under the new covenant, not as of old for curse under the law. Hence the total difference of what is found in the Epistle to the Hebrews as compared with this and other prophecies. There can be no doubt that that epistle applies now. There ought to be as little question that this prophecy will apply by-and-by. Those who make both converge upon the Christian destroy the force of both. The result is that one is half Jew, half Christian. And such is the prevalent aspect of Christendom, to the great dishonour of the Lord, the distress of souls, and the enfeebling of the word of God. No, we must give each scripture its own proper value, and, while cleaving as Christians to the doctrine of that epistle for ourselves, let us rejoice in the prophet's bright anticipations for Israel. The heavenly people rest upon the one sacrifice, and draw near into the holiest of all, where Christ is at the right hand of God. But the earthly people will have a sanctuary as well as land suited to them, and such are all the ordinances of their worship.

"And these [are] the measure of the altar in cubits: The cubit [is] a cubit and a handbreadth, and the bottom a cubit, and the breadth a cubit, and its border on its edge round about a span: this [shall be] the outside of the altar. And from the bottom [on] the ground to the lower

projection two cubits, and the breadth one cubit; and from the lesser projection to the greater projection four cubits, and the breadth a cubit, and the hearth" (literally Ariel, or lion of God) "four cubits; and from the hearth and upwards four horns; and the hearth twelve [cubits] long, twelve broad, square on its four sides; and the projection fourteen [cubits] long, and fourteen broad, on its four sides; and the border round about it half a cubit, and its bottom a cubit round about. lend its steps shall look toward the east." (Vers. 13-17)

Next follows the use to which it was to be applied. "And he said to me, Son of man, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: These [are] the ordinances of the altar on the day when it shall be finished, to offer burnt-offerings thereon, and to sprinkle blood thereon. And thou shalt give to the priests, the Levites, who are of the seed of Zadok, who approach to me, saith the Lord Jehovah, to minister unto me, a young bullock for a sin-offering. And thou shalt take of his blood, and put it on its four horns, and on the four corners of its projection, and upon the border round about. And thou shalt cleanse it, and make an atonement for it. And thou shalt take the bullock for a sin-offering, and one shall burn him at an appointed place of the house outside the sanctuary. And on the second day thou shalt offer an he-goat, without blemish, for a sin-offering. And they shall cleanse the altar as they cleansed it for the bullock. When thou hast made an end of cleansing it, thou shalt offer a young bullock without blemish, and a ram out of the flock without blemish, and thou shalt bring them near before Jehovah, and the priest shall throw salt upon them, and they shall offer them up a burnt-offering unto Jehovah. Seven days shalt thou prepare every day a goat for a sin-offering. They

shall also prepare a young bullock, and a ram out of the flock, without blemish. Seven days shall they atone for the altar, and purify it. And they shall consecrate it. And when these days are expired, it shall be on the eighth day and forward, the priests shall prepare upon the altar your burnt-offerings, and your peace-offerings, and I will accept you, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Vers. 18-27)

This is decisive. Not only do we hear of the priests, but of these as Levites; nor this only, but of the seed of Zadok, intrusted with the duties of the altar. Sin-offerings, burnt-offerings, thank-offerings, all follow in due order. It is the renewal of sacrifice when the earth and Israel come under the reign of Messiah, displayed in glory, and governing in righteousness and peace. It is the apostasy, the Judaizing, of ritualism, which seeks to introduce the sacrificial system now that we are called to act in faith of the one offering of Christ accepted in heaven. But we ought not to close our eyes to the revelation of this future day for the earth, when God sanctions priest and people, sacrifice and altar, for Israel. If we cannot adjust the differences, we are bound at least to submit to the scriptures, which are unanswerably plain in their import, both as to ourselves now, and as to Israel by-and-by. Simplicity of subjection to Christ and His word is the secret of all intelligence that has price in the eyes of God.

Ezekiel 44

The prophet is again brought back to the gate that looks toward the east. This time it was shut. When he saw it before, the glory of Jehovah came by this very way into the house, and filled it. This gives occasion for the word of Jehovah. And there is ample instruction to decide its

application. “Then he brought me back the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary which looketh toward the east; and it was shut. Then said Jehovah unto me; This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because Jehovah, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut. It is for the prince; the prince, he shall sit in it to eat bread before Jehovah; he shall enter by the way of the porch of that gate, and shall go out by the way of the same.” (Ver. 1-3)

The entrance of Jehovah, the God of Israel, was enough to close it for all but His representative. But He will have a representative upon earth - the prince — and the prince stall sit “to eat bread before Jehovah.” He is to have the honour of entering in and going cut by the way of the porch of that gate. No high priest ever claimed this. Indeed it is not a priest but the prince, the earthly chief of Israel. We shall learn from chapters 45 and 46. a little more about the prince. Suffice it to say that he is certainly not the Messiah, for although he is thoroughly distinguished from a priest, he needs to offer a sin-offering, and he may have sons. Doubtless it is a future prince of the house of David.

“Then brought he me the way of the north gate before the house. And I looked, and behold the glory of Jehovah filled the house of Jehovah; and I fell upon my face.” It is clearly the kingdom. The prince shall be there, and the glory of Jehovah too. No approach to it has yet been seen, only a type had once been in the days of Solomon. Greater things are yet in store for Israel.

“And Jehovah said unto me, Son of man, mark well; behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, all that

I say unto thee concerning all the ordinances of the house of Jehovah, and all the laws thereof. And mark well the entering in of the house, with every going forth of the sanctuary." (Ver. 5) It is here that men have failed to set their heart. They have not understood the difference between all the ordinances and laws of the house here noted, and the past circumstances of the temple. They have failed to mark well, and confounded all with that which has been. Indeed it is where man habitually is dull. The Holy Ghost alone can show us "things to come" according to God.

"And thou shalt say to the rebellious, to the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Let it suffice you of all your abominations, in that ye have brought children of a stranger, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in my sanctuary, to pollute it, my house, when ye offer my bread, the fat, and the blood; and they have broken my covenant, because of all your abominations." (Vers. 6, 7) There will be no following of idols any more. Israel will have done with all their abominations. No longer will there be a tampering with the priesthood, nor yet a breach of Jehovah's covenant. Holiness will be observed henceforth in the house of Jehovah for ever. Here He reminds them of their sins, but shows that there can be no toleration of such ways longer.

"And ye have not kept the charge of mine holy things, but ye have set keepers of my ordinance in my sanctuary for yourselves." (Ver. 8) There is an end of every such failure.

"Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, no stranger uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall

enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel. And the Levites that are gone away far from me, when Israel went astray, when Israel went astray far from me, shall even bear their iniquity. Yet they shall be ministers in my sanctuary, having charge of the gates of the house, and ministering to the house. They shall slay the burnt-offering, and the sacrifice for the people; and they shall stand before them, to minister unto them. Because they ministered unto them before their idols, and caused the house of Israel to fall into iniquity, therefore have I lifted up mine hand against them, saith the Lord Jehovah, and they shall bear their iniquity. And they shall not come near unto me to do the office of a priest unto me, nor to come near to any of my holy things in the most holy place, but they shall-bear their shame and their abominations which they have committed. But I will make them keepers of the charge of the house, for all the service thereof, and for all that shall be done therein." (Ver. 9-14)

Thus the Levites who had turned aside will feel their shame in the days of the kingdom. They are degraded from their proper work — at least in its higher parts — and are only allowed to do menial service for the sanctuary. Sad contrast with the Levites in the days of Moses, when even Aaron revolted! But it is the days of the kingdom, and righteousness governs. Past reputation will not suffice. If their sons have walked unfaithfully before Jehovah appears in glory, they must bear the consequences. Jehovah shall be exalted in that day, and those who have humbled themselves will He exalt in due time.

So Israel must here learn in due time upon the earth. We have had the prince and the Levites; the rest of the chapter concerns the priests.

If evidence be wanted to know the just application of this final vision (Ezek. 40-48), one can hardly conceive of anything plainer or more decisive than the latter verses of our chapter convey. It is not at all a ministry to preach the good news of God in indiscriminate grace or to establish the children of God in His truth and their privileges. The church state is gone before this prophecy begins to be fulfilled, as surely as that church state began long after the prophecy was written. As we have seen the house of Jehovah with its inner and outer courts, its gates and its porches, its separate place, its chambers, and its sanctuary, so now we have the sons of Zadok as the priests the Levites who alone are authorised to draw near in divine services for Israel.

It is in vain to plead that under Christianity there are priests; for this does not mean a class of Christian officials who represent their brethren and enjoy a greater nearness to God than the rest. It is the mystic priesthood of those who believe in Christ. They are all free to draw near to God, being equally brought nigh by the blood of Jesus. To assert a relationship of greater nearness for some is to deny the gospel not only for the others but for all; inasmuch as it is the very essence of it that grace now puts all who are Christ's in the same absolute perfection by His blood. The efficacy of His sacrifice is complete, unchanging and everlasting. He annuls the work of Christ who attributes to it a various value; he has only a human traditional notion of it; he has not learnt what God reveals as to it. The teaching accordingly of the New Testament is that all who believe

are priests. The same precious blood which has blotted out their sins has brought themselves near to God. They are in Christ before Him. As there was no difference of old in their sinfulness, so is there none in their access to God. We have therefore, all alike, boldness for entering into the holy places by the blood of Jesus, the new and living way which He has dedicated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh. We are a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices to God by Jesus Christ, yea, a royal priesthood to set forth the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness to His wonderful light.

But here it is a certain favoured portion of the chosen people who could represent all where the rest could not go; and as this is an earthly priesthood, so the offerings are akin. “But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me, and they shall stand before me to offer unto me the fat and the blood, saith Jehovah God: They shall enter into my sanctuary, and they shall come near to my table, to minister unto me, and they shall keep my charge.” (Vers. 15, 16) “The fat” and “the blood” according to the law were Jehovah’s portion, as we see claimed punctiliously in the directions for the peace-offering. (Lev. 3, 7) It has been pointed out already that, though the altar in the Old Testament is designated the table of Jehovah, nowhere is the Lord’s table in the New Testament spoken of as His altar. The altar of old might fittingly be styled His table because thereon was laid and consumed “the food of the offering made by fire unto Jehovah.” This in no way applies to the New Testament, where it is no question of any such oblation but of the church’s communion in the

remembrance of Christ and thus in showing forth His death.

The details quite fall in with the remarks just made and confirm them. Thus linen was enjoined for the priestly ministration and wool forbidden; and this for the head as well as the body. Their ordinary clothes are all well outside, but they must wear the due priestly garments in their office and lay them in the holy chambers. They must neither shave their heads nor wear long hair; they must drink no wine when they enter into the inner court. They must not marry a widow save of a priest or maidens of Israel. “And it shall come to pass, [that] when they enter in at the gates of the inner court, they shall be clothed with linen garments; and no wool shall come upon them, whiles they minister in the gates of the inner court, and within. They shall have linen bonnets upon their heads, and shall have linen breeches upon their loins; they shall not gird [themselves] with anything that causeth sweat. And when they go forth into the utter court into the utter court to the people, they shall put off their garments wherein they ministered, and lay them in the holy chambers, and they shall put on other garments; and they shall not sanctify the people with their garments. Neither shall they shave their heads, nor suffer their locks to grow long; they shall only poll their heads. Neither shall any priest drink wine, when they enter into the inner court. Neither shall they take for their wives a widow, nor her that is put away: but they shall take maidens of the seed of the house of Israel, or a widow that had a priest before.” (Ver. 17-22) It is clearly a repetition of Levitical order for the earthly priests of Israel in the days of the future kingdom, with even increase of strictness in this that all the priests are

to be put under the conditions of marriage laid of old on the high priest. But in their literal bearing these precepts have no reference to Christians, still less to any class among them.

Their duties are next shown to embrace both ceremonial and judicial decisions. “And they shall teach my people [the difference] between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. And in controversy they shall stand in judgment; they shall judge it according to my judgments; and they shall keep my laws and my statutes in all mine assemblies; and they shall hallow my sabbaths.” (Vers. 23, 24)

The law of defilement for the dead holds as rigidly as ever. “And they shall come at no dead person to defile themselves; but for father, or for mother, or for son, or for daughter, for brother, or for sister that hath had no husband, they may defile themselves. And after he is cleansed, they shall reckon unto him seven days. And in the day that he goeth into the sanctuary, unto the inner court, to minister in the sanctuary, he shall offer his sin-offering, saith the Lord Jehovah.” (Ver. 25-27) Death may be but rare and exceptional in that day, but so much the more reason was there why the priests should not be under its power in any way.

They are to be content with Jehovah as their inheritance, instead of the carnal portion of an Israelite. But they are appointed their share out of His offerings, dedicated things and first-fruits, abstaining from any food of what had died of itself or been torn. “And it shall be unto them for an inheritance: I [am] their inheritance; and ye shall give them no possession in Israel; I [am] their

possession. They shall eat the meat-offering, and the sin-offering, and the trespass-offering; and every dedicated thing in Israel shall be theirs. And the first of all the first-fruits of all [things], and every oblation of all, of every [sort] of your oblations, shall be the priest's: ye shall also give unto the priest the first of your dough, that he may cause the blessing to rest in thine house. The priests shall not eat of anything that is dead of itself, or torn, whether it be fowl or beast." (Ver. 28-81) Surely it is not needful to demonstrate that these regulations are wholly outside Christianity; yet will they assuredly be in force when the glory of Jehovah visits and governs the earth. In heaven, or to the partakers of the heavenly calling, they are quite inapplicable. They will be lessons beautiful in their place and season. They are but beggarly elements now if taken literally, whatever spiritual instruction they furnish, as they undoubtedly may and do.

All turns on Christ. If He is known to faith while He is on high on the Father's throne, a heavenly relationship is formed; and "as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly." But when He is manifested in glory and takes the earth, there will be a corresponding change in the relative place of His people. They will be no longer heavenly but earthly; and the Holy Spirit will not form them into the one body of a heavenly Head, but place them as Israel and the nations in their due positions, and of course, distinct; though the old enmity and jealous alienation shall have passed away under the reign of Him whom all own as Jehovah, king over the whole earth. Hence also earthly distinctions as priests and Levites, with the other features of an earthly worship, are again set up according to the will of God,

instead of a common place of heavenly nearness in Christians as now.

Ezekiel 45

Next follows a fresh characteristic of the new age, the oblation set apart to Jehovah.

“And when ye shall cause the land to fall by lot for inheritance, ye shall heave an heave-offering unto Jehovah, a holy portion of the land. The length [shall be] the length of five and twenty thousand, and the breadth ten thousand; it shall be holy in all the border round about. Of this shall be for the sanctuary five hundred by five hundred, square round about; and fifty cubits an open place for it round about. And of this measure shalt thou measure the length of five and twenty thousand, and the breadth of ten thousand; and in it shall be the sanctuary and the most holy place. The holy portion of the land shall be for the priests the ministers of the sanctuary, which shall come near to minister unto Jehovah: and it shall be a place for their houses, and an holy place for the sanctuary. And the five and twenty thousand of length, and the ten thousand of breadth, shall also the Levites, the ministers of the house, have for themselves, for a possession for twenty chambers.” (Vers. 1-5) Jehovah thus claims His right as the acknowledged possessor of the land, but uses them for His people’s sanctuary and those who carry on the worship there, whether priests or Levites. It is a fresh arrangement for the millennial age; nothing equivalent was known in the past.

“And ye shall appoint the possession of the city five thousand broad, and five and twenty thousand long, over against the oblation of the holy portion; it shall be for

the whole house of Israel. And a portion shall be for the prince on the one side, and on the other side of the oblation of the holy portion, and of the possession of the city, before the oblation of the holy portion, and before the possession of the city, from the west side westward, and from the east side eastward: and the length shall be over against one of the portions, from the west border unto the east border. In the land shall be his possession in Israel: and my princes shall no more oppress my people; and the rest of the land shall they give to the house of Israel according to their tribes." (Vers. 6-8) Thus Israel have their portion in the possession of the city; the prince has his, and the tribes theirs, in the land generally; Jehovah binds up the entire system of His people, civil and religious, with His own name. Thenceforward selfish oppression will be as unknown as corruption in worship. But it is not less clearly the earth and the earthly people. Heavenly things have no place here. What a blank must be in the thoughts of such believers as leave no room for such a change in the earth to the praise of Jehovah's name!

This leads to a pointed moral exhortation, addressed to those of the prince's house. "Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Let it suffice you, O princes of Israel: remove violence and spoil, and execute judgment and justice, take away your exactions from my people, saith the Lord Jehovah. Ye shall have just balances, and a just ephah, and a just bath. The ephah and the bath shall be of one measure, that the bath may contain the tenth part of a homer, and the ephah the tenth part of a homer; the measure thereof shall be after the homer. And the shekel shall be twenty gerahs; twenty shekels, five and twenty shekels, fifteen shekels, shall be your maneh." (Ver

9-12) God deigns to regulate all things for His people on earth; there is nothing beneath His notice.

Next, the religious dues are laid down with precision. “This is the oblation that ye shall offer; the sixth part of an ephah of a homer of wheat, and ye shall give the sixth part of a ephah of a homer of barley: Concerning the ordinance of oil, the bath of oil, ye shall offer the tenth part of a bath out of the cor, which is a homer of ten baths; for ten baths are a homer: And one lamb out of the flock, out of two hundred, out of the fat pastures of Israel; for a meat-offering, and for a burnt-offering, and for peace-offerings, to make reconciliation for them, saith the Lord Jehovah. All the people of the land shall give this oblation for the prince in Israel. And it shall be the prince’s part to give burnt-offerings, and meat-offerings, and drink-offerings, in the feasts, and in the new moons, and in the sabbaths, in all solemnities of the house of Israel: he shall prepare the sin-offering, and the meat-offering, and the burnt-offering, and the peace-offerings, to make reconciliation for the house of Israel.” (Ver. 18-17) The relative places of the people and the prince were thus defined; there was no confusion, but their interests were common, and could not be severed.

Then we come to the times and seasons, as they were henceforth to be observed by Israel. At once we notice a new order for cleansing the sanctuary. “Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; In the first month, in the first day of the month, thou shalt take a young bullock without blemish, and cleanse the sanctuary: and the priests shall take of the blood of the sin-offering, and put it upon the posts of the house, and upon the four corners of the settle of the altar, and upon the posts of the gate of the inner court.

And so thou shalt do the seventh day of the month for every one that erreth, and for him that is simple: so shall ye reconcile the house." (Ver. 18-20) It is not now a testimony at the beginning of their months, any more than an atonement in the seventh month. The year opens on its first day with an offering which sets forth Christ in His full unblemished devotedness, yet suffering for sin; and this again on the seventh day, for every one that errs and for the simple, that none such should be debarred from the enjoyment of God and his privileges.

But there are the feasts, as well as the reconciliation of the house. God re-enacts the passover. It is the great unchanging institution for His people, begun in Egypt, observed in the wilderness, celebrated in the land, after long indifference recovered by Hezekiah, and again by Josiah; and now anew we see that in the kingdom Israel are still to keep the feast of seven days with unleavened bread. "In the first month, in the fourteenth day of the month, ye shall have the passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten. And upon that day shall the prince prepare for himself and for all the people of the land a bullock for a sin-offering. And seven days of the feast he shall prepare a burnt-offering to Jehovah, seven bullocks and seven rams without blemish daily the seven days; and a kid of the goats daily for a sin-offering. And he shall prepare a meat-offering of an ephah for a bullock, and an ephah for a ram, and a hin of oil for an ephah." (Ver. 21-24) It is not here thousands of oxen and sheep offered willingly out of a free heart; but the prince and all the people, on the fourteenth day of the first month, are identified as they never were before in a single bullock for a sin-offering, while every day of the seven the prince prepares a complete burnt-offering,

with its sign of perfect consecration to Jehovah, and its daily sin offering, and not without the appropriate meat-offering.

Most strikingly however the feast of weeks appears nowhere. There are those who conceive of the millennial day as peculiarly the era for the gift of the Spirit, and who might naturally expect this to be then far the most prominent of all feasts. But it absolutely drops out of the list. This is solemnly instructive. The gift of the Spirit has been, and is, the characteristic of this day of grace when we have to walk in faith and patience, rather than of the day when the kingdom comes in power. It is not that the Holy Spirit will not then be poured out on all flesh, for the prophets are explicit that so it is to be in that day. But now He is come down, not only in the way of power and blessing, but baptising all that believe whether Jew or Gentile into one body, the body of Christ the glorified Head of the church on high. It will not be so in the future day. Israel and the nations will be blessed, and they will rejoice together; but no such union is predicted as one body. They are to be each on their own ground, forming distinct circles, however blessed, around their Lord and God, whose earthly throne will be Jerusalem in that day. There will be far greater breadth then, but no such height and depth as the sovereign grace of God gives in this day for the praise of His earth-rejected Christ now exalted in heaven. Hence, as it appears to me, most fittingly, Pentecost is not found for the day of earth's blessedness, having found its highest and richest fulfilment in the church of God united to Christ in heavenly places.

But the feast of tabernacles will surely be then. This accordingly is here appointed afresh, and in the usual

time. “In the seventh month, in the fifteenth day of the month, shall he do the like in the feast of the seven days, according to the sin-offering, according to the burnt-offering, and according to the meat-offering, and according to the oil.” (Ver. 25) The sense of Christ’s work is fully maintained, as in the passover; but the feast which is most fully expressed then is clearly the great ingathering to rejoice before Jehovah, after the harvest and the vintage (cf. Rev. 14) when they look back on pilgrim days past for ever. It is not a witness now as in the two loaves, but the blessing of Israel when the glory shines on Zion.

Ezekiel 46

We have now further particulars as to the public worship of the millennial day in the sanctuary; and this as affecting the prince, the people, and the priests, and with especial prominence given to the sabbaths and the new moons.

“Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; The gate of the inner court that looketh toward the east shall be shut the six working days; but on the sabbath it shall be opened, and in the day of the new moon it shall be opened.” (Ver. 1) The reason why these two occasions gain so marked a place now is obvious. Those who are of God are no longer entering into rest; they have gone in. The day is come. Sabbath-keeping no longer remains for the people of God. Glory dwells in the land, and Israel are there gathered out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south. They had wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. This is all past — past for ever. They have been led forth by the right way, they are come to a

city of habitation, yea to His city, for this is its true and deep and worthy boast: as we shall hear, Jehovah is there. “In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not; to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. Jehovah thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will be silent in his love, he will exult over thee with singing.” The sabbath therefore naturally is now made much of. But so is the new moon. Israel who had long waned and disappeared now renews her light, never more to withdraw herself. The new moon therefore fitly marks Israel restored now and for evermore.

“And the prince shall enter by the way of the porch of [that] gate without, and shall stand by the post of the gate, and the priests shall prepare his burnt-offering and his peace-offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate: then he shall go forth; but the gate shall not be shut until the evening. Likewise the people of the land shall worship at the door of this gate before Jehovah in the sabbaths and in the new moons.” (Vers. 2, 3) It was meet that prince and people should thus worship before Jehovah, and with this distinction between them. But even the prince does not go within, he stands by the post of the gate, he worships at the threshold. There is no drawing near as we now do in the Holy Spirit through the rent veil. It is a people blessed on earth, not in the heavenly places.

“And the burnt-offering that the prince shall offer unto Jehovah in the sabbath day [shall be] six lambs without blemish, and a ram without blemish. And the meat-offering [shall be] an ephah for a ram, and the meat-offering for the lambs as he shall be able to give, and a hin of oil to an ephah. And in the day of the new moon [it

shall be] a young bullock without blemish, and six lambs, and a ram: they shall be without blemish. And he shall prepare a meat-offering, an ephah for a bullock, and an ephah for a ram, and for the lambs according as his hand shall attain unto, and a hin of oil to an ephah. And when the prince shall enter, he shall go in by the way of the porch of [that] gate, and he shall go forth by the way thereof." (Vers. 4-8) Such was the order on ordinary occasions. There was this difference however, that in the solemn feasts the prince went in and went out in their midst: "But when the people of the land shall come before Jehovah in the solemn feasts, he that entereth in by the way of the north gate to worship shall go out by the way of the south gate; and he that entereth by the way of the south gate shall go forth by the way of the north gate; he shall not return by the way of the gate whereby he came in, but shall go forth over against it. And the prince in the midst of them, when they go in, shall go in; and, when they go forth, shall go forth. And in the feasts and in the solemnities the meat-offering shall be an ephah to a bullock, and an ephah to a ram, and to the lambs as he is able to give, and an hin of oil to an ephah." (Vers. 9-11) Another distinction appears when he offered a voluntary offering alone: "Now when the prince shall prepare a voluntary burnt-offering or peace-offerings voluntarily unto Jehovah, [one] shall then open him the gate that looketh toward the east, and he shall prepare his burnt-offering and his peace-offerings, as he did on the sabbath day: then he shall go forth; and after his going forth [one] shall shut the gate." (Ver. 12)

It is remarkable again that, while the daily offering consisted of the burnt-offering of a lamb, as of old it was

to be prepared morning by morning, but there was no longer an evening lamb. “Thou shalt daily prepare a burnt offering unto Jehovah [of] a lamb of the first year without blemish: thou shalt prepare it every morning. And thou shalt prepare a meat-offering for it every morning, the sixth part of an ephah, and the third part of an hin of oil, to temper with the fine flour; a meat-offering continually by a perpetual ordinance unto Jehovah. Thus shall they prepare the lamb, and the meat-offering, and the oil, every morning [for] a continual burnt-offering.” (Vers. l 3-15) The propriety of this again seems most apparent. It was the day when the sun of Israel should go no more down. Of old an evening lamb was in every way seasonable, and full of comfort for the people to know when awakened to the truth that God had provided for that long long night during which they had slept alas! in their forgetfulness of Him who had died for that nation. But now that they are in the light of His day the evening lamb disappears, while every morning it abides as a continual burnt-offering.

Next we have care taken that the prince should not overstep his due limits, in case of a gift to his servants, so as to preserve the rights of his sons intact, as well as of every Israelite. “Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: If the prince give a gift unto any of his sons, the inheritance thereof shall be his sons’; it [shall be] their possession by inheritance. But if he give a gift of his inheritance to one of his servants, then it shall be his to the year of liberty, when it shall return to the prince: but his inheritance shall only be for his sons. Moreover the prince shall not take of the people’s inheritance by oppression, to thrust them out of their possession; he shall give to his sons inheritance out of his own

possession: that not one of my people be deprived of his possession." (Vers. 16-18) Truly judgment shall return to righteousness in that day. The jubilee is then observed in all its force.

The last regulations show special provision not for meat-offerings only but for those for sin and trespass: the state of Israel on earth still demands them. "And he brought me through the entry, which [was] at the side of the gate, into the holy chambers of the priests, which looked toward the north: and, behold, there [was] a place on the two sides westward. And said he unto me, This [is] the place where the priests shall boil the trespass-offering and the sin-offering, where they shall bake the meat offering; that they bear [them] not out into the utter court, to sanctify the people. And he brought me forth into the utter court, and caused me to pass by the four corners of the court; and, behold, in every corner of the court [there was] a court. In the four corners of the court [there were] courts joined of forty [cubits] long and thirty broad: these four corners [were] of one measure. And [there was] a row [of building] round about in them, round about them four, and [it was] made with boiling places under the rows round about. And said he unto me, These [are] the places of them that boil, where the ministers of the house shall boil the sacrifice of the people." (Ver. 19-24) The millennial age differs as decidedly from the present ways of God with the church as from the eternal state. We have here Israel blessed on earth during the kingdom, Satan bound, but sin not yet extirpated though suppressed, and in certain cases grace meeting it where it did not demand a curse or excision.

Ezekiel 47

We now come to a highly characteristic feature of the coming age, in connection with the sanctuary of Jehovah, waters that issue with healing power, and this with increasing volume.

Joel, as is well known, had already predicted that “a fountain shall come forth of the house of Jehovah, and shall water the valley of Shittim.” (Joel 3:18) The prediction does suppose exuberance of earthly blessing, as the token of God’s favour and delight in goodness to the creature. The valley of the acacias does not forbid but confirm this. For it is no question whether the waters could flow thither on the other side Jordan, some seven miles or more beyond the Dead Sea, as nature now is. “That day” will be subject to no such conditions. Nature bowed to the Creator when He came to be a man and die and rise again; nature will bow correspondingly when He executes judgment on the quick at His coming again in His kingdom. It is just because it affords such an example of dryness that God takes that valley, and declares it shall be watered then, it is because the east sea is one proverbially of death, that it shall be made to abound in life. Blessing will spread to the ends of the earth, and from this centre — the house of Jehovah. What ought to be shall then be without fail, even on this earth, in spite of its hitherto sad continuity of failure; and this because Jehovah-Jesus reigns in virtue of His cross.

After our prophet, Zechariah declares that half of the living waters should go to the hinder sea or the Mediterranean, and half to the former or eastern sea, thus adding very materially to what Joel had predicted;

and this should be alike in summer as in winter. For its source was higher than the creature supplies.

Ezekiel, between these two prophets, will tell us of the manner and effects of these waters, which point to an energy altogether different from man's or nature's so evidently that Henderson is obliged here to depart from his previous interpretation. So far as the temple and its ordinances are concerned, he owns their literality. Here he gives this up, because there was nothing left for the Jews to do in bringing about the realization of the vision. But this is in every way erroneous; for (1) the Jews could do as little to bringing back the visible display of Jehovah's glory as in causing healing waters to flow from the temple, and yet the return of the cherubim is the grandest feature in all this vision from first to last; and (2) we have already seen that, in what might be thought more within the compass of the Jews, a vast deal of the description, and even ritual, wholly differs from what existed among the remnant who returned to the land from Babylon. It would be hard to point out a single particular of agreement between their history and the prophecy.

The only just conclusion then is that the vision, as a whole and in all its parts, belongs to the future, and supposes the kingdom to be set up over Israel, restored once more, and planted for ever in their land. In this point of view the words of the translator referred to may be cited, though they need correction: — "Having left the temple, the seat of the divine residence, and the source whence blessings were to flow to the restored Hebrew nation, the prophet is carried in vision southward into the regions of the Dead Sea, which had been noted for everything that was forbidden and

noxious in its aspect — the very embodiment of barrenness and desolation. These were now to be converted into fertility and beauty. As in their previous condition they were strikingly symbolical of the spiritually unproductive and abhorrent character of idolatrous Israel, so they were now to serve as images of the renewed state of things when God should bring back His people, and, according to His promises, bless them, by conferring upon them abundantly the rich tokens of His regard. Instead of a barren wilderness, they should now become as the garden of Eden. By the copious effusions of the influences of His Holy Spirit He would restore His church to spiritual life, and render her instrumental in diffusing blessings to the world around."

The intelligent reader will see, not only the confusion of the Jew with the church, but also the mistake of supposing that this vision regards Israel's blessing. It is distinctly the divine blessing which will change the familiar, yet awful, scene of death outside into life and fruitfulness, though flowing out from the house of Jehovah. But, whatever may be the effusion of the Holy Ghost which accompanies it, there is no solid ground to question that this part of the vision is just as literal as what precedes and follows. All is really homogeneous.

"And he brought me back unto the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued from under the threshold of the house eastward; for the front of the house [was toward] the east, and the waters came down from under the right side of the house, at the south of the altar. And he brought me out of the way of the gate northward, and led me about the way without unto the utter gate by the way that looketh eastward; and, behold, there ran out waters on the right side. And when the man that had the

line in his hand went forth eastward, he measured a thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the waters were to the ankles. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through the waters; the waters were to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through; the waters were to the loins. Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over." (Vers. 1-5) The remarkable fact here seen is the striking increase of the waters, without the least hint, but rather to the exclusion, of the thought of accession from tributary streams as in ordinary nature. It is an astonishing manifestation of God's gracious power: all gushes forth from His house, yet the waters deepen rapidly, instead of growing shallower, as they recede from their source — to the ankles, to the knees, to the loins, and, lastly, till they are a river to swim in that could not be passed over.

"And he said unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen [this]? Then he brought me, and caused me to return to the brink of the river. Now when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other. Then said he unto me, These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea; which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed. And it shall come to pass, that everything that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and everything shall live whither the river cometh. And it shall come to pass, that the fishers shall

stand upon it from En-gedi even unto En-eglaim; they shall be a place to spread forth nets; their fish shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many. But the miry places thereof and the marshes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt. And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary; and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine." (Vers. 6-12) The effects appear at once: very many trees on both sides the stream, and there, where death had so long reigned, fish in the greatest abundance, so that fishers should spread their nets from end to end of what had once been the lake of Asphaltitis. Still it is in time, not yet the perfection of eternity any more than its condition, for there is still sea (cf Rev. 21), and its swamps and its lagoons are not to be healed, whatever may be the ample exhibition of animal and vegetable life within and around; but there is marked exception here, as verse 11 shows, even if we accept the view that these unhealed waters are reserved or destined for the production of salt. Lovely is the picture of God's bountiful provision in verse 12, though here too we may note the supply of leaves for medicine. It is an earthly scene.

It may be remarked here how singularly some of the ancient versions (the Greek, Syriac, and Arabic) have mistaken the plain and certain meaning of verse 8. All three have blundered alike in making 'Arabah' mean Galilee, the Septuagint and the Arabic adding also the error of translating 'Lo'aroboh' as Arabia, the Syriac as

the north, or north-east instead of the plain or valley of the Jordan. The Targum of Jonathan has avoided these mistakes.

The rest of the chapter is occupied with the arrangement of Israel according to their future place in the land; and here Henderson cannot but return to “the literal Canaan and the literal tribes,” as alone meeting the demand of the unbiassed expositor. The counsels of God stand. Joseph, whatever the dark history of his sons meanwhile, must have his portion; the title of flesh failed, Reuben forfeited his birthright; but not the original gift of grace. So the prophet begins the distribution. “Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, This shall be the border, whereby ye shall inherit the land according to the twelve tribes of Israel: Joseph shall have two portions. And ye shall inherit it, one as well as another: concerning the which I lifted up mine hand to give it unto your fathers: and this land shall fall unto you for inheritance. And this shall be the border of the land toward the north side, from the great sea, the way of Hethlon, as men go to Zedad; Hamath, Berothah, Sibraim, which is between the border of Damascus and the border of Hamath; Hazar-hatticon, which is by the coast of Hauran. And the border from the sea shall be Hazar-enan, the border of Damascus, and the north northward, and the border of Hamath. And this is the north side. And the east side ye shall measure from Hauran, and from Damascus, and from Gilead, and from the land of Israel by Jordan, from the border unto the east sea. And this is the east side. And the south side southward, from Tamar even to the waters of strife in Kadesh, the river to the great sea. And this is the south side southward. The west side also shall be the great sea

from the border, till a man come over against Hamath. This is the west side. So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel." (Vers. 18-21) Did any fear that the territory might fail for Israel gathered in, every one from all lands? They need not, for in that day the earth shall yield its increase, and the abundance of the sea shall be turned to Zion, and the riches of the nations without measure. The nation and the kingdom that will not serve Jerusalem shall perish. Kings shall be her nursing-fathers, and princesses her nursing mothers.

But so little ground is there for anxiety, that the land will suffice not only for the tribes of Israel but for the strangers that may sojourn and have begotten children there. "And it shall come to pass that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Vers. 22, 23) Who can doubt that such largeness of heart and liberality of hand are absolutely new to Israel?

On every side the evidence is complete that it is not of the past and accomplished we here read, but of the bright future of God for Israel in their land, when there will be a welcome for the stranger truly divine to an inheritance in any tribe whatsoever. So will it be with the Jew in that day, happy contrast with all that has ever been! He will learn it of God when he bows to Jesus, and himself blessed be a blessing. Good measure, pressed

down, shaken together, and running over, such shall they give to the praise of His mercy which endures for ever.

Ezekiel 48

It must be evident to every dispassionate mind that the distribution of the tribes in the land, from Joshua to the ruin of the kingdom, wholly differs from what is here predicted, and that nothing answering to the prophecy can be alleged since. Thus Dan is in the extreme north, not Naphtali, as of old; next Asher, and, not till then, Naphtali. Again Manasseh, instead of being divided by the Jordan, is altogether like the other tribes, with Ephraim to the south, and Reuben no longer to the east of the Jordan but following, and Judah immediately before the holy oblation. South of the oblation is first of all Benjamin's portion reversing their ancient order, in which the former was north and the latter south. Simeon comes next, and Issachar (instead of its old position, south-west of the sea of Galilee and north of Samaria) follows Simeon. Then succeeds Zebulun, which of old was north of Issachar; and Gad, instead of its ancient locality in the east, is found the most southern of all.

"Now these [are] the names of the tribes: from the north end to the coast of the way to Hethlon, to the entering in of Hamath, Hazar-enan, the border of Damascus northward to the coast of Hamath; and these are the sides thereof east [and] west; Dan, one. And by the border of Dan, from the east side unto the west side; Asher, one. And by the border of Asher, from the east side even unto the west side; Naphtali, one. And by the border of Naphtali, from the east side unto the west side; Manasseh, one. And by the border of Manasseh,

from the east side unto the west side; Ephraim, one. And by the border of Ephraim, from the east side even unto the west side; Reuben, one. And by the border of Reuben, from the east side unto the west side; Judah, one. And by the border of Judah, from the east side to the west side, shall be the oblation which ye shall offer, five and twenty thousand in breadth, and in length as one of the parts, from the east side to the west side; and the sanctuary shall be in the midst of it. The oblation that ye shall offer unto Jehovah [shall be] of five and twenty thousand in length, and of ten thousand in breadth. And for them, [even] for the priests, shall be [this] holy oblation; toward the north five and twenty thousand [in length], and toward the west ten thousand in breadth, and toward the east ten thousand in breadth, and toward the south five and twenty thousand in length: and the sanctuary of Jehovah shall be in the midst thereof. [It shall be] for the priests that are sanctified of the sons of Zadok; which have kept my charge, which went not astray when the children of Israel went astray, as the Levites went astray. And [this] oblation of the land that is offered shall be unto them a thing most holy by the border of the Levites. And over against the border of the priests the Levites [shall have] five and twenty thousand in length, and ten thousand in breadth: all the length [shall be] five and twenty thousand, and the breadth ten thousand. And they shall not sell of it, neither exchange, nor alienate the firstfruits of the land; for [it is] holy unto Jehovah. And the five thousand, that are left in the breadth over against the five and twenty thousand, shall be a profane [place] for the city, for dwelling, and for suburbs: and the city shall be in the midst thereof. And these [shall be] the measures thereof: the north side four thousand

and five hundred, and the south side four thousand and five hundred, and on the east side four thousand and five hundred, and the west side four thousand and five hundred. And the suburbs of the city shall be toward the north two hundred and fifty, and toward the south two hundred and fifty, and toward the east two hundred and fifty, and toward the west two hundred and fifty. And the residue in length over against the oblation of the holy [portion shall be] ten thousand eastward, and ten thousand westward: and it shall be over against the oblation of the holy [portion]; and the increase thereof shall be for food unto them that serve the city. And they that serve the city shall serve it out of all the tribes of Israel. All the oblation [shall be] five and twenty thousand by five and twenty thousand: ye shall offer the holy oblation foursquare, with the possession of the city. And the residue [shall be] for the prince, on the one side and on the other of the holy oblation, and of the possession of the city, over against the five and twenty thousand of the oblation toward the east border, and westward over against the five and twenty thousand toward the west border, over against the portions for the prince: and it shall be the holy oblation; and the sanctuary of the house [shall be] in the midst thereof. Moreover, from the possession of the Levites, and from the possession of the city, [being] in the midst [of that] which is the prince’s, between the border of Judah and the border of Benjamin, shall be for the prince. As for the rest of the tribes, from the east side unto the west side; Benjamin, one. And by the border of Benjamin, from the east side unto the west side; Simeon, one. And by the border of Simeon, from the east side unto the west side; Issachar, one. And by the border of Issachar, from the east side unto the west side; Zebulun, one. And

by the border of Zebulun, from the east side unto the west side; Gad, one. And by the border of Gad, at the south side southward, the border shall be even from Tamar [unto] the waters of strife [in] Kadesh, [and] to the river toward the great sea. This [is] the land which ye shall divide by lot unto the tribes of Israel for inheritance, and these [are] their portions, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Vers. 1-29)

It will be observed that, as in the days of Joshua, the land was divided by lot; so it will be in the day when a greater than he takes the kingdom. The oblation is a wholly new feature of this redistribution of Israel, when He comes whose right is the crown, and whose prime care is the sanctuary of Jehovah. Prince, priests, and Levites shall be there, each in due place in relation to the city and the sanctuary. For it is no question here of heaven or the heavenly city, new Jerusalem, that comes down out of heaven from God, but of the earth and the land. The temple is as marked here as it is emphatically absent in Revelation 21. So there are not, nor could be, priests or Levites, feasts or sacrifices, in the heavenly city of the Apocalypse any more than in Christianity now. In Ezekiel there are essential and indelible traits, which are only intelligible to those who, believing the prophets look for the age to come before eternity, and the fulfilment of prophecy in the blessing of Israel and the Gentiles under the reign of the Lord Jesus, when He shall have come with all His saints in glory. Unbelief of the truth is natural, and reasoning against it is not difficult, but the word of God remains as plain and sure as ever; and blessed are they who, confessing the future joy and rest which await Israel on earth, converted in the grace and faithfulness of God, are the more free to

await the Son of God from heaven. our Deliverer from the coming wrath. To see with distinctness the place of the earthly people, first under the old legal responsibility, next under the Messiah and the new covenant, helps greatly those who through grace now believe against the efforts of Satan, who would darken and destroy, if possible, their intelligence and enjoyment of their own proper blessedness and calling on high, as the body of Christ and bride of the Lamb. Mysticism is thus avoided, and scripture received in simple faith.

One more section leads us to the close of the prophecy. “And these [are] the goings forth of the city: on the north side four thousand and five hundred measures; and the gates of the city [shall be] according to the names of the tribes of Israel; three gates northward, one gate of Reuben, one gate of Judah, one gate of Levi. And at the east side four thousand and five hundred: and three gates; and one gate of Joseph, one gate of Benjamin, one gate of Dan. And at the south side four thousand and five hundred measures: and three gates; one gate of Simeon, one gate of Issachar, one gate of Zebulun. At the west side four thousand and five hundred, [with] their three gates; one gate of Gad, one gate of Asher, one gate of Naphtali. [It was] round about eighteen thousand [measures]; and the name of the city from [that] day [shall be], Jehovah [is] there.” (Vers. 30-35)

This then is the last and chief glory — the presence of Jehovah in the city of His choice. In this Israel shall boast above all their privileges; and justly, for it is the complement and crown of all. How bright an end of their long wanderings, and of their manifold sorrows! How worthy of His redeeming grace, who will cleanse away the guilt which shed it, when they turn to Him in faith,

discerning and owning at length their self-destructive folly in the light of His love, who never wavered but died for them so many centuries before they broke down in shame and contrition before Him!

1 The traditions of the Jews that Ezekiel was servant of Jeremiah, or his son (identifying Buzi with J.) seem unworthy of credit. Even Josephus makes him too young when a captive, for in the fifth year he begins to prophesy.

2 “The thirtieth year” (Ezek. 1:1) has greatly perplexed the learned. But it seems plain that the starting-point is the era of Nabopolassar, father of Nebuchadnezzar, who became king of Babylon, B.C. 625, about the date when Hilkiah found the book of the law in the temple so pregnant with blessing to Josiah and the righteous in Judah. This last is referred to in the Chaldee paraphrase of Jonathan ben Uzziel.

3 See especially Sepher Ikkarim, p. iii. c. 16.

4 Some consider it to mean that the four faces had the same aspect, the man and lion on the right, and the ox and eagle on the left.

5 It is of moment to observe that the observance of the sabbath is not of a moral nature like the other nine words or commandments; for these one judges to be right of oneself, intrinsically right, the sabbath only because God enjoins it to His own people as a sign of His covenant with Israel. Hence, while idolatry and robbery, for instance, are always evil, the Lord Himself in finishing the work of redemption inaugurates and sanctions another day as the expression of the Christian’s fellowship with the Father and the Son, as a sort of firstfruits. What ignorance to find fault with this,

which is really God’s wisdom and grace! Alas! even all saints have not such knowledge of God. Yet it is only one of the proofs how far Christendom is fallen; and men who ought to understand talk still of the christian sabbath, as if the sabbaths of Jehovah had not been taken up and enjoined as a sign that Israel might know Jehovah who sanctified them. But we, Christians, stand on the footing of redemption accomplished and of the new creation, not the old, and hence meet on the first day of the week, not on the last like the Jews.

6 Our version gives the obsolete phrase “Woe worth” instead of “Woe unto” etc.

7 It is to the shame of Christians that they who know the truth and grace of God in Christ should be so beguiled, in reading the prophecies at least, as to be justly rebuked for their dark unbelief by a Jew — himself so prejudiced as Don Balthasar Orobio. I am indebted to another for the following extract: —

“If it be Israel mentioned in the passages they quote, it is the spiritual (that is, the nations who have embraced the christian religion), and not the temporal, or in other words the Jewish seed of Abraham. If the text affirm that Israel and Judah shall return to the land of their fathers to possess it for ever, they uphold that this land is heaven, and those who have acknowledged Messiah are Israel and Judah. The wars and desolation of which the prophet speaks are also taken in a metaphorical sense. We must believe, according to them, that it is the struggle of vice with virtue - impiety with justice. Thus to annihilate the proofs which we expect will mark the fulfilment of the Almighty’s promises, they confound heaven with earth, this world with paradise, the holy

city with the assemblings of Christians; Israel, Jacob, and Judah, with the Gentiles; the disorder of war with the spiritual opposition of vice to virtue; the temple, evidently temporal as it is, with the salvation of souls, the religion they profess, etc.

“The prophet Ezekiel completely destroys all these chimerical opinions. The true Israelites, he says, will be redeemed — the real need of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and not the Gentiles. He does not say that the land which they will re-possess will be the church or heaven, but that same land which they had inhabited before they were scattered, and wherein they will dwell for ever. The Lord commands him to take two sticks; on the one to write the name of Judah and his companions; and on the other the name of Ephraim, son of Joseph, and all the house of Israel; that is to say, the remnant of the tribes which were divided into two kingdoms after the death of Solomon: and to say to the children of Israel that at the time of the redemption the kingdoms shall be united never to be divided again. He was then to show these two sticks to the people and say to them, ‘Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will take the children from among the nations whither they be gone, and will gather them from every side, and bring them unto their own land: and I will make them but ONE nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel: and one king shall be king to them all: they shall be no more two nations neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein their fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they and their children’s children for ever. And the nations shall know that I the Lord do

sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.'

"Can the Gentiles who have embraced the christian faith believe that they are the Israelites to whom the prophet alludes? Are the nations ever termed Judah and Ephraim? Or have they been divided into two kingdoms? Neither reason nor plain sense is the foundation of the persuasion that the land of which the prophet speaks is spiritual; that it is the church signified when he assures the people of Israel of their return to their own land — to that happy country which they had before possessed in the land of Canaan, that which the Lord had given to their ancestors. Can the mountains where the people were to assemble be spiritual? Fiction never went so far in metamorphosis."

8 Those who wish to go farther into the evidence may see it more fully in the Appendix to a volume of mine containing "Lectures on the Second Coming and Kingdom of our Lord Jesus." They will find there the more important extracts and interesting discussion in J Von Hammer's Origines Russes, drawn from Oriental MSS. (St. Petersburg, 1825) — a work which few can see for themselves. The author tries to make out that the Tiraz of Genesis 10 was the progenitor of the Ros or Ras of the Bible and the Koran, that is, of the Russians. Meshech and Tubal are undoubtedly given there. Prefixes and suffixes were often thus added, and hence the same name appears in more than one form. It was very common in the East, and we find it also in the Bible. Gomer appears to be the head of the Cimmerian or Celtic race, as Togarmah of the Armenians. Cush and Phut are those translated Ethiopia and Libya. It only needs to be added here that part of Cush settled on the

Euphrates, part on the Nile, being thus Asiatic as well as African. Compare Isaiah 18 for Cush.

9 This word is understood by our English translators to mean “leave the sixth part of thee;” and no doubt the connection of this rare word with the Hebrew for six is tempting. But the LXX give καθοδεγήσω σε (or with the Complutensian editors κατάξω σε). I have given the sense understood in the Targum, though with a query. The ancient versions in general express little more than Jehovah’s leading Gog.

10 Listen to the words of one who did not always seem an enemy - “All the fulfilment is past, and nothing more is expected. The Jews returned to their country and rebuilt their temple. If their restoration took place in a different manner from what the prophet projected [for God is in none of these thoughts], and the circumstances attending it were a poor counterpart of his imaginings, if the reality were but a dwarfish fulfilment of the prophecy, the event shows the imperfection of Ezekiel’s foreshadowing.” (Davidson’s “Introduction to the Old Testament,” iii. 156) It shows, as I should say, the folly of such an interpretation. Is Dr. D. a prophet to say that the vision is not to be fulfilled in the future? Let him beware of the character and doom of a false prophet. God is not mocked, though it be the day of grace and patience with man on the earth.

11 Boothroyd here follows the conjecture of Houbigant, or rather the version of the LXX, alleging that the rooms could not be for singers, when they were for the priests who had the charge of the altar and of the most holy place. Hence he gives, “And he brought me to the inner gate, and lo, there were two rooms in the inner court,

one on the side of the north gate, and its prospect was towards the south.... And he said unto me, This room, whose prospect," etc.

12 To the root of the hand; or, as some say, under ground; as others, by the joining.

13 Mr. H. A. Wassell (Holy Land, W. J. Johnson, 1875) says, "This is evidently a mistake, as it would make the Temple six times as broad as the measurements of the previous chapters; and I may further observe that the measurements of the other parts of the Temple that we have not yet come to exactly agree in making the Temple 500 cubits square. The Septuagint has in this place cubits instead of reeds, and it is a singular fact that the area on Mount Moriah is about 500 cubits or over 300 yards broad." (pp. 25, 26)

14 Or, "on their death." "When they are dead." would seem to be the force of Soncin. edition, which is supported by more than a dozen of De Rossi's MSS.