Notes on Jeremiah

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Introduction

On the consideration of the second of the four great prophets we purpose to enter. Here we are not in presence of the comprehensive scope of divine purpose such as we have seen in Isaiah; but we are about to deepen our acquaintance with one who yields to none in pathos. The sublime strains of his inimitable predecessor are not more suited to the magnificent visions which he was inspired to see and communicate then is the plaintive style of Hilkiah's son to his own solemn and touching commission.

Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry, as he intimates, in the thirteenth year of Josiah, the last king of Judah. It was the year which followed the first effort to purge the capital and the country from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images. The fairness of the promise but added to the poignancy of his grief when the reformation turned out altogether superficial, and the ruin impending was only stayed, under God, so to speak, by the life of Josiah, who died at the age of 39. Then followed the deplorable reigns of Jehoahaz (= Shallum), whom Pharaoh-Necho deposed, setting up Eliakim (= Jehoiakim); who was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin (= Jeconiah or Coniah), for whom Nebuchadnezzar soon substituted "his brother" (or, as we would say, his father's brother) Zedekiah (= Mattaniah). Under these kings the closing disasters of Jerusalem, were mixed up with the struggle between Egypt and Babylon, which ended in the indisputable world-sovereignty of the latter and the various stages of

Judah’s captivity. What juncture so suited to call out the exercises of such a heart as Jeremiah’s? These soul-trials, which the Holy Ghost wrought in, were, as far as circumstances and persons could be, the mould in which the various parts of the prophecy were cast.

As to form, no such book of Scripture perhaps has more perplexed the critics, one of whom (Dr. Blayney) has dared to characterize it as a “preposterous jumbling together” of incoherent materials. Apparently from very early times the arrangement was found difficult, as we may gather from the strikingly different disposal of a large part that is exhibited in the Septuagint. They have been compared thus:-

Lxx. Hebrew.

25:14-18 49:34-39

26 46

27, 28 50, 51

29:1-7 47:1-7

29:7-22 47:7-22

30:1-5 49:1-6

30:6-11 49:28-33

30:12-16 49:23-27

31 48

32 25:15-39

33, 51 26, 45

52 52

Dr. Blayney has sought to arrange the whole chronologically. Any such scheme will make it evident

that neither the Hebrew original nor the version of the Seventy adheres throughout to the order of time.

I do not doubt that the Hebrew (as followed by the Authorized Version) was the order in which the book was left by the inspired editor (whether Ezra or Baruch matters little) who added the last chapter, which fitly terminates the prophecy, and serves as a preface for the appendix of the prophet's Lamentations. In short, it appears that the disregard of mere historical sequence subserves a moral order, which, as usual in Scripture, has eluded the notice of those who look to no more then external points which lie on the surface.

Jeremiah 25 is a sort of link of transition between the first and last halves of the book. The early chapters were no doubt among the first utterances of the prophet, and are for the most part occupied with appeals to the conscience of the Jews, and warnings of the inevitable judgment of God just impending, though far from exhausted then. In that central chapter, the judgment is clearly predicted; and this judgment falls first on the land of Judah and all its neighbours; next, after seventy years' servitude to the king of Babylon, the day of divine visitation comes for the king of Babylon and the land of the Chaldeans. "And I will bring upon that land all my words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah hath prophesied against all nations. For many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of them also: and I will recompense them according to their deeds, and according to the works of their own hands. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel unto me; Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it. And they shall drink, and

be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them. Then took I the cup at the Lord's hand, and made all the nations to drink, unto whom the Lord hath sent me: To wit, Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, and the kings thereof, to make them a desolation, an astonishment, an hissing, and a curse; as it is this day; Pharaoh king of Egypt, and his servants, and his princes, and all his people." (Jer. 25:13-19.)

Thus evidently the chosen people are merged in the ruin and judgment of the nations, and only possess a title to come first in order to be chastised of God for their iniquities, so much the more guilty because of His favour and their privileges. This casts much light on the expression in the chapter that Jeremiah was ordained or made "a prophet unto the nations." Whatever the secret counsels of divine grace, in the public government of God the moment was come for Judah to be Lo-Ammi ("not my people"). Surely God will in His mercy restore them for the latter-day blessing and glory; but meanwhile they fell through idolatry, after the most perfect patience on God's part, from their distinctive place as God's people in the earth — not for ever indeed (for His gifts and call are without repentance), but for a time still in progress. "The times of the Gentiles," and the dispersion of Israel are the evident proofs of it.

Hence we may regard the Book of Jeremiah as divisible into two great and nearly equal parts: the first, up to Jeremiah 25, consisting of moral appeals to the people; and the second, from that chapter, bringing in the particulars of the judgments on Israel and the nations among which they as it were disappeared, and in the midst of judicial dealing God remembering mercy and

restoring them in virtue of the new covenant through His own unfailing grace.

Within these two main divisions there are, of course, lesser, though connected, sections. Thus Jeremiah 1 is the prophet's call; Jeremiah 2-6 go together, his first grave expostulation with the people. Jeremiah 7-10 begin with the house of God as the witness of the people's sin and the starting-point of His judgment; declare that Israel might take a lesson, in their inattention to the Lord, from the birds of heaven which observe their movements and seasons; and insist, though with the deepest grief on the prophet's part, that divine judgments must fall both on them and on the nations around them. Jeremiah 11-13 remind them of their fathers' covenant broken, so that intercession was vain, yet of restoring mercy at last, and close with a solemn denunciation of the proud iniquity of Judah. Jeremiah 14, 15 mingle an acknowledgement of God's chastening in famine with the prophet's tears and confession for the people; but the Lord's assurance, that not Moses nor Samuel could turn Him towards those whom He had made up His mind to abandon and disperse. Jeremiah 16, 17 separate the prophet from the people now, but assure of final blessing show the value of trusting the Lord and call to repentance. Jeremiah 18-20 give a startling picture of religious hardness toward God, and hatred of the prophet who called them by the testimony of judgment as well as of his own deep conflict withal. Jeremiah 21-24 are remarkable in this way, that the Spirit takes occasion, by the overwhelming answer of the prophet to Zedekiah, to collect the various sentences on the successors of Josiah-Shallum, Jehoiakim, [Je]coniah. Woe on these destructive pastors

is followed by Jehovah's promise of a righteous Branch to David. This, however, does not hinder present sternness of rebuke, but with discrimination of the righteous and the wicked, as set forth in the two baskets of figs. Jeremiah 25, though in fact an earlier message, winds up, as we saw, the first division, by declaring the intent of God to give all up to the king of Babylon, who in turn should be punished himself.

The second part consists far more of detached portions which give details. Thus, Jeremiah 26, in the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign, shows the effect of Jeremiah's calling them to repent of their sins that God might turn from the evil otherwise inevitable, the lay element, if one may so say, shielding their monitor from the priestly power. Jeremiah 27, 28 bring us to the beginning of (not "Jehoiakim's," which is an error of the copyists, but) Zedekiah's reign (of ver. 3, 12, 20 and Jer. 28:1). God had acted sovereignly in the government of the world and warns, not the king of Judah only, but those round about, of the necessity of subjection to the king of Babylon. This was sealed in the death of Hananiah the false prophet. Jeremiah 29 declares the blessing of God on those who accepted the humiliation from His hand in the dominion of Babylon such should find peace while there. Those who prophesied otherwise were not divinely sent, and must be judged for their rebellion against the Lord. Jeremiah 30, 31 prove that the Spirit does not limit the return from captivity to the remnant who went up from Babylon in the days of Cyrus, but looks onward to the unparalleled days of trouble, the time of Jacob's trouble which precedes his deliverance, when they shall serve not only Jehovah, but "David their king whom I will raise up unto them." The day of the

lord is contemplated, without doubt. Hence all the families of Israel enter the blessing, instead of a remnant according to the election of grace, as now, or before Christ. These will be the days when all Israel shall be saved, and be placed under Messiah and the new covenant.

Jeremiah 32 sets forth a present act on the prophet's part in evidence of their restoration — yea, of an everlasting covenant with them. Jeremiah 33 teaches that, when the Lord causes the captivity of Judah and of Israel to return, not only will there be unexampled prosperity, but Messiah, the Branch of Righteousness, shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land, and Jerusalem itself be called Jehovah-tzidkenu; and as the king, so the priesthood; and all this for ever. Jeremiah 34 renews the assurance of the imminent ruin of Jerusalem and Judah, and in detail. Jeremiah 35 contrasts the Rechabites, faithful to their father, with Judah's disobedience. Jeremiah 36 sets forth God's faithfulness in testimony spite of Jeremiah's imprisonment and Jehoiakim's destructive madness. Jeremiah 37 - 39 form another testimony to this in a different shape under Zedekiah. Appearances of good do not weaken God's word, nor do trifling circumstances impart security where He is not trusted. Jeremiah 40 - 44 testify similarly among those left behind when the final blow of the Chaldeans had fallen on Jerusalem: the people were as unbelieving and rebellious as the kings, and reap the due fruit of their sowing, whether in the land or in Egypt. Jeremiah 45 assures Baruch in his sorrow and shrinking, of God's sure judgments but of his own preservation meanwhile. Jeremiah 46 - 49 give the details of His dealings with the Gentiles in the land; as

Jeremiah 50, 51 show us the imperial power of Babylon itself judged, the occasion and type of that which makes the way for Israel's return to the land and the Lord their God.

Jeremiah 52, though not the prophet's writing, fitly closes the book, furnishing the connection of the Chaldean with the king, the capital, and the temple. The spoliation of the city and sanctuary was complete, and so was the captivity of the people. God had not failed in aught He had predicted of Babylon's supremacy, nor of the value of subjection to Babylon, the scourge of Judah's sin.

Jeremiah 1

But few words will suffice for the opening chapter, especially if the general scope of the prophecy has been apprehended. We have seen the extent of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry. (Ver. 1-3.) His call is then described in verses 4-10. He was a prophet sanctified to the nations, the people of God being on the point of losing their sanctification as His people, and all merged in common ruin and obnoxiousness to divine judgment. Serious charge to one of Jeremiah's tender feelings so strongly susceptible of grief and pity! But he must deliver it. "Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant." (Ver.

7-10.) Next, he is taught in symbols what was in store for him. (Ver. 11-16.) The almond rod set forth how God would hasten the performance of His word; the pot seething with its face northwards intimated the evil brewing thence for Jerusalem and Judah on account of their idolatries. “Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest 1 confound thee before them. For, behold 1 have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee: but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee.” (Ver. 17-19.) Out of weakness the prophet must be made strong to suffer, if not to do, in the testimony of God against his own people, the more painful because so loved and yet so guilty. His tender spirit must speak boldly against all, and so the Lord would deliver him: to shrink from it would ensure his confusion before them. What a deliverance from the fear of man is the fear of the Lord who deigns to be with His servant!

Jeremiah 2 - 6

The opening charge of the prophet to the people occupies these five chapters.

Jer. 2 Nothing can be more affecting than the Lord’s appeal as He reminds them, as it were, of plighted troth and consecration to Jehovah at the beginning of their history. (Ver. 1-3.) Was it iniquity in the Lord that their fathers walked after vanity? Were they not willingly ignorant, who felt not His goodness in bringing them out

of the furnace of Egypt, through the dreary desert, and into His good land, which they had made defiled and an abomination? (Ver. 4-7.) Nor were the priests, the pastors, or the prophets one whit better, but rather worse, or at least more conspicuous in their sin against Him. (Ver. 8.)

Next, how slow is the Lord to abandon His people, pleading with those before Him then, to their children's children! Go where they pleased — north-west or south-east, to Greeks or to Arabians: they would hear of none so false to their false gods as Israel to the true God. Well might the heavens be amazed and afraid and greatly wasted, at the sight of God's people guilty of two such evils: forsaking Him, the fountain of living waters, to hew them out cisterns, broken cisterns that hold not the waters! (Ver. 9-13.)

And why such exposure to enemies? Was Israel a slave from without or one born at home, that he should suffer the grossest wrong and indignity even from those they most trusted — the sons of Noph and Tahapanes — feeble as they were? Jehovah forsaken was Israel's punishment and shame. What had they to do with drinking of the Egyptian river or of the Assyrian? They must yet learn the bitterness of abandoning the Lord their God. (Ver. 14-19.) Of old they had been set free, and promised obedience, but turned to all licentiousness. God had failed in no case: the fault was their own, their stain indelible.

(Ver. 20-22.) Self-righteous were they, yet swift to do evil and irreclaimable, given up to others hopelessly (Ver. 23-25.), and as palpably as a thief caught in the very act; and this, not the masses only, but their kings, their

heads, and their priests, and their prophets, saying to a stock, My father art thou, and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth. In their trouble they might turn to God with Arise and save us; but God challenges their gods to arise if they can save them. It was from no lack of number alas! for Judah's gods were as many as their cities. In vain did they excuse themselves. They were all guilty, and far from accepting Jehovah's correction, their own sword had devoured their prophets. (Ver. 26-30.) The prophet closes this appeal on the Lord's part by asking if He had been a desert or land of darkness to Israel that they came no more to Him, forgetting Him unnaturally and continually, and teaching the wicked their ways, and with the most evident blood-guiltiness yet pretending to innocence. And truly it was but a shift of sin. It had been Assyria, it was now Egypt: but shame and sorrow would be the lot of their depraved affections.

Jeremiah 3. God, however, is nowhere more Himself than in His pitiful mercy to His fallen people. A man could not take back the wife who had deserted him for another. "Israel had committed fornication with many lovers: yet return again to me, saith the Lord." He points out their frequent and shameless unfaithfulness, calling Him withal the father and guide of their youth. But whatever they said, they persevered in evil-doing. (Ver. 1-5.) Israel's uncleanness was notorious, and God had called her back in vain; but Judah was yet more treacherous, despised the warning with better knowledge, and sinned yet more audaciously. (Ver. 6-11.)

In the face of all the prophet is bid say, "Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for 1 am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever. Only

acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the Lord. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for 1 am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: and I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the Lord, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more. At that time they shall Jerusalem the throne of God; and all the nations shall be gathered into it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart. In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers." (Ver. 12-18.) It is in vain to refer such language as this to the past. Such interpretations not only mislead as to the drift of the passage itself, but do the far greater damage of enfeebling all Scripture in the eyes of those who accept them. For if God can exaggerate or fail as to the one point, how can His word be trusted absolutely anywhere else? Apply such a prediction to the future, when, beginning with ever so small a gathering from this or that place, God will bring back His people to Zion, and the new order will far outshine the past, and Jerusalem be His throne, a centre for all nations, and the long-divided houses of Judah and Israel be re-united once more and for ever, not in another world, or after a

mystical sort, but in the land given for an inheritance to their fathers. But it will be no mere external resuscitation of Israel. They will truly repent and cleave to the lord with purpose of heart. (Ver. 12-19.)

The rest of this chapter (Ver. 20-25.) resumes the appeal to the conscience of the people; and the prophet replies in their name with a confession of their sins.

Jeremiah 4 summons the people to return to the Lord, and this in truth of heart, lest His fury break forth and burn like fire. Let the trumpet assemble to the defenced cities; for destruction comes from the north. It is Nebuchadnezzar "The lion is come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way; he is gone forth from his place to make thy land desolate; and thy cities shall be laid waste, without an inhabitant. For this gird you with sackcloth, lament and howl: for the fierce anger of the Lord is not turned back from us. And it shall come to pass at that day, saith the lord, that the heart of the king shall perish, and the heart of the princes; and the priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall wonder." (Ver. 7-9.) Again: "Behold he shall come up as clouds, and his chariots shall be as a whirlwind; his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe unto us! for we are spoiled." (Ver. 13.) The prophet next tells Jerusalem plainly that these bitter things befall her for her sins; and then pours out the lamentation of his own anguished heart at the horrors impending over the guilty but beloved city and land. (Ver. 19-31.)

Jeremiah 5. Yet was it most just. Righteousness was sought in vain throughout the streets and broadways; profanity was everywhere. And what would be the result under the righteous government of God? "Wherefore a

lion out of the forest shall slay them, and a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities: every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces: because their transgressions are many, and their backslidings are increased." (Ver. 6.)

How should the lord pardon Jerusalem for this? Could He reward His own dishonour? Could He sanction the grossest depravity? Nevertheless, the judgment was to be measured, even though they belied the Lord and His chastenings. (Ver. 7-18.)

Nor would it be only desolation and death in the land, but the people should serve strangers in a foreign land, even as they had forsaken Jehovah and served strange gods in their own land. They were revolted and gone in heart already. "Shall I not visit for these things? [recounting their iniquities] saith the Lord: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" is the twofold witness of the prophet. (Ver. 9-29.) People, prophets, priests loved falsehood together.

Jeremiah 6. This concluding portion of the charge adds to the terrors of the scene, first, by the call to the Benjamites to quit the doomed city. Zion was but a comely and delicate woman, incapable of defending her neighbours. Next, the prophet commissions the besiegers to come against Jerusalem; and this for universal covetousness and deceit. Such would be the eagerness of her wasters, that neither the heat of noon would delay them, nor the darkness of night, to the deep discouragement of those beleaguered. No: Jerusalem would not be instructed. The word of Jehovah is to them a reproach. Wounds were slightly healed with a "Peace, peace," where there was none. They would neither go

the good old way, nor attend to the warning of new woes. (Ver. 1-17.) “Therefore hear, ye nations, and know, O congregation, what is among them. Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it.” (Ver. 18, 19.) Their offerings were not acceptable. The northern foe is coming. Let Jerusalem gird herself with sackcloth. But if the Lord makes Jeremiah a fortress, the people are no better than reprobate silver, rejected of Him.

Jeremiah 7 - 10

This section of our prophet starts from the temple as its groundwork, though of course branching out into all directions of the people’s iniquity.

Judah at that time fell into the same fatal delusion, against which the Gentile is warned in Romans 11. Christendom, too, has despised the apostle’s admonition. Thus the solemn facts stand now in double line before us. Man asserts his self-security most loudly when he least heeds God’s sovereign grace and his own responsibility to witness Him aright. The Jew flattered himself that the temple must stand by God’s power, let the people be what they might. So Christendom, fallen and yet still falling, set up, corresponding to its degradation, the claims of unfailingness and infallibility, which belongs only to God.

But let us hearken: “The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Stand in the gate of the Lord’s house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the Lord, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings,

and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord are these." (Ver. 1-4.)

God must have reality in His people. Grace never was meant and never can be suffered to enfeeble the moral ways of God: indeed, it is the sole spring of power to make them precious in our eyes and to give firmness in walking according to them. And the grace that is shown to and appreciated, however feebly, by the soul, manifests fruit of righteousness in every-day life between men as surely as it sets all right Godward. No more destructive snare than that privilege can be pleaded by such as sin and continue in it. God's righteous government of His people is as certain as the mercy, which chose and blessed them: let them forget neither! "For if ye throughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye throughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land which I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever. Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; and come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the Lord." (Ver. 5-11.) Nearness to God, even outwardly, is the ground for a more watchful holiness, never for indifference.

But God deigns to reason with His people, notwithstanding their grossness. He points to Shiloh, where first the tabernacle of the congregation had been set up. How vain and fond the notion, that God would maintain His seat where His people insulted Him to His face! “But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what 1 did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the Lord, and 1 spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim. Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee. Seest thou not what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger. Do they provoke me to anger? saith the Lord: do they not provoke themselves to the confusion of their own faces? Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched.” (Ver. 12-20.)

And what does the God and Father of the lord Jesus now behold in Christendom? What in the East? What in the

West? What in those vast tracts of Asia and Africa, where christian assemblies once studded the countries now given over to the Mahometan apostasy? And if we come closer still, is there not as decided a setting up of false mediators in Romanism, as ever there was of false gods in Israel? If one had their “queen of heaven,” has not the other theirs, worshipped with yet more passionate devotion and with far less inexcusable rejection of better light?

The rest of Jeremiah 7 (21 et seq.) reminds the people that obedience was the claim of Jehovah, not burnt-offerings to hide their transgressions and stiff wickedness, which grew worse and worse as the prophets followed the law. Jeremiah should speak of them; but they were incorrigible idolaters. Jerusalem only dishonoured the Lord and His house, and is therefore called to mourning. As the Lord had rejected the generation of His wrath, so the high places of Tophet in the valley of Hinnom’s son should be superseded by the valley of slaughter till Tophet should have no more space for burial, and the carcases of Judah should be meat for birds and beasts; and all joy should cease and the land be desolate.

Jeremiah 8 fills up the picture. “At that time, saith the Lord, they will bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of his princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves: and they shall spread them before the sun, and the moon, and all the host of heaven, whom they have loved and whom they have served, and after whom they have walked, and whom they have sought, and whom they have worshipped: they shall not be gathered, nor be

buried; they shall be for dung upon the face of the earth. And death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue of them that remain of this evil family, which remain in all the places whither I have driven them, saith the Lord of hosts." (Ver. 1-3.) Moreover, the prophet was to remonstrate with the people of Jerusalem on their perpetual and unrepentant backsliding (Ver. 4-6), more heedless than familiar birds, great or small, which attend to their fit times, yet with all assumption of wisdom. (Ver. 7, 8.) But what wisdom is in those who reject the word of the Lord? Their covetousness and perfidious neglect of the true interests of Israel must meet with due retribution at His hands. He will surely consume, reversing the counsels of prudence, disappointing their hopes, and causing the whole land to tremble before their adversaries, who will bite like serpents not to be charmed. (Ver. 9-17.)

The rest of the chapter (Ver. 18 to the end) and the first eight verses of Jeremiah 9 set forth the affliction of the prophet over the deceitful malice of the people of the Lord, which forbade their knowledge of Him. Then, from ver. 9, follows their judgment under the Lord's indignant displeasure. Well might they call (Ver. 17) for mourning women, and with haste; and men shall fall like the handful after the reaper, but with none in their case to gather them. (ver. 22.) Human acquirements and resources would never do for man to glory in, but in understanding and knowing Jehovah righteous in all His ways here below, and delighting in goodness. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will punish all them which are circumcised with the uncircumcised; Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell

in the wilderness: for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart." (Ver. 25, 26.) If grace can be indiscriminate, judgment sometimes takes this shape also. And of this Jeremiah treats.

Jeremiah 10 closes the section with a solemn warning to Israel against the superstitious fear and idolatry of heathen ways, which are exposed in the ridicule of their falsehood. "They are vanity, and the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish. The portion of Jacob is not like them: for he is the former of all things; and Israel is the rod of his inheritance: The Lord of hosts is his name." (Ver. 15, 16.) Verses 17, 18 speak of speedy and condign judgment. And the prophet (ver. 19-25) both resumes his outpourings of grief, pleads for correction only in judgment lest all should come to nought, and prays for His fury on the heathen that know Him not, the devourers of Jacob and desolaters of His habitation.

Jeremiah 11 - 13

This section opens with the call of Jehovah to hear the words of the covenant between Him and His people. It is the covenant of law, not the ways of grace. By this Israel had bound themselves; but they forgot, transgressed and despised it, not more to His dishonour than to their own hurt. Little did they feel its solemnity when they undertook to obey it; not at all did they take into account their own self-will and rebelliousness. The sad and sure result was their ruin; and such must God's law invariably prove to the sinner. It never was given as a source of life, strength, or holiness; grace, the very reverse of law, alone can be such; and this, not from

defect in the law (for it is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good), but from the inherent weakness and invariable evil of fallen man judged by a divine standard. The fatal error of Israel was shown at the beginning by their proffer to take their stand and hope of blessing, not on the promises made to the fathers, but on the accomplishment of the law to be rendered by themselves; it was ignoring God's grace and their sin; it was presumptuous confidence in their own powers and guilty obliviousness of Him who alone could make reconciliation for iniquity and bring in everlasting righteousness. What, in such a question, is man to be accounted of? Let him at least confess his sinfulness to God and look to another — a Deliverer outside himself. This was precisely what Israel did not, and thence followed their mournful history of pride and falling through sin from first to last. To turn from promise to law, to accept and pledge conditions of obedience must be destructive to sinful men. This was just Israel's case, and God brings it before them.

"The word that came to Jeremiah from Jehovah saying, Hear ye the words of this covenant, and speak unto the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant, which I commanded you fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Obey my voice, and do them, according to all which I command you: so shall ye be my people, and I will be your God: that I may perform the oath which I have sworn unto your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as it is this day. Then answered I, and said, So be it, O Lord." (Ver. 1-5.)

But self-will soon goes into rebellion, and this again into idolatry. “Then Jehovah said unto me, Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying, Hear ye the words of this covenant, and do them. For 1 earnestly protested unto your fathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, even unto this day, rising early and protesting, saying, Obey my voice. Yet they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear, but walked every one in the imagination of their evil heart: therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do; but they did them not. And the lord said unto me, A conspiracy is found among the men of Judah, and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, which refused to hear my words; and they went after other gods to serve them: the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers.” (Ver. 6-10.)

Impossible that Jehovah should be a consenting party to His people’s sin and misery, any more than to His own dishonour. Judgment, therefore, should not slumber. “Therefore thus saith Jehovah, Behold, I will bring evil upon them, which they shall not be able to escape; and though they shall cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them. Then shall the cities of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem go, and cry unto the gods unto whom they offer incense: but they shall not save them at all in the time of their trouble. For according to the number of thy cities were thy gods, O Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have ye set up altars to that shameful thing, even altars to burn incense unto Baal. Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift

up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble. What hath my beloved to do in my house, seeing she hath wrought lewdness with many, and the holy flesh is passed from thee? when thou doest evil, then thou rejoicest. The Lord called they name, A green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit: with the noise of a great tumult he hath kindled fire upon it, and the branches of it are broken. For the Lord of hosts, that planted thee, hath pronounced evil against thee, for the evil of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah, which they have done against themselves, to provoke me to anger in offering incense unto Baal." (Ver. 11-17.)

In the latter part of the chapter (ver. 18-23) the prophet states how the Lord had made known all to him; for he was as unconscious of their murderous devices against himself as the beast devoted to slaughter. So he calls for righteous vengeance on the guilty people, specially and full soon on the men of Anathoth, to whom Jeremiah's nearness had furnished the opportunity of proving their excessive iniquity.

This is pursued in the first four verses of Jeremiah 12, where the prophet complains to Jehovah of the prosperity of the wicked in the land — so much the more grievous a stumbling-block because He was as near in their mouth as far from their reins.

This is answered in verses 5-13, where Jehovah prepares the tried spirit of His servant for greater ills, and declares He has forsaken His house and heritage, giving the love of His soul (as He calls His people Israel) into the enemies' hands. Desolation therefore was coming, and the sword of Jehovah.

Nevertheless even here Jehovah warns all His evil neighbours who sought to profit by the disasters of the Jews. “Behold, I will pluck them out of their land, and pluck out the house of Judah from among them. And it shall come to pass, after that I have plucked them out I will return, and have compassion on them, and will bring them again, every man to his heritage, and every man to his land. And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, The Lord liveth, as they taught my people to swear by Baal; then shall they be built up in the midst of my people. But if they will not obey, 1 will utterly pluck up and destroy that nation, saith the Lord.” (Ver. 14-17.)

The section ends with a symbolic action to which the prophet was called in Jeremiah 13, its application and touching appeal to Jerusalem founded on it. The girdle worn and kept safely, then utterly marred, set forth what Jehovah had been and what He would be to Judah. (ver. 1-l l.) Did the people taunt the prophet as telling them what they knew? Let them learn what they did not believe, their own destruction now imminent, kings, priests, prophets, all: the God of mercy should not have mercy, but destroy them unsparingly. “Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud: for the Lord hath spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God, before He cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness. But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride, and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the Lord’s flock is carried away captive. Say unto the king and to the queen, Humble yourselves, sit down: for your principalities shall come down, even

the crown of your glory. The cities of the south shall be shut up, and none shall open them: Judah shall be carried away captive all of it, it shall be wholly carried away captive. Lift up your eyes, and behold them that come from the north: where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock? What wilt thou say when he shall punish thee? for thou hast taught them to be captain, and as a chief over thee: shall not sorrows take thee, as a woman in travail?" (Ver. 15-21.) Did Jerusalem say in her heart, wherefore come these things upon me? Alas! the answer was already prepared: "For the greatness of thine iniquity are thy skirts discovered and thy heels made bare." (Ver. 22.) Their evil was as hopelessly ingrained as the black of a negro or the spots of a leopard. Jehovah should not only scatter His people, but put them to extreme shame. (Ver. 24-27.) So it must be till all has been fulfilled. There remains greater horrors: only there is one that yet hinders the last excess of lawlessness in the rising of the lawless one against Jehovah and His Anointed. But this belongs to another witness than Jeremiah: so 1 say no more here.

Jeremiah 14, 15

This section opens with a graphic picture of the pressure of death on the Jews and Jerusalem, which filled the land with mourning and levelled the great and small, man and beast, in common privation and suffering. (Ver. 1-6.) This draws out the prophet in touching intercession. "O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake: for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against thee. O the hope of Israel, the saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that

turneth aside to tarry for a night? Why shouldest thou be as a man astonied, as a mighty man that cannot save? yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name; leave us not." (Ver. 7-9.)

But was it possible for Jehovah, whatever His mercy, to accept the degradation of His name at the hands of His own favoured people? "Thus saith the Lord unto this people, Thus have they loved to wander, they have not refrained their feet, therefore the Lord doth not accept them; he will now remember their iniquity, and visit their sins." (Ver. 10.) How solemn when Jehovah says to His servant "Pray not for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry: and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence." (Ver. 11, 12.) This to one who loved the people of God was in every way a trial: what was it to Him who loves as only God can love? Yet it remains true, and there are times when the principle applies, and faith is bound to find it out and act on it, whatever the reproach of uncharitableness. Such a reproach, that costs nothing, gratifies the flesh, and buys the favour of those with whom God has a controversy. But thy favour of the guilty people is dearly bought, at the expense of His approval and glory.

Nevertheless, Jeremiah spreads before the Lord that which misled the people most and was the chief source of difficulty to himself. "Then said I, Ah Lord God! behold the prophets say unto them, Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place. Then the Lord said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto

them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the prophets that prophesy in my name, and I sent them not, yet they say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land; By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed. And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and they shall have none to bury them, them, their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters: for I will pour their wickedness upon them." The false prophets must be the first to fall by the very ill from which they promised the people exemption, and the people must learn the folly of heeding man's promises by their own righteous ruin.

The rest of the chapter (ver. 17-22) is an outpouring of sorrow; for indeed the desolation was without and within, and both the prophet and the priest helped it on for the sake of selfish advantage, fattening on the corruption of God's people. What could Jeremiah do but bewail? This was not forbidden. It was an awful thing for a godly Jew to think of — the rupture of Israel's bond with Jehovah, the loss of their distinctive place as His people on earth. "Hast thou utterly rejected Judah? hath thy soul loathed Zion? why hast thou smitten us. and there is no healing for us? we looked for peace, and there is no good; and for the time of healing, and behold trouble! We acknowledge, O lord, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers: for we have sinned against thee. Do not abhor us, for thy name's sake, do not disgrace the throne of thy glory: remember, break not thy covenant with us. Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? or can the heavens

give showers? art thou not he, O lord our God? therefore we will wait upon thee: for thou has made all these things." (Ver. 19-22.)

In the beginning of Jeremiah 15 the Lord is still more peremptory. At the most critical points in the past Moses and Samuel had cried to Jehovah, and not in vain. The people had cast off Jehovah as their God and as their king; yet had he hearkened to His servants, and staid the hand uplifted as it was in judgment. But now, said Jehovah to Jeremiah, "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth. And it shall come to pass, if they say unto thee, Whither shall we go forth? then thou shalt tell them, Thus saith the Lord, Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity. And I will appoint over them four kinds, saith the Lord: the sword to slay, and the dogs to tear, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the earth, to devour and destroy. And I will cause them to be removed into all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem. For who shall have pity on thee, O Jerusalem? or who shall bemoan thee? or who shall go aside to ask how thou doest? Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord, thou art gone backward: therefore will 1 stretch out my hand against thee, and destroy thee; I am weary with repenting. And I will fan them with a fan in the gates of the land; I will bereave them of children, I will destroy my people, since they return not from their ways. Their widows are increased to me above the sand of the sees: I have brought upon them

against the mother of the young men a spoiler at noonday: I have caused him to fall upon it suddenly, and terrors upon the city. She that hath borne seven languisheth, she hath given up the ghost; her sun is gone down while it was yet day: she hath been ashamed and confounded: and the residue of them will I deliver to the sword before their enemies, saith the lord." (Ver. 1-9.)

Most acutely does the prophet feel the anguish of such desolation from Jehovah's hand (ver. 10), not famine merely in the land, but a sweeping captivity out of it. The point of faith in such circumstances is ever the spirit of faith that accepts the strokes as righteously measured out of His hand, and not as the result either of mistake on the part of the people or of skill and strength in their enemies. God ruled in it all, and this in view of His people's shameless departure from Himself.

Nevertheless there is no time of retribution, chastening, and sorrow when the same faith which sees God in the circumstances is not given to see Him above them. "The Lord said, Verily it shall be well with thy remnant; verily I will cause the enemy to entreat thee well in the time of evil and in the time of affliction. Shall iron break the northern iron and the steel? Thy substance and thy treasures will I give to the spoil without price, and that for all thy sins, even in all thy borders. And 1 will make thee to pass with thine enemies into a land which thou knowest not: for a fire is kindled in mine anger, which shall burn upon you." (Ver. 11-14.)

Here the prophet (ver. 15) looks for the judgment of his persecutors, who were found, alas! far more among the Jews than outside. He recounts the sweetness to his

spirit of that divine word which brought him into pain perpetual in the sense of the people's sin, and of the judgments impending on them. (Ver. 16 18.) Isolated and crushed he groans to Jehovah, who gives him the needed comfort: "If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before me: and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth: let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them. And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brasen wall: and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee, saith the Lord. And I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible (Ver. 19-21.) To return from one's own thoughts and feelings to Him is strength; and to have a heart for what is precious sifted and severed from the vile, fits one to be His mouthpiece. (Compare 2 Tim. 2:20-22.) True grace makes one immovable and victorious, let the odds be what they may.

Jeremiah 16, 17

The prophet has, in this section, a new picture of the excessive evil of the people and of the impending judgments and woes.

"The word of the Lord came also unto me, saying, Thou shalt not take to thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons or daughters in this place. For thus saith the Lord, concerning the sons and concerning the daughters that are born in this place, and concerning their mothers that bare them, and concerning their fathers that begat them in this land: they shall die of grievous deaths; they shall not be lamented; neither shall they be buried; but they

shall be as dung upon the face of the earth, and they shall be consumed by the sword, and by famine; and their carcases shall be meat for the fowls of heaven, and for the beasts of the earth." (Ver. 1-4.) No relationship was to be contracted in the land, no longer were sons or daughters to be desired as a heritage from Jehovah. Children and parents alike were devoted to a sorrowful end, without lamentation or even burial, consumed by sword and famine, left as dung on the ground, or meat for birds and beasts of prey. And this was Jehovah's decree about His people!

This is followed up in verses 5-7, where every sign of sympathy in their bereavement is forbidden. "For thus saith the Lord, Enter not into the house of mourning, neither go to lament nor bemoan them: for I have taken away my peace from this people, saith the Lord, even loving-kindness and mercies. Both the great and the small shall die in this land: they shall not be buried, neither shall men lament for them, nor cut themselves, nor make themselves bald for them: neither shall men tear themselves for them in mourning, to comfort them for the dead; neither shall men give them the cup of consolation to drink for their father or for their mother." I would here remark that the marginal rendering gives the best sense in the beginning of the last verse; for there is no connection between men tearing themselves for those in mourning and comforting them for the dead; whereas to break bread as a sign is natural, especially as followed up by giving the cup of consolation. This, which was customary on occasions of mourning, was a sort of transition between the paschal feast and the Lord's Supper, wherein the Lord would have us remember Him and thus show forth His death.

Thus, as every token of loving sympathy was now interdicted to the prophet; so was equally every form of congratulation. “Thou shalt not also go into the house of feasting, to sit with them to eat and to drink. For thus saith the lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, 1 will cause to cease out of this place in your eyes, and in your days, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride.” (Ver. 8, 9.) God should cause all festive occasions to vanish away from the land of His delight on which His eyes rest continually.

Thus did He compass His people round with accumulated proofs of His displeasure to the uttermost, if peradventure they might still repent. At least the warnings, thus given and despised by the rebellious people, would instruct those who might have ears to hear in their midst. “And it shall come to pass, when thou shalt show this people all these words, and they shall say unto thee, Wherefore hath the Lord pronounced all this great evil against us? or what is our iniquity? or what is our sin that we have committed against the Lord our God? Then shalt thou say unto them, Because your fathers have forsaken me, saith the Lord, and have walked after other gods, and have served them, and have worshipped them, and have forsaken me, and have not kept my law; and ye have done worse than your fathers; for, behold, ye walk every one after the imagination of his evil heart, that they may not hearken unto me: therefore will I cast you out of this land into a land that ye know not, neither ye nor your fathers; and there shall ye serve other gods day and night; where I will not show you favour.” (Ver. 10-13.)

It would be sad indeed, were this all. But it is not; sorrow may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. “Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be said, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, the Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers.” (Ver. 14, 15.) The bright future would eclipse the most magnificent deliverance of the past, and with so much the more solidity as being the fruit of a faithful God’s mercy, after all the experience of their evil ways. Nor should it be like the single act in the days of Moses. “Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the Lord, and they shall fish them; and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks. For mine eyes are upon all their ways: they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes.” (Ver. 16, 17.)

But grace in their case, as in ours, in no way sets aside the governmental dealings of God; and in theirs especially, as having a covenant character under law, before they are placed under Messiah and the new covenant. “And first 1 will recompense their iniquity and their sin double; because they have defiled my land, they have filled mine inheritance with the carcases of their detestable and abominable things.” (Ver. 18.) This drew before the prophet the picture of Israel’s idolatries, and extorts from him the apostrophe, with the Lord’s answer, which closes the chapter. “O Lord, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction,

the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit. Shall a man make gods unto himself, and they are no gods? Therefore, behold, I will this once cause them to know, I will cause them to know mine hand and my might; and they shall know that my name is The Lord." (Ver. 19-21.) What a rebuke to the Jews that the most distant Gentiles should yet come and be ashamed of their false gods, which nevertheless entangled the sons of Israel so often and long. It is by judgments that Jehovah's name shall at length be known. But so much the more distressing was the present state of Judah. As the prophet says, "The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars: whilst their children remember their altars and their groves by the green trees upon the high hills." (Jer. 17:1, 2.) Hence, then judgment was inevitable; for the Lord shall judge His people. "You only have 1 known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for your iniquities." (Amos 3.) Bethel and Gilgal could be no cover for the transgressions of the chosen people, but rather made them more glaring and excuseless. Hence the word, "O my mountain in the field, I will give thy substance and all thy treasures to the spoil, and thy high places for sin, throughout all thy borders. And thou, even thyself, shalt discontinue from thine heritage that I gave thee; and 1 will cause thee to serve thine enemies in the land which thou knowest not; for ye have kindled a fire in mine anger, which shall burn for ever." (Ver. 3, 4.)

Alas, the Jews were but men like the nations, but more guilty; for they departed from Him whom the others knew not. Therefore, “thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.” (Ver. 5-8.)

How then can it be that a people should be more indifferent to their God, the true God that loved them, than the most depraved to their idols? “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? 1 the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.” (Ver. 9 -11.) The ill-gotten flies away. Continuance is only in God even for what He gives. And in Israel’s case there was the less palliation; for God had done great things for them. “A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary. O Lord, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters. Heal

me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my praise." (Ver. 12-14.)

This accounts for all that follows: on the one hand, the mockers in Jerusalem, who dared the fulfilment of Jehovah's word; on the other hand, the prophet's confident appeal to Him who knew all, that his desire was far from the woeful day for the people. In Him only was his hope, and that He should be a terror to adversaries, not to him who spoke what was right before Himself. (Ver. 15-18.)

Nevertheless, as in Nineveh, so in Jerusalem, God delights in goodness and mercy; and a public message goes forth to prince and people at the gates of the city, that if they hearkened to the lord and hallowed His sabbath, all would be well for them in joy, and prosperity, and thankful praise before the Lord. But if not, He would kindle a fire to devour their palaces which would not be quenched. How soon and truly it came to pass!

Jeremiah 18 - 20

The prophet is now told to betake himself to the potter's house, where he was to hear Jehovah's words. There he beholds a vessel of clay marred in the potter's hands, and another vessel made as he would. (Ver. 1-4.) "Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in my hand, O house of Israel. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil I thought to do unto them.

And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them." (Ver. 5 10.) The will of man is only evil. The sole hope is in God Himself. But Israel, as Christendom now, feels neither, even where both are in words confessed; for there is a real turning from evil where grace works, and man is quick to claim the credit of it. On the other hand, man is prone to depart from the living God, who would deny Himself if He made light of disobedience, and treated evil in His sight as if it were good.

Another awful effect of perseverance in evil is despair. Man never trusts God really; and a divine call or warning provokes this form of his will. Were it broken, he would at least cry to God and cast himself on what God is, who cannot deny that He is love. His goodness leads to repentance, man's will to desperation. "Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. And they said, There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart. Therefore, thus saith the Lord; ask ye now among the heathen, who hath heard such things: the virgin of Israel hath done a very horrible thing. Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon which cometh from the rock of the field? or shall the cold flowing waters that come from another place be forsaken? Because my people hath forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity, and they have them to stumble in their ways from

the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up; to make their land desolate, and a perpetual hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished, and wag his head. I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will show them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity." (Ver. 11-17.)

But this draws out hatred of the prophet, and determination to defend things as they are; while the tried witness of the Lord can only plead against Israel, however much he had sought before Him to speak good for them and to deprecate His wrath. "Then they said, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the ward from the prophet. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words. Give heed to me, O Lord, and hearken to the voice of them that contend with me. Shall evil be recompensed for good? for they have digged a pit for my soul. Remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, and to turn away thy wrath from them. Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and pour out their blood by the force of the sword; and let their wives be bereaved of their children, and be widows; and let their men be put to death; let their young men be slain by the sword in battle. Let a cry be heard from their houses, when thou shalt bring a troop suddenly upon them: for they have digged a pit to take me, and hid snares for my feet. Yet, Lord, thou knowest all their counsel against me to slay me: forgive not their iniquity, neither blot out their sin from their sight, but let them be overthrown before thee; deal thus with them in the time of thine anger." (Ver. 18-23.)

In Jeremiah 19 Jehovah summons the prophet to take a potter's earthen bottle before the ancients of the people and of the priests and in the valley of Hinnom to proclaim His new message. "Hear ye the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem; Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, the which whosoever heareth, his ears shall tingle. Because they have forsaken me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, whom neither they nor their fathers have known, nor the kings of Judah, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents; they have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which 1 commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind: therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that this place shall no more be called Tophet, nor The valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of slaughter. And I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place; and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hands of them that seek their lives: and their carcases will I give to be meat for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth. And I will make this city desolate, and an hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished and hiss because of all the plagues thereof. And I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they shall eat every one the flesh of his friend in the siege and straitness, wherewith their enemies, and they that seek their lives, shall straiten them." (Ver. 3-9.)

Then (ver. 10) he was to break the bottle with the words, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Even so will I break this

people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again; and they shall bury them in Tophet, till there be no place to bury. Thus will I do unto this place, saith the Lord, and to the inhabitants thereof, and even make this city as Tophet: and the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses of the kings of Judah, shall be defiled as the place of Tophet, because of all the houses upon whose roofs they have burned incense unto all the host of heaven, and have poured out drink offerings unto other gods." (Ver. 11-13.) Nor was this all: the prophet on his return from Tophet stood in the court of Jehovah's house, and said to all the people, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, 1 will bring upon this city and upon all her towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it, because they have hardened their necks, that they might not hear my words." (Ver. 15.)

This (Jer. 20) draws out the persecution of Pashur the son of Immer the priest, chief governor in the house of Jehovah, who smote Jeremiah and put his feet in the stocks. But the prophet on the morrow gave his adversary, from Jehovah, the name of Magor-missabib (i.e. fear round about), with a still more precise menace of speedy judgment on all Judah, and the strength of the city, and the treasures of the kings, which should go to Babylon. (Ver. 1-5.) "And thou, Pashur, and all that dwell in thine house shall go into captivity: and thou shalt come to Babylon, and there thou shalt die, and shalt be buried there, thou, and all thy friends, to whom thou hast prophesied lies."

The rest of this section is of deep interest, where the prophet bemoans his sad testimony and shows how truly the treasure was in an earthen vessel, that the

excellency of the power might be of God and not of men. After all his inward conflicts, the result is his own fresh confidence in Jehovah. “But the Lord is with me as a mighty terrible one: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail: they shall be greatly ashamed; for they shall not prosper: their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten. But, O Lord of hosts, that triest the righteous, and seest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I opened my cause. Sing unto the Lord, praise ye the Lord; for he hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of the evildoers.” Even then however the chapter (ver. 14-18) closes with cursing the day of his birth and the messenger who congratulated his father on such a child, the prophet of woe for Israel. Certainly prophecy came not at any time by the will of man, but holy men spake as borne along by the Holy Ghost.

Jeremiah 21 - 24

Zedekiah’s message to the prophet in the last struggle with king of Babylon, gave occasion to the section before us. “Enquire, I pray thee, of the Lord for us; for Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon maketh war against us; if so be that the Lord will deal with us according to all his wondrous works, that he may go up from us.” (Ver. 2.)

The answer of the Lord was peremptory in the extreme. How could it be otherwise to a king who thus hypocritically honoured Jehovah with his lips when his heart was far from Him? All was hopeless for the king of Judah, who showed less value for the oath he had taken than the Gentile who had imposed it on him. “Thus shall ye say to Zedekiah: Thus saith the Lord God of Israel;

Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, wherewith ye fight against the king of Babylon, and against the Chaldeans, which besiege you without the walls, and I will assemble them into the midst of this city. And I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger, and in fury, and in great wrath. And I will smite the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast: they shall die of a great pestilence. And afterward, saith the Lord, 1 will deliver Zedekiah king of Judah, and his servants, and the people, and such as are left in this city from the pestilence, from the sword, and from the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those that seek their life: and he will smite them with the edge of the sword; he shall not spare them, neither have pity, nor have mercy." (Ver. 4-7.)

Yet even then God has a word for the people (ver. 8-10), and sets before them the way of life, no less than that of death. "He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth out, and falleth to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey. For I have set my face against this city for evil, and not for good, saith the Lord: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire." (Ver. 9, 10.) Nor is the house of the king forgotten. "Hear ye the word of the Lord; O house of David, thus saith the Lord; Execute judgment in the morning, and deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, lest my fury go out like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings. Behold, I am against thee, O inhabitant of the valley, and

rock of the plain, saith the Lord; which say, Who shall come down against us? or who shall enter into our habitations? But I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings, saith the Lord: and I will kindle a fire in the forest thereof, and it shall devour all things round about it." (Ver. 11-14.)

But this call to awake to righteousness the Lord follows up in Jeremiah 22 by sending the prophet down to the king's house with a further appeal. "Hear the word of the Lord, O king of Judah, that sittest upon the throne of David, thou, and thy servants, and thy people that enter in by these gates: Thus saith the Lord: Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place. For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people. But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation. For thus saith the Lord unto the king's house of Judah; Thou art Gilead unto me, and the head of Lebanon: yet surely I will make thee a wilderness, and cities which are not inhabited. And I will prepare destroyers against thee, every one with his weapons: and they shall cut down thy choice cedars, and cast them into the fire. And many nations shall pass by this city, and they shall say every one to his neighbour, Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto to this great city? Then they shall answer, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them. (Ver. 2-9.)

Nor is this all. The various kings of Judah who had reigned during the crisis of the capital come before us successively. Never had a louder wail been heard in the land than when all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. “And Jeremiah [we are told expressly in 2 Chron. 35] lamented for Josiah; and all the singing men, and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel; and behold, they are written in the lamentations.” But here, long after, the same Jeremiah says of Josiah’s son, “Weep ye not for the dead [i.e., Josiah], neither bemoan him; but weep sore for him that goeth away; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country. For thus saith the Lord touching Shallum the son of Josiah king of Judah, which reigned instead of Josiah his father, which went forth out of this place, He shall not return thither any more: but shall die in the place whither they have led him captive, and shall see this land no more.” (Ver. 10-12.) Josiah might be mourned justly by a people that lost so godly a king cut off prematurely; but far more deplorable in itself was the lot of his son deposed and carried away into Egypt by Pharaoh-Necho.

Was this all? Far from it. The king of Egypt set up another son of Josiah, changed his name from Eliakim to Jehoiakim; but Nebuchadnezzar bound the guilty monarch in chains, and carried him to Babylon. And his dirge follows: “Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour’s service without wages, and giveth him not for his work; that saith, I will build me a wide house and large chambers, and cutteth him out windows; and it is ceiled with cedar and painted with vermilion. Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar? did

not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the Lord. But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it. Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah; They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! they shall not lament for him, saying, Ah lord! or, Ah his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem." (Ver. 13-19.) Who of the kings had lived with less conscience? Who had died with more shame? No lamentation for him but an ass's burial (i.e., base exposure) beyond the gates of Jerusalem. For the innocent blood he shed, the Lord would not pardon. See Jeremiah 36:30.

But had not Jehoiakim a son? Wretched was he, Jehoiachin, who succeeded to his father's guilt and misery. How could he be said to sit upon the throne of David? He reigned in Jerusalem but three months before the lion came up from his thicket and the destroyer of the Gentiles was on his way, the avenger under divine Providence of one who did evil in the sight of Jehovah, according to all that his father had done. "Go up to Lebanon and cry; and lift up thy voice in Bashan, and cry from the passages: for all thy lovers are destroyed. I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear. This hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyedst not my voice. The wind shall eat up all thy pastors, and thy lovers shall go into captivity: surely then shalt thou be ashamed and confounded for all thy

wickedness. O inhabitant of Lebanon, that makest thy nest in the cedars, how gracious shalt thou be when pangs come upon thee, the pain as of a woman in travail! As I live, saith the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence; and I will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life, and into the hand of them whose face thou fearest, even into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans. And I will cast thee out, and thy mother that bare thee, into another country, where ye were not born; and there shall ye die. But to the land whereunto they desire to return, thither shall they not return. Is this man Coniah a despised broken idol? is he a vessel wherein is no pleasure? wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into a land which they know not? O earth, earth, earth, hear ye the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah." (Ver. 20-30.)

Thus the roll is complete: for he with whom the chapter opens was the last king of Judah, Zedekiah, before the capital finally sunk, and the sanctuary was burnt, and the king of the Chaldees had all given into his hand. The answer to his message brings before us the sad group, miserable successors of the righteous king taken away from the evil now come.

Hence in Jeremiah 23 we have their general and solemn judgment, but not without the vision of sovereign mercy when the Son of David shall arise. How refreshing to read such words in the midst of the moral horrors we have had before us! "Woe be unto the pastors that

destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the Lord. Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people, Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, 1 will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the Lord. And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the Lord. Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness. Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that they shall no more say, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, the Lord liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land." (Ver. 1-8.)

This prophecy has never been fulfilled. When He came, who is to fulfil its every letter as well as its spirit to the full, He did not reign nor prosper, but was cast out from the earth, and exalted in heaven. Thus greater things were accomplished than a Davidical kingdom or a restoration of the dispersed tribes of Israel. For the very rejection of the Messiah by the Jews gave occasion to the mighty work of redemption by the blood of the cross; and heavenly counsels, previously unrevealed, are now

brought out by the holy apostles and prophets, while the Jews are more than ever scattered, and Jerusalem is trodden down of the Gentiles, till the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. But those times being ended, and the Church of the heavenly places having been meanwhile called and completed in glory, the Lord will turn the heart of His ancient people, at least of a remnant, to Himself, and will return and reign gloriously, executing judgment and justice in the earth. The greatness of this future deliverance will altogether eclipse the day when they first left Egypt and soon saw their enemies dead upon the sea-shore. It is ridiculous to pretend that any such gathering of the tribes has yet been wrought. It is therefore future.

But if Jeremiah had thus a woe for the pastors with the assurance of a true Pastor that was coming, even Jehovah-Tsidkenu as He shall be called, he was compelled meanwhile to denounce the prophets and priests. (Ver. 9-40.) There was absurdity in the idolatrous prophets of Samaria; there was filthiness in the prophets of Jerusalem, when hypocrisy was gone forth into all the land. Jehovah of hosts therefore commanded His people not to hearken to the prophets who thus made them vain, speaking a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord. Peace, and no evil, cried they; when behold a whirlwind of Jehovah is gone forth in fury, to fall grievously on the head of the wicked. They were wholly unauthorized: had they caused His people to hear His words, they should have turned them from their evil way. Jehovah, who filled heaven and earth, was not unheeding but marked those who prophesied lies in His name. If they had His word, let them speak it faithfully. “Is not my word like a fire? saith the Lord; and

like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that steal my words every one from his neighbour. Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, He saith. Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord." (Ver. 29-32.)

That Jehovah would forsake them was the due burden now, and the burden of Jehovah was not to be mentioned more; for every man's word should be his burden. He would cast out prophet, priest, and people from His presence, and bring on them an everlasting reproach, and a perpetual shame which should not be forgotten.

Jeremiah 24 appears to conclude this collection of predictions given at different times, but brought together here because of their moral unity as clustering round the last kings of Judah in view of the fall of Jerusalem. The object was to set forth clearly, under the image of two baskets of figs, the wholly opposite fates that awaited those Jews who with Jeconiah were carried off to Babylon, and those who with Zedekiah remained in the land or dwelt in Egypt. "Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good. For I will set mines eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up. And I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord: and they shall be

my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart. And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus saith the Lord, So will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt. And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them. And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, among them, till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers." Ver. 5-10.) It is painful but of faith to bow to God's solemn judgment of our sin; for He cannot be unfaithful to Himself, and loves to exalt those who abase themselves in His sight. It was unbelief to cleave to the temple and the land when God was judging all, just because His name set there had been made an excuse for the grossest and most rebellious iniquity.

Jeremiah 25

This chapter has a central relation to what goes before and after, not more in fact then in force. We have seen the evils of the people of God, especially of Judah, laid bare. They had refused all the patient perseverance of God's increasingly solemn warnings, as well as His gracious encouragements; and in consequence of their deliberate and persistent idolatry, their condign punishment at the hand of the king of Babylon is announced. After their seventy years' captivity, their chastiser must be visited of Jehovah, and this with no such measure assigned as to Judah. Had the instrument of divine judgment lifted up itself proudly? It must be

surely judged itself without mercy. “The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon: the which Jeremiah the prophet spake unto all the people of Judah, and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, even unto this day, that is the three and twentieth year, the word of the Lord hath come unto me, and I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye have not hearkened. And the Lord hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear. They said, Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the Lord hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever: and go not after other nods to serve them and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt. Yet ye have not hearkened unto me, saith the Lord; that ye might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt. Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the Lord, and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations. Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle. And this whole land shall be a

desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the Lord, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations. And 1 will bring upon that land all my words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah hath prophesied against all the nations. For many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of them also: and I will recompense them according to their deeds, and according to the works of their own hands." (Ver. 1-14.)

Then the prophet is bid to administer the cup of vengeance to the guilty nations; but behold, among these, and as the first of them, stand Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, and their kings and princes! "For thus saith the Lord God of Israel unto me; Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it. And they shall drink, and be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them. Then took I the cup at the lord's hand, and made all the nations to drink, unto whom the Lord had sent me: to wit, Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, and the kings thereof, and the princes thereof, to make them a desolation, an astonishment, an hissing, and a curse; as it is this day; Pharaoh king of Egypt, and his servants, and his princes, and all his people; and all the mingled people, and all the kings of the land of Uz, and all the kings of the land of the Philistines, and Ashkelon, and Uzzah, and Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod, Edom and Moab, and the children of Ammon, and all the kings of Tyrus, and all the kings of Zidon, and

the kings of the isles which are beyond the sea, Dedan, and Tema, and Buz, and all that are in the utmost corners, and all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mingled people that dwell in the desert, and all the kings of Zimri, and all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of the Medes, and all the kings of the north, far and near, one with another, and all the kingdoms of the world, which are upon the face of the earth: and the king of Sheshach shall drink after them. Therefore thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Drink ye, and be drunken, and spue, and fall, and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you. And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup at thine hand to drink, then shalt thou say unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Ye shall certainly drink. For, lo, I begin to bring evil on the city which is called by my name, and should ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be unpunished: for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, saith the Lord of hosts." (Ver. 15-29.)

It is thus an universal principle that God in judgment begins with that which bears His name — His people, His city, His house. And if He begins there, where can He stop? Impossible to pass by His haughty enemies. Thus a judgment is involved, first, of the nations which had most to do with His people, but not ceasing till He takes in all the kings, kingdoms, and inhabitants of the earth. To restrain this to that which was accomplished of old is to make the prophetic word of private interpretation, and to force into a narrow, temporary compass what is plainly and expressly of unlimited extent.

The chapter clearly looks on from the past dealings of God with Jerusalem, its neighbours, and its Chaldean foes, to the universal judgment of the habitable earth at the end of the age.

“Therefore prophesy thou against them all these words, and say unto them, The Lord shall roar from on high, and utter his voice from his holy habitation; he shall mightily roar upon his habitation; he shall give a shout, as they that tread the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. A noise shall come even to the ends of the earth; for the Lord hath a controversy with the nations, he will plead with all flesh; he will give them that are wicked to the sword, saith the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth. And the slain of the Lord shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth: they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be dung upon the ground. Howl, ye shepherds, and cry; and wallow yourselves in the ashes, ye principal of the flock: for the days of your slaughter and of your dispersions are accomplished; and ye shall fall like a pleasant vessel. And the shepherds shall have no way to flee, nor the principal of the flock to escape. A voice of the cry of the shepherds, and an howling of the principal of the flock, shall he heard: for the Lord hath spoiled their pasture. And the peaceable habitations are cut down because of the fierce anger of the Lord. He hath forsaken his covert, as the lion: for their land is desolate because of the fierceness of the oppressor, and because of his fierce anger.” (Ver. 30-38.)

Jeremiah 26

The second half of this book consists of special circumstances. Here it is a question of the prophet's call to fidelity in his office.

"Thus saith the Lord; Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the Lord's house, all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word: if so be they will hearken, and turn every man from his evil way, that 1 may repent me of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings. And thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord; If ye will not hearken to me, to walk in my law, which I have set before you, to hearken to the words of my servants the prophets, whom 1 sent unto you, both rising up early, and sending them, but ye have not hearkened; then will 1 make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth." Ver. 2-6.) It is unworthy of a servant to pare down the message of the Master. Only let him take care that he add not to His words nor to the tone in which they should be conveyed: for much depends on this, especially in intercourse with others. Hence the apostle wished to be enabled to change his voice, which of course is precluded by the written communication.

How unwearied too is the patience of the Lord, who guarantees His own repentance of the evil He could not but threaten, if they but hearkened and turned from their evil doings. But if they persisted in their rejection of His prophets whom He had sent (as He says, "rising up early and sending them"), let them prepare for the worst. No mercy should turn aside His profanation of

His sanctuary which their sins had already profaned. The temple He should make as Shiloh, and the city a curse before all nations. It is an awful state of infatuation when men presume on God's favour to His people, spite of their indifference to His will and glory, and predicate the necessary faithfulness of God at the expense of His character and let off those whom Satan has perverted into His worst enemies under the cover of His name, and law, and land.

In this state a bad conscience makes men implacable; and as they have no faith in God's threatenings any more than in His promises, so the one desire is to extinguish the testimony which galls them. "So the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the Lord. Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die. Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant? And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the Lord." (Ver. 7-9.)

But when the enemy comes in thus, the Spirit of the lord, if He does not lift up a standard, knows how to sustain a witness till the work is complete. As usual it was the religious element which was most wounded by the word of God and most hostile to His servant. The priests and the prophets, with all the people easily excited and misled, determined on his death, and this in Jehovah's house. "When the princes of Judah heard these things, then they came up from the king's house

unto the house of the Lord, and sat down in the entry of the new gate of the Lord's house. Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears." (Ver. 10, 11.)

But the princes were not so easily moved as the people, who, under those more used to calm and dispassionate deliberation, renounced for the moment their former counsels. "Then spake Jeremiah unto all the princes and to all the people, saying, The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard. Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God; and the Lord will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you. As for me, behold, I am in you hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the Lord hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears. Then said the princes and all the people unto the priests and to the prophets: This man is not worthy to die; he hath spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God." (Ver. 12-16.)

The prophet pleads his commission from Jehovah, repeats the sum of His words without disguise, calls on them to repent of their sins that the Lord might repent of His judgments, but leaves himself in their hand, with a solemn warning to beware of shedding innocent blood. His murder would certainly neither disprove his commission from the Lord, nor turn aside the divine

vengeance from themselves nor Jerusalem. The conscience of those addressed answered to his appeal.

“Then rose up certain of the elders of the land, and spake to all the assembly of the people, saying, Micah the Morasthite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spake to all the people of Judah, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Zion shall be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest. Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him at all to death? did he not fear the Lord, and besought the Lord, and the lord repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against them? Thus might we procure great evil against our souls.” (Ver. 17-19.)

A counter case, however, is added. If holy boldness was protected, prudence would be a feeble, short-lived, defence, even if the timid prophet took refuge in a foreign land. “And there was also a man that prophesied in the name of the Lord, Urijah the son of Shemaiah of Kirjath-jearim, who prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah: and when Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men and all the princes, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death: but when Urijah heard it, he was afraid, and fled, and went into Egypt; and Jehoiakim the king sent men into Egypt, namely, Elnathan the son of Achbor, and certain men with him into Egypt. And they fetched forth Urijah out of Egypt, and brought him to Jehoiakim the king; who slew him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people.” (Ver. 20-23.) Thus Micah and Urijah were each instructive, though from a different point; and “the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah that

they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death." Poor are the people that are in such a case; as hapless as inconstant are they, whose will leads them, and not the Lord.

Jeremiah 27, 28

It is well known that an error has crept into the text of the prefatory verse. The reader has only to compare verses 3 and 12, with 19, 20, to make this clear and certain. For "Jehoiakim" in verse 1 read "Zedekiah".

The occasion of this word from Jehovah to Jeremiah was an effort at a coalition of the king of Judah with the kings that surrounded the land to throw off the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar. Vain thought! God had for an appointed term given him a dominion unlimited in title: if limited in fact, it was only that he did not push with his arms yet farther. Rebellious thought! for the God who gave the king of Babylon this large place of authority was avowedly chastising His own people whose evil refused all remedy. Now when God is judging sin, the only suited feeling of man is repentance in dust and ashes with submission of heart to His ways. Therefore was the prophet to say "Thus saith the Lord to me; Make thee bonds and yokes, and put them upon thy neck, and send them to the king of Edom and to the king of Moab, and to the king of the Ammonites, and to the king of Tyrus, and to the king of Zidon, by the hand of the messengers which come to Jerusalem unto Zedekiah king of Judah; and command them to say unto their masters, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Thus shall ye say unto your masters; I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and

have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto me. And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant; and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him. And all nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the very time of his land come: and then many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of him. And it shall come to pass, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish, saith the Lord, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand." (Ver. 2-8.)

The mourning prophet was called to a course, unspeakably bold and presumptuous in the eyes of his countrymen — how much more in the eyes of the ambassadors and the foreign powers! But God does not abate His sovereign will, nor hide the claims of His glory, because His people degrade themselves and put His name to open shame. And what a rebuke, especially to Judah and the guilty son of David, to hear "the God of Israel" proclaim Nebuchadnezzar as "His servant," not only to the Jews but to their Gentile neighbours! The divine grant too was as minute as it was extensive: "the beasts of the field" did Jehovah give to serve him, as well as "all these lands." But Babylon's supremacy was measured. It was no purpose of mercy; it was but a sovereign disposition in providence, and as the accomplishment of the needed chastisement of Judah and the nations. This over, many nations and great kings should serve themselves of the Babylonian king after the third generation, as surely as all nations should serve

him meanwhile. But serve they must till then on pain of God's punishment with His sore plaques.

Observe that the conduct of faith at such a time exposed the prophet (and those who needed the word of the Lord) to the charge both of indifference to their country's honour and liberty, and of proud insubjection to the powers that ruled over Palestine and the kingdoms round about. This is not the least of the trials of a sensitive spirit. Observe, further, that the path of faith is inseparable from the actual message of God that applied to the then condition of His people. It was worse than useless to imitate what was of God for the days of Moses, of Joshua, of David, or even of Hezekiah. Faith is ever taught of God, and understands His present testimony and dealings. Always a true principle, this is verified now pre-eminently in the Christian. He has the mind of Christ, and is responsible to gather by the Holy Spirit from the perfect revelation of God what is for our guidance as each conjuncture arises. There is no need for which God has not provided in His word; but the Spirit alone can apply it aright, acting in us to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Appearances may be against the faithful as much now as in the days of Jeremiah. Our business is to do God's will and to diffuse the witness of His truth, spite of every adversary.

"Therefore hearken not ye to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreamers, nor to your enchanters, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far from your land; and that I should drive you out, and ye should perish. But the nations that bring their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him, those will I let remain still in

their own land, saith the Lord; and they shall till it, and dwell therein." (Ver. 9-11.) To be stiff-necked and refuse the word of divine warning is the sure road to the fulfilment of His word in our own misery and destruction. To obey is better than sacrifice in the worst of times as much as in the best. But the prophets of men prophesy what suits their masters' wishes and their own immediate interests, and only hasten the evil against which they promise a security as hollow as it is loud.

But the prophet perseveres and warns first Zedekiah the king, then the priests and all the people. "I spake also to Zedekiah king of Judah according to all these words, saying, Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live. Why will ye die, thou and thy people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, as the Lord has spoken against the nation that will not serve the king of Babylon? Therefore hearken not unto the words of the prophets that speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you. For I have not sent them, saith the Lord, yet they prophesy a lie in my name; that I might drive you out, and that ye might perish, ye, and the prophets that prophesy unto you. Also I spake to the priests and all this people, saying, Thus saith the Lord; Hearken not to the words of your prophets that prophesy unto you, saying, Behold, the vessels of the Lord's house shall now shortly be brought again from Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you. Hearken not unto them; serve the king of Babylon, and live: wherefore should this city be laid waste? But if they be prophets, and if the word of the Lord be with them, let them now make intercession to the Lord of hosts, that the vessels which are left in

the house of the Lord, and in the house of the king of Judah, and at Jerusalem, go not to Babylon. For thus saith the Lord of hosts concerning the pillars, and concerning the sea, and concerning the bases, and concerning the residue of the vessels that remain in this city, which Nebuchadnezzer king of Babylon took not, when he carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah from Jerusalem to Babylon, and all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem; yea, thus saith the lord of hosts, the God of Israel., concerning the vessels that remain in the house of the Lord, and in the house of the king of Judah and of Jerusalem; they shall be carried to Babylon, and there shall they be until the day that I visit them, saith the Lord; then will I bring them up, and restore them to this place." (Ver. 12-22.) In presence of sin, the flesh holds out fair hopes and immediate pleasure; but the Spirit always insists on that subjection to God's sentence on sin, which cannot but be repulsive to nature but ensures His blessing both now and evermore. Pride goes before a fall; and a refractory spirit paves the way for yet deeper humiliation.

But the enemy grows bolder (Jer. 28); and Hananiah dares to trifle with the name of Jehovah in His own house. "And it came to pass the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, and in the fifth month, that Hananiah the son of Azur the prophet, which was of Gibeon, spake unto me in the house of the Lord, in the presence of the priests and of all the people, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of the Lord's house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took

away from this place, and carried them to Babylon: and I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah, that went into Babylon, saith the Lord: for 1 will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. Then the prophet Jeremiah said unto the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests, and in the presence of all the people that stood in the house of the Lord, even the prophet Jeremiah said, Amen: the Lord do so: the Lord perform thy words which thou hast prophesied, to bring again the vessels of the Lord's house, and all that is carried away captive, from Babylon into this place. Nevertheless hear thou now this word that I speak in thine ears, and in the ears of all the people; the prophets that have been before me and before thee of old prophesied both against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence. The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him. Then Hananiah took the yoke from off the prophet Jeremiah's neck, and brake it. And Hananiah spake in the presence of all the people, saying, Thus saith the Lord; Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all nations within the space of two full years. And the prophet Jeremiah went his way." (Ver. 1-11.)

Evil seemed now to have a full and easy victory over good. But God did not await even the brief space to which Hananiah had committed himself under the instigation of Satan. "Then the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah the prophet, after that Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke from off the neck of the

prophet Jeremiah, saying, Go and tell Hananiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord; Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron. For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; I have put a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him: and I have given him the beasts of the field also. Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; the lord hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie." Therefore thus saith the Lord; Behold 1 will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the Lord. So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month." (Ver. 12-17. God is not mocked. His word abides for ever. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him. The meek will He guide in judgment; and the meek will He teach His way. But the expectation of the wicked shall perish. Destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity.

Jeremiah 29

In this chapter the prophet instructs the captives in Babylon as to their stay in the strange land, the right feeling to be cultivated toward its sovereign, and the falsity of the hopes their prophets were giving out. The Lord in His due time would prove His goodness to His people, whether preparatorily soon, or finally in a day not yet arrived. The objects of their trust, whether prophetic or royal, should fall under His judgments, even in some cases most ignominiously and unsparingly by the hand of the ruler of Babylon; in others by a total

failure of seed to inherit the blessing when it comes from the hand of Jehovah.

“Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem unto the residue of the elders which were carried away captives, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon; (after that Jeconiah the king, and the queen, and the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, and the carpenters, and the smiths, were departed from Jerusalem;) by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah (whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent unto Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon) saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom 1 have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither 1 have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.” Ver. 1-7.)

Thus the prophet forwards his letter to the captives by the messengers whom Zedekiah sent to Nebuchadnezzar. It was no accidental slip of Jeconiah and the people; it was no power of the king of Babylon which accounted for the degradation of the Jews. Jehovah of hosts had caused them to be carried away to the city of the conqueror; and He it was that now spoke to them by Jeremiah. How gracious thus to notice them

after all their guilt and to link His name with theirs in their fallen estate! It was worse than vain to hope for an immediate return to Palestine: no conspiracies, no resolutions would avail. It was Jehovah's word that they should settle down in the land of their captivity, building and planting, marrying and giving in marriage, and thus increase rather than diminish, seeking withal the peace of the city where they sojourned, and this heartily as from the Lord, and not as pleasing men. In its peace should be their peace. Assuredly the ways of the Lord are wise and good, wholesome and edifying. Oh that His people had hearkened to Him, and Israel had walked in His ways! But as of old Israel would none of Him, so now were the captive Jews in danger of being a prey to the deceivers who fattened on the folly and sin they helped on.

Hence the prophet was directed to add a special warning against false spiritual pretensions. "For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the Lord. For thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon 1 will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the Lord: and I will turn away your

captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither 1 have driven you, saith the Lord; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive." (Ver. 8-14.) The stay of seventy years in Babylon was measured of Jehovah. It was long enough to accomplish His chastening; it was short enough to prove His tender mercy, and leave room for a greater display of Himself, to be followed alas! by a more dismal and lasting punishment of their guiltier rejection of their own Messiah.

Had they boasted of those the Lord had raised up in Babylon to prophesy? Alas! the true prophet was the least heeded; for he was no counsellor of rebellion, neither did he despise the word of Jehovah that came by Jeremiah, but gave himself up to prayer and confession as the time of deliverance drew near. But as to those who trusted the false prophets, "Because ye have said, The Lord hath raised us up prophets in Babylon; know that thus saith the Lord of the king that sitteth upon the throne of David, and of all the people that dwelleth in this city, and of your brethren that are gone forth with you into captivity: thus saith the Lord of hosts; Behold, I will send upon them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like vile figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil. And I will persecute them with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and will deliver them to be removed to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a curse, and an astonishment, and an hissing, and a reproach, among all the nations whither I have driven them: because they have not hearkened to my words, saith the Lord, which I sent unto them by my

servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; but ye would not hear, saith the Lord." (Ver. 15-19.)

But this is not enough. Public examples were needful in special instances to admonish and impress the obdurate people, as credulous of man as they were unbelieving toward God. "Hear ye therefore the word of the Lord, all ye of the captivity, whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon: thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, of Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and of Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, which prophesy a lie unto you in my name; Behold, 1 will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; and he shall slay them before your eyes; and of them shall be taken up a curse by all the captivity of Judah which are in Babylon, saying, The Lord make thee like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire; because they have committed villany in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbours' wives, and have spoken lying words in my name, which I have not commanded them; even 1 know, and am a witness, saith the Lord." Ver. 20-23.) And as Shemaiah had sent letters, as from Jehovah, from Babylon to Jerusalem, stirring up the priests especially against Jeremiah, God was no heedless hearer of this audacious profanity. "Thus shalt thou also speak to Shemaiah the Nehelamite, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, Because thou hast sent letters in thy name unto all the people that are at Jerusalem, and to Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the priests, saying, The Lord hath made thee priest in the steed of Jehoiada the priest, that ye should be officers in the house of the Lord, for every man that is mad, and maketh himself a prophet, that thou shouldest put him

in prison, and in the stocks. Now therefore why hast thou not reproved Jeremiah of Anathoth, which maketh himself a prophet to you? for therefore he sent unto us in Babylon, saying, This captivity is long: build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the ears of Jeremiah the prophet. Then came the word of the Lord unto Jeremiah, saying, Send to all them of the captivity, saying, Thus saith the Lord concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite; Because that Shemaiah hath prophesied unto you, and I sent him not, and he caused you to trust in a lie: therefore thus saith the lord: Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite, and his seed: he shall not have a man to dwell among this people; neither shall he behold the good that I will do for my people, saith the Lord; because he hath taught rebellion against the Lord." (Ver. 24-32.) Truly God is not mocked. The curse causeless shall not come; but those who, miserable themselves, are given up to a spirit of hostility and detraction of God's servants abiding in the truth, shall of the flesh reap the corruption they sow.

Jeremiah 30, 31

The next communication from Jehovah pledges that He will bring back His people to the land He gave their fathers. (Ver. 1-3.) Has this been accomplished? No more than an earnest of it. It is His work and shall not fail when fulfilled in power. One of the peculiarities of it is that it is the day of their greatest trouble, yet it is immediately their complete and, as we shall see, final deliverance. The return from Babylon in no way meets such a description; for their return from that captivity was preceded by the day of the lord on the proud city of

the Chaldeans, and in no sense the time of Jacob's trouble. Again, the siege of Titus, however severe a time of trouble to the Jew, cannot possibly be regarded as the time; for Jacob was led captive and scattered more than ever, instead of being then delivered. But these are the only notable epochs that can be pretended since. It remains then that the hour of unparalleled trouble preceding their great deliverance is future and will surely be fulfilled. "And these are the words that the Lord spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus saith the Lord; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it. For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him: but they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them." Ver. 4-9.) Who will deny that the yoke is not broken, that bonds still restrain, that strangers yet serve themselves of Israel? Who will affirm that they are serving Jehovah their God, and David their king? Can this be any other than their true Beloved, their Messiah, the promised Son of that line? He is come no doubt, but as yet refused by them; but the time hastens when Him too they shall serve. it follows however their salvation out of their last time of trouble.

"Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the Lord; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save

thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid. For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished. For thus saith the Lord, Thy bruise is incurable, and thy wound is grievous. There is none to plead thy cause, that thou mayest be bound up: thou hast no healing medicines. All thy lovers have forgotten thee; they seek thee not, for I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of thine iniquity; because thy sins were increased. Why criest thou for thine affliction? thy sorrow is incurable for the multitude of thine iniquity; because thy sins are increased, I have done these things unto thee. Therefore all they that devour thee shall be devoured; and all thine adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity; and they that spoil thee shall be a spoil, and all that prey upon thee will 1 give for a prey. For I will restore health unto thee, and 1 will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the lord; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion whom no man seeketh after." (Ver. 10-17.) Here Jehovah renews His assurance not of saving Israel only, but of their return and rest from the land of their captivity. This is not the gospel. Christianity presents other and higher hopes — grace gathering to Christ on high; and not deliverance by the execution of divine judgments on their Gentile adversaries as here.

From verse 18 there is a third repetition of Jehovah's mercy to His ancient people. "Thus saith the Lord,

Behold, I will bring again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on his dwelling-places; and the city shall be builded upon her own heap, and the palace shall remain after the manner thereof. And out of them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of them that make merry: and I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small. Their children also shall be as aforetime, and their congregation shall be established before me, and I will punish all that oppress them. And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me: for who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord. And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. Behold, the whirlwind of the Lord goeth forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind: it shall fall with pain upon the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of the Lord shall not return until he have done it, and until he have performed the intents of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it." (Ver. 18-24.) Here their national restoration is yet more minutely portrayed, and with increasing disproofs of any adequate application to the past or present. From the return out of Babylon till the Romans sacked Jerusalem there was no more than "a little reviving in their bondage." They were but servants in their own land under the great empires, with which is contrasted the promise that "their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them." But there is a far transcendent change. Lo-ammi is no longer to be inscribed on Israel; but "ye shall be my people, and I will be your God." A divine all-searching judgment of men most clearly and expressly characterizes this intervention of Jehovah: "In the latter

days ye shall consider it." Alas! the Jews have not considered it yet.

Another material distinction is already set out in the beginning of Jeremiah 31. It is no return of Judah, but of the twelve tribes: how different from the scanty remnant of the Jews with a few stragglers of other tribes under Ezra and Nehemiah! Here all the families of Israel are in question. "At the same time, saith the Lord, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people. Thus saith the Lord, The people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest. The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have 1 drawn thee. Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry. Thou shalt yet plant vines upon the mountains of Samaria: the planters shall plant, and shall eat them as common things. For there shall be a day, that the watchmen upon the mount Ephraim shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the Lord our God. For thus saith the Lord; Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations: publish ye, praise ye, and say, O Lord, save thy people, the remnant of Israel. Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble:

for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn." (Ver. 1-9.) Who can pretend that this has been made good either in the Jews or in the gospel, much as the gospel has transcended it?

I know the nations are summoned to hear, but it is not of their own salvation but Israel's blessing. "Hear the word of the Lord, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock. For the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he. Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all. Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow. And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the Lord." (Ver. 10-14.)

It is vain to cite Matthew 2, as if it proved the complete accomplishment of verse 15: especially as the formula points out no more then a correspondence in spirit between the prophecy quoted and the fact, as distinguished from the object. "Thus saith the lord; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the lord; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the

enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border." (Ver. 15-17.)

But sorrow from man's oppression and cruel suffering is not all. There is a needed discipline from the Lord which is next brought before us. "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and 1 shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since 1 spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." (Ver. 18-20.)

Then the Lord calls them to their cities. "Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities. How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? for the Lord hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man. Thus saith the lord of hosts, the God of Israel; As yet they shall use this speech in the land of Judah and in the cities thereof, when I shall bring again their captivity; The lord bless thee, O habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness. And there shall dwell in Judah itself, and in all the cities thereof together, husbandmen, and they that go forth with flocks. For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul. Upon this I awaked, and beheld; and my sleep was sweet unto

me." (21-26.) It is a favourite application among the fathers and many who are under their influence, that the birth of the Saviour is here intended. But this is an error, and introduces a sense as incongruous with the context as with the particular phrase which has been tortured to bear the weight of the incarnation. "A woman shall compass a man" refers, not to the birth of Christ, but to the superiority in the latter day of the once backsliding daughter over all the might of man that shall oppose her.

A threefold declaration (first, ver. 27-30; second, ver. 31-37; and third, ver. 38-40) from Jehovah of the rich blessing of all His people closes this word of our prophet.

The first of these promises pledges the end of travail and the sure establishment of both houses of the chosen nation. "Behold, the days come, saith the lord, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast. And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will 1 watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the lord. In those days they shall say no more, the fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge." (Ver. 27-30.)

The second speaks of the new covenant, not according to law but grace, which Jehovah will make with them and its and their perpetuity. "Behold, the days come, saith the lord, that I will a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day

that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord. But this shall be the covenant that 1 will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, 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 the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The Lord of hosts is his name. If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the Lord; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord." (Ver. 31-37.)

The chapter ends with the third promise as to the city, its limits and landmarks, which (unlike the second) is incapable of any just application to the wants, circumstances, or blessings of the Christians. It is the divine Doomsday-book of Jerusalem, the topography defined, and that security pronounced which belongs only to the mouth of God. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the city shall be built to the Lord from the tower of Hananeel unto the gate of the corner. And the measuring line shall yet go forth over against it upon the hill Gareb, and shall compass about to Goath. And the

whole valley of the dead bodies, and of the ashes, and all the fields under the brook of Kidron, unto the corner of the horse gate toward the east, shall be holy unto the Lord; it shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more for ever." (Ver. 38-40.)

Jeremiah 32

The crisis was now at hand. Jerusalem was undergoing its last siege. The king of Babylon had begun it ere the ninth year of Zedekiah closed, and took the city early in his eleventh year, after having invested it some eighteen months, though not without an interruption. The occasion of the prophet's imprisonment, during which this message came from Jehovah is first explained. "The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar. For then the king of Babylon's army besieged Jerusalem: and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the prison, which was in the king of Judah's house. For Zedekiah king of Judah had shut him up, saying, Wherefore dost thou prophesy, and say, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it; and Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him mouth to mouth, and his eyes shall behold his eyes; and he shall lead Zedekiah to Babylon and there shall he be until I visit him, saith the Lord: though ye fight with the Chaldeans, ye shall not prosper." (Ver. 1-5.)

Then from verse 6 we have the message itself. As an old writer remarks, if the prophet was bound, the word of

God was not bound. The word of Jehovah came to him, saying, “Behold, Hanameel the son of Shallum thine uncle shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that is in Anathoth: for the right of redemption is thine to buy it. So Hanameel mine uncle’s son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the Lord, and said unto me, Buy my field I pray thee, that is in Anathoth which is in the country of Benjamin: for the right of inheritance is thine, and the redemption is thine; buy it for thyself. Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord. And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle’s son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver. And 1 subscribed the evidence, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances. So I took the evidence of the purchase, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open: and I gave the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, in the sight of Hanameel mine uncle’s son, and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the book of the purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison. And I charged Baruch before them, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and put them in earthen vessel, that they may continue many days. For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land.” (Ver. 7-15.) Thus the mournful servant of the Lord changes his sackcloth for the raiment of daily life. He had put on the attire of mourning when others vaunted of their tower of false prophecy and their arm of flesh, before the king of Babylon smote Jerusalem. Now, while

all were shut up closely and himself a prisoner, the king and the people within, more his enemy than the cruel Chaldean without, and with the certainty that the city must soon be taken and Zedekiah not escape but go to Babylon a captive, he buys his cousin's field in witness that houses, and fields, and vineyards should again be possessed in the land.

Now when I had delivered the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, I prayed unto the Lord, saying, Ah Lord God! behold, thou has made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee: thou showest lovingkindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the Lord of hosts, is his name, great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings: which hast set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, even unto this day, and in Israel, and among other men; and hast made thee a name, as at this day; and hast brought forth thy people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs, and with wonders, and with a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with great terror: and hast given them this land, which thou didst swear to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey; and they came in and possessed it; but they obeyed not thy voice, neither walked in thy law; they have done nothing of all that thou commandedst them to do: therefore thou hast caused all this evil to come upon them: behold the mounts, they have come unto the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans, that fight

against it, because of the sword, and of the famine, and of the pestilence: and what thou hast spoken is come to pass; and, behold, thou seest it. And thou hast said unto me, O Lord God, Buy thee the field for money, and take witnesses; for the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans." (Ver. 16-25.)

Such was the faith and the patience of this holy prophet. To bear at all cost a true testimony of Jehovah's mind to His people was far dearer to him than earthly goods, or honour, or life. When outward peace reigned, he saw the coming ruin; when the ruin was approaching its climax, he took measures, according to his discernment of the word of Jehovah, of a restoration that could not fail. Accordingly the word of Jehovah comes to the pleading prophet. "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me? Therefore thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the Chaldeans, and into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and he shall take it: and the Chaldeans, that fight against this city, shall come and set fire on this city, and burn it with the houses, upon whose roofs they have offered incense unto Baal, and poured out drink offerings unto other gods, to provoke me to anger. For the children of Israel and the children of Judah have only done evil before me from their youth: for the children of Israel have only provoked me to anger with the work of their hands, saith the Lord. For this city hath been to me as a provocation of mine anger and of my fury from the day that they built it even unto this day; that I should remove it from before my face, because of all the evil of the children of Israel and of the children of Judah, which they have done to provoke me to anger, they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, and the

men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And they have turned unto me the back, and not the face: though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction. But they set their abominations in the house, which is called by my name, to defile it. And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which Ii commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin." (Ver. 27-35.)

Thus nothing would set aside the speedy execution of the long-suspended sentence. From the beginning (for so it always is with man) had Jerusalem been for His anger and for His fury to this day, making His house the especial seat of their abominations and building the high places of Baal in the valley of the son of Hinnom, with the horrid sacrifices of sons and daughters to Molech. Judgment therefore must fall on their idolatries and their iniquities If any deny Him, He must deny them. But He abides faithful; He cannot deny Himself. "And now therefore thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel concerning this city, whereof ye say, It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence; behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: and I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not

turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul." (Ver. 36-41.), Jeremiah, like Daniel, might go his way till the end be; but then he too shall stand in his lot, and the right of inheritance shall not be lost, nor the evidence of the purchase forgotten of the field in Anathoth.

It is too plain to be mistaken, unless the mind be perverted by some false system, that Jehovah speaks of a day yet future for Israel. They have never yet been gathered out of all countries, nor have they been caused since their dispersion to dwell safely in their land. Nor has the sentence of Lo-ammi been yet reversed, nor have they had one heart and one way, fearing Jehovah always for the good of themselves and their children after them. Nor can it be pretended that the "everlasting covenant" is made with them, when they shall not depart from Jehovah and He will rejoice over them, planting them in the land in truth with all His heart and all His soul.

"For thus saith the Lord; like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them. And fields shall be bought in this land, whereof ye say, It is desolate without man or beast; it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans. Men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe evidences, and seal them, and take witnesses in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the south: for I will cause their captivity to return, saith the Lord." (Ver. 42-44.)

Jeremiah 33

This chapter completes the part of the prophecy which has for its object to assure the people of their ultimate restoration to their land from captivity and dispersion. And hence it is remarkably full as well as distinct.

“Moreover the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah the second time, while he was yet shut up in the court of the prison, saying, Thus saith the Lord the maker thereof, the Lord that formed it, to establish it; the Lord is his name; call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.” (Ver. 1-3.)

After this opening Jehovah warns them of the vanity of self-defence against the king of Babylon: let who might come in, it would only be to swell the ranks of the slain by the Chaldeans. “For thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city, and concerning the houses of the king of Judah, which are thrown down by the mounts, and by the sword; they come to fight with the Chaldeans, but it is to fill them with the deed bodies of men, whom I have slain in mine anger and in my fury, and for all whose wickedness 1 have hid my face from this city.” (Ver. 4, 5.)

But a low estate, especially hopeless ruin before their enemies, elicits an instant assurance of blessing from the Lord. “Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth. And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as at the first. And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have

sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me. And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that 1 do unto them: and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that 1 procure unto it." (Ver. 6-9.) They should be built up once more in their land as at the beginning, yea much beyond what was at first. For Jehovah did not then cleanse them from all their iniquity, nor pardon their sins and transgressions against Himself. He gave them a witness of good things to come in their typical sacrifices; but He did not yet relieve them from that law which could not but be to sinners a ministry of condemnation and death. The last chapter declared that the days come that Jehovah will make a new covenant with both the houses of His people, expressly in contrast with their position under the law of old, the result of which will be an inward spirit of obedience, a real knowledge of Jehovah, and their sins remembered of Him no more. Thus will Jerusalem be to Him a name of joy, for praise and beauty, to all the nations of the earth, who hear and tremble for the good and peace He procures His people. On every side they will then learn righteousness.

"Thus saith the Lord; again there shall be heard in this place, which ye say shall be desolate without man and without beast, even in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man, and without inhabitant, and without beast, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the lord of hosts: for the lord is good: for his mercy endureth for ever: and of them that shall bring

the sacrifice of praise into the house of the lord. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the Lord." (Ver. 10, 11.) As surely as He had previously threatened and was now accomplishing His threat to take from them the voice of mirth and of gladness, of the bridegroom and of the bride, so does He assure, in the face of appearances and natural results and forebodings of desolation but too suitable to guilt, that the sounds of joy should be renewed in their land, and not of nature only but the voice of them that say His praise and bring appropriate sacrifice into His house.

"Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Again in this place, which is desolate without man and without beast, and in all the cities thereof, shall be an habitation of shepherds causing their flocks to lie down. In the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the vale, and in the cities of the south, and in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, shall the flocks pass again under the hands of him that telleth them, saith the Lord." (Ver. 12-14.) Peacefully shall the shepherds tend their flocks there where war had devastated most. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah." They are thus both included — a conclusive proof that no past return, or revival of tranquillity under Gentile rule, meets the terms of scripture. The prophecy awaits its fulfilment.

Yet the next verses (15, 16) clearly point to the presence of the Messiah. "In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Judah be saved, and

Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord our righteousness." It is Messiah present, but not in humiliation, not a sufferer, but in power and glory. He is reigning. It is not a question of an earth-rejected King, sitting at God's right hand on His Father's throne. It is the great King reigning on His own throne, the throne withal of His father David. "He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land." It is totally different from His present action. His relation to us is never that of a King reigning over the Christian or over the Church. He is given as Head to the body, as by and by He will reign King over His people in their land; and all people, nations, and languages shall serve the glorious Son of man. While God is gathering out to Him the Church for heavenly glory, Judah is for the most part blinded, not saved, and Jerusalem is dwelt in safely neither by Jew nor by Gentile. In the days of which the prophet speaks Jerusalem will own her Saviour God and King, and acquires a name from His own — Jehovah-Tsidkenu (Jehovah our righteousness); just as the apostle does not hesitate to say, in 1 Corinthians 12:12, "so also is Christ," where we would have expected His body, the Church. "For thus saith the Lord, David shall never went a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel; neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt offerings, and to kindle meat offerings, and to do sacrifice continually." (Ver. 17, 18.) Neither the throne nor the sanctuary should fail in Israel: the true King, and the true Priest, should be there from the Lord.

Thus rich and precise is the divine guarantee to His people in their darkest hour. Nor is this all. Confirmation is added, as for the successor to the throne of David, and

the Levites, the priests (Ver. 19-22), so for the two families of the people. (Ver. 23-26.) “And the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord, If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of. the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will 1 multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me. Moreover the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, Considerest thou not what this people have spoken, saying, The two families which the Lord hath chosen, he hath even cast them off? thus they have despised my people, that they should be no more a nation before them. Thus saith the Lord, If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; then will I cast away the seed of Jacob, and David my servant, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them.” (Ver. 19-26.)

Jeremiah 34

This chapter begins a new series, in which the proof of the wickedness of the people is brought out. We see their spasmodic efforts at repentance. Alas! it was no true work of God in their conscience, but simply the pressure of calamity for a time, which led them to form resolves, in a measure after the law of the Lord, but which utterly powerless when the affection was stayed

for ever so little a while. Hence the word comes to Jeremiah from Jehovah, “When Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and all his army, and all the kingdoms of the earth of his dominion, and all the people, fought against Jerusalem, and against all the cities thereof.” And the Lord then told him to speak to Zedekiah king of Judah, from Himself, assuring him that He would “give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he should burn it with fire.” To fight it out was even to resist the Lord. It was not Nebuchadnezzar merely who was taking Jerusalem; Jehovah was giving up the city and their king of the house of David — a most solemn sign of His displeasure.

Indeed there is never any good received from a trial except it be taken from the hand of God. When humiliation comes, it is no use laying the blame on others, on this one or that one, but rather on God’s people as a whole — on ourselves — more especially if we have the chief responsibility of action. Here the king had an immense place, and of course the priests also. If the king was a righteous man, Jehovah always brought blessing to the people for his sole sake; if the king was ungodly, his evil drew down chastening on the people. Alas! if there was an ungodly king, there was also an ungodly people. We may say, Like people, like king; and not only “Like people, like priest.” In this case Jehovah intimates to Zedekiah a part of that which should befall him. “Thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but shalt surely be taken and delivered into his hand; and thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth; and thou shalt go to Babylon.” (Ver. 3.) This is the more remarkable, because another prophet was given to prophesy that

Zedekiah's eyes should be put out, and that he should not see Babylon. "I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there." (Ezek. 12:13.) Both are true. His eyes did not see the king of Babylon in Babylon, but he was taken prisoner in "the plains of Jericho" and brought to the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath. There his eyes were put out. After seeing his sons put to death, he was blinded by the indignant king of Babylon, and not without deserving it. For Zedekiah had behaved extremely ill before God and man. He had profaned the name of Jehovah, he had shown less respect for that name than Nebuchadnezzar himself. The Gentile chief trusted that the name of Jehovah would bind the Jewish king in his oath: but it did not. Zedekiah, the son of David, broke the oath of Jehovah, and Nebuchadnezzar's anger was great. Therefore he punished Zedekiah thus fiercely, giving him to see the death of his own sons, then putting his eyes out and bringing him to Babylon. Nevertheless his eyes did previously behold the eyes of the king of Babylon. He was confronted with the heed of gold, haughty and in the pride of his power, to whom God had given universal power. Thus Ezekiel was proved true, because Zedekiah went blinded from Riblah to Babylon; and Jeremiah was proved true, because he was taken prisoner in the land, did with his eyes behold the king of Babylon and was afterwards taken to Babylon. Thus most minutely can every word of the prophets be trusted.

But there was another instructive dealing of God. Along with the humiliation that would surely come upon the king, the son of David, God tells him, "Thou shalt not die by the sword." He might have dreaded not merely the

sword, but the furnace. Nevertheless God says to him, “Thou shalt die by the sword: but thou shalt die in peace: and with the burnings of thy father, the former kings which were before thee, so shall they burn odours for thee; and they will lament thee saying, “Ah, lord! for I have pronounced the word, saith the Lord.” That is to say, he would have a funeral suited to his dignity as a king, and after the usual mode of the Jews — a bed of spices prepared to burn the king’s body, and lamentations over him. The reason for this, that God, even in His judgment, carefully remembers whatever good there may have been. The Lord says, as it were, I will recompense; and He never fails. Zedekiah had acted wickedly: nevertheless his heart was towards the prophet, and he would have gladly spared him, but he was pushed on by others more wicked than himself. Consequently, when the supreme moment came, God extends mercy towards him; and thus he stands in full contrast with Jehoiakim, who had only the burial of an ass, as Jeremiah had proclaimed in an earlier chapter.

“Then the prophet spake all these words unto Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem. And the king of Babylon’s army fought against Jerusalem, and against all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish, and against Azekah” (ver. 6, 7), the cities that were intended to form a bulwark and a stay if an enemy came up against Jerusalem. But the people and the king formed a covenant, and this was what brought fresh displeasure from the Lord upon them. There was an old law from the days of the desert imposed on the children of Israel, that no Hebrew could ever be a servant to his brother longer than seven years, unless by his own voluntary choice, when his ear was bored, and he, with his wife and

children, if he had any, remained servants to their master for ever. But as a rule, a manservant or maidservant could only serve six years, and in the seventh they went out free. The sabbatical year proclaimed that they could no longer righteously be kept in bondage. But it has been neglected, it seems for a very long period, probably for several hundreds of years; for the prophecy of the seventy years' captivity notices this, and seems to imply a period of four hundred and ninety years, during which they had paid no heed no heed to the sabbatical year. However that may be, "When all the princes, and all the people, which had entered into the covenant, heard that every one should let his manservant, and every one his maidservant, go free, that none should serve themselves of them any more, then they obeyed and let them go." (Ver. 10.)

But afterwards, when the sight of danger was past for the moment — for Nebuchadnezzar for a while raised the siege — "They turned, and caused the servants and the handmaids whom they had let go free, to return, and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids." (Ver. 11.) Then the word of the Lord comes by Jeremiah again, "Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondmen." How disgraceful then, if God had brought them out of bondage, that they should forget the will of the Lord as to their brethren in bondage. They might possess a stranger unlimitedly; but they might not keep one of their own brethren more than six years. Thus they had quite forgotten their obligations at home until the time of their affliction, when they reed and obeyed, letting their Hebrew

bondmen go. Hence their guilt was much greater, because they had felt their sin and their fathers' sin; they had seen what the will of God was, and having resolved to do it under pressure of danger, directly the occasion was gone they returned to their evil ways. "Therefore, thus saith the Lord, Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the Lord, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth." (Ver. 17.)

Nor was it merely that they had singularly lost sight of Jehovah's will and transgressed His covenant, but they had contracted a solemn covenant made afresh, "when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof." There was something similar in early days between their father Abram, as recorded in Genesis 15, and God. There was a remarkable covenant, when it is said that he took all the victims named and "divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcases, Abram drove them away. And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him." (Ver. 10-12.) Thus and then it was made known to him, in presence of this sacrifice, that his seed were to be afflicted four hundred years, but that the nation whom they should serve, God would judge, and afterwards they should come out with great substance. "And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces." (Ver. 17.) This set forth the destiny of Israel, the smoking furnace

representing their trial and affliction; the burning lamp that passed between them, the hope of the deliverance that would spring up out of darkness. Such were the dealings of God in righteous government.

These men seem to have imitated in a manner this covenant with Abram; but in them there was no faith counted for righteousness, though they solemnly acknowledged their obligation to the will of God, passing between the calf, which was not only a sacrificial sign for confirmation before the Lord, but a kind of imprecation of death upon themselves if they were unfaithful to the covenant, like the children of Israel in Exodus 24. And so says the Lord to those who had passed between the parts of the calf; “I will even (jive them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life: and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth. And Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes will I give into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life, and into the hand of the king of Babylon’s army, which are gone up from you.” (Ver. 20, 21.) They were not to be killed as the others, but to be taken prisoners and put to humiliation; though God might assuage their calamity, as we have seen in the case of Zedekiah. As for the city, they flattered themselves that the Babylonians would never come back again; but says the Lord, I will “cause them to return to this city; and they shall fight against it, and take it, and burn it with fire: and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without an inhabitant.” (Ver. 22.) So solemn are the ways of Jehovah, whether with the guilty king, in not forgetting his kindness to the prophet, whatever might be the judgment of his iniquity;

or with the princes and priests, the still more guilty advisers of the king. Destruction came upon them to the uttermost, as also upon the city itself where such conscienceless deeds were allowed.

Jeremiah 35

It is striking the pains God takes with His people and the way in which He condescends to employ the example of men (before of birds and beasts) for a parable for instructing His people, if they are but willing to listen. We learn that there was in the holy land at this time a tribe of the sons of Rechab. They were Kenites as to their race — the same people of whom Moses' wife came: there was, as we know, a friendly feeling between Israel and them in consequence.

The manner too in which the Lord presses home the lesson is much to be observed: "Go," says He to Jeremiah, "unto the house of the Rechabites and speak unto them, and bring them into the house of the Lord, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink." This was calculated to impress the Rechabites strongly. A prophet of Jehovah sets before them cups of wine, and this too in the temple. "Then I took Jaazaniah, the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habaziniah, and his brethren, and all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechabites; and I brought them into the house of the Lord." It was not into some obscure place either in the temple, but unto one of the priests — "into the chamber of the sons of Hanan, the son of Igdaliah, a man of God, which was by the chamber of the princes, which was above the chamber of Maaseiah, the son of Shallum, the keeper of the door." It was by the chamber even of the heads of the priesthood and of the princes. And there it is added,

“I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pots full of wine, and cups, and I said unto them, Drink ye wine.” But the Rechabites were faithful; they had pledged themselves to their father a long while before. It was no new feeling; it had governed their conduct ever since his time who gave the tribe its name; and now even, under circumstances such as pressed Judea, when there was no lack of dangers and sorrow, though a prophet of the Lord bid them drink, though the wine was set before them in the temple of the Lord, they still refuse. “They said, We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye nor your sons for ever.”

It would be too much to assume that there was any direct purpose of pleasing God, or anything morally good in simply taking wine or not. It is plain God does not tempt anyone to evil: the very fact therefore that Jehovah bade the prophet bring them into the temple and set wine before them and bade them drink, shows that it is no question of moral evil. But it would have been unbecoming in those who had pledged themselves not to take it, had they done SO. They were obedient to their father — this was what was right. Their father was entitled to test their obedience if he liked, and he did so; and they were true to their father and to their own filial obligation. This was what pleased the lord, and what He uses for the correction of Israel. What is a convincing proof that the point is not one of moral evil is this: — besides the charge to drink no wine, it had also been commanded them “Neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents.” It is evident there is nothing at all wrong in itself in a man’s having a house or sowing

seed in a field: no one thinks so at least none but a madman. Yet these being tests of their obedience, they were as much bound to abstain from sowing seed and planting vineyards as from drinking wine. But the particular test here employed was drinking wine, because I suppose the others could not have been applied so readily. Jonadab put all this before them as a motive of obedience on the earth — “that ye may live many days in the land where ye be strangers. Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he hath charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, nor our daughters; nor to build houses for us to dwell in: neither have we vineyard, nor field, nor seed: but we have dwelt in tents and have obeyed, and have done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us.” There is no moral excellence in dwelling in a tent, any more than in a house; but there are circumstances where it would be more congruous and becoming. It was a beautiful sign of pilgrimage in the fathers to dwell in tents.

And so here: whatever may have been the motive in Jonadab for laying this precept upon his children, we do not know; but still they were right in dutiful obedience to him. “We have dwelt in tents, and have obeyed, and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us.” It is true there was now an exception. “But it came to pass, when Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon came up into the land, that we said, Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Syrians: so we dwell at Jerusalem.” It may be questioned whether they were called upon to make this an exception, and whether it was any better for them to be in Jerusalem than in the land as before. It is good always

to hold fast the principle on which we are called to act; it is dangerous to allow ourselves to change. God of course is entitled to bring in new principles for new circumstances, but we must take care that it is God who does so.

“Then came the word of the Lord unto Jeremiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Go and tell the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to my words? saith the Lord. The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are performed; for unto this day they drink none, but obey their father’s commandment: notwithstanding I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye hearkened not unto me. I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend you doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers; but ye have not inclined your ear nor hearkened unto me. If Such was now the condition of Israel, that God employs all sorts of figures, principally in the mouth of Jeremiah. The birds of the heavens know their appointed times, the cattle of the earth even are truer to their masters than the children of Israel to Jehovah. And here were these Gentiles, these strangers, living in tents in obedience to their father’s command. How faithful they were to their promise! how honouring to their father! while Israel as plainly refuses to hearken to Jehovah. It was not that God had not taken pains with Israel. Jonadab had never toiled so hard nor so perseveringly with his sons: he had no prophets to send to them. It was not called for, even if it had been in

his power. But as for Jehovah, rising up early He had spoken to them and had sent His prophets; yet they had not hearkened. Nevertheless He was ready to begin afresh and to forgive all — “Amend your doings and go not after other gods to serve them.” Yet they had not inclined their ear nor hearkened to Him. Disobedience is as the sin of witchcraft: there is nothing more derogatory to God, nor is anything else more ruinous to man. And God shows that in His government of the world He notices obedience, and especially to parents too: it has His signal blessing. “Because the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father which he commanded them; but this people hath not hearkened unto me: therefore thus saith the Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, I will bring upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them: because 1 have spoken unto them, but they have not heard; and 1 have called unto them, but they have not answered. And Jeremiah said unto the house of the Rechabites, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you: therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not a man to stand before me for ever.”

God is always thus, I think I may say, with the parental respect and with filial obedience, unless it be in direct opposition to Himself. It has beauty in His eyes and honour from His hand. And so it is that when — solemn sight! — the children of Israel would be given up to destruction (only not final because of the reserve of

grace), Jonadab the son of Rechab was not to want a man to stand before God for ever.

It is the more important to distinguish this, because it is on the same principle that God blesses even where the condition of people may be indifferent or otherwise bad. Supposing you take even a pious Catholic, God will always bless what is good. He will bless among any except where Christ is utterly rejected. The evil of Popery is not the outward rejection of Christ, but the bringing in of priesthood and ordinances between the soul and God; not taking away from the true God and the Lord Jesus, but rather the adding of something of man's own. It is idolatrous. It is not openly and profanely infidel. Profane infidelity denies the true God; but the religious infidelity of Romanism shows itself in putting things between the soul and God, and thus sharing the glory which belongs to God alone with other mediators, such as the saints, the Virgin Mary, and in fact the old sacrificial system. Nevertheless, spite of all that, God will always honour men according to their fidelity. Take, for instance, such a man as Martin Booz, in the course of this very century. He was greatly used of God in the conversion of souls, though he lived and died in Romanism. It is a part of the divine government, that He will bless what is faithful in individuals even where the public state of things is far from being according to His mind; whereas, where things may be according to His word, He will withhold His blessing if hearts are not practically faithful. In the very best position God will withhold His hand where souls are untrue to Him. On the other hand, He will bless individual fidelity in positions utterly foreign to the word of God. This is a

great comfort, especially in the present condition of Christendom.

Jeremiah 36

The last chapter presented the Lord’s admonitions to, if not reproach of, Judah in contrast with the fidelity of the Rechabites to their father, even though their obligations were of small intrinsic account. Jeremiah 36 adds an awful view of the obstinate unbelief of the king with its profane issue, and the condign judgment threatened which was surely accomplished at the fitting moment. Thus the guilt of the people and the king alike comes before us in these distinct but connected words from Jehovah to Jeremiah.

The prophet was bound, but the word of God was not. He is ever superior to the shifting circumstances of man, and paramount to the hindrances which seem to preclude the testimony of His servants. “And it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, that this word came unto Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day. It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin. Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah: and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the Lord, which he had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book. And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, I am shut up; I cannot go into the house of the Lord:

therefore go thou, and read in the roll, which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the Lord, in the ears of the people in the Lord's house upon the fasting day: and also thou shalt read them in the ears of all Judah that come out of their cities. It may be they will present their supplication before the Lord, and will return every one from his evil way: for great is the anger and the fury that the Lord hath pronounced against this people. And Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading in the book the words of the Lord in the Lord's house." (Ver. 1-8.)

The spirit of obedience ere long finds a fitting moment for serving the Lord. "And it came to pass in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, in the ninth month, that they proclaimed a fast before the Lord to all the people in Jerusalem, and to all the people that came from the cities of Judah unto Jerusalem. Then read Baruch in the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of the Lord, in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the higher court, at the entry of the new gate of the Lord's house, in the ears of all the people. When Michaiah the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, had heard out of the book in the words of the Lord, then he went down into the king's house, into the scribe's chamber: and, lo, all the princes sat there, even Elishama the scribe, and Deliah the son of Shemaiah, and Elnathan the son of Achbor, and Gemariah the son of Shaphan, and Zedekiah the son of Hananiah, and all the princes. Then Michaiah declared unto them all the words that he had heard, when Baruch read the book in the ears of the people." (Ver. 9-13.)

But the ways of God are wise as well as good. Without our own seeking it, He knows how to bring His word before the greatest of men. As Paul before governors, a king, and an emperor, so the words of the Lord through Jeremiah came into the council chamber and the court. “Therefore all the princes sent Jehudi the son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cushi, unto Baruch, saying, Take in thine hand the roll wherein thou hast read in the ears of the people, and come. So Baruch the son of Neriah took the roll in his hand, and came unto them. And they said unto him, Sit down now and read it in our ears. So Baruch read it in their ears. Now it came to pass, when they had heard all the words, they were afraid both one and other, and said unto Baruch, We will surely tell the king of all these words. And they asked Baruch, saying, Tell us now, How didst thou write all these words it his mouth? Then Baruch answered them, He pronounced all these words unto me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book. Then said the princes unto Baruch, Go, hide thee, thou and Jeremiah; and let no man know where ye be. And they went in to the king into the court, but they laid up the roll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and told all the words in the ears of the king. So the king sent Jehudi to fetch the roll: and he took it out of Elishama the scribe’s chamber. And Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes which stood beside the king.” (Ver. 14-2l.) How blessed! The servant of Jehovah keeps his own place of lowliness, despised and suffering as his Master at a later day; but the message none the less surely reaches the throne.

Alas! it was a rejected testimony, and he who sat on David’s throne startled his most obsequious courtiers by

the boldness of his rebellion against Jehovah. “Now the king sat in the winter-house in the ninth month: and there was a fire on the hearth burning before him. And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth. Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words. Nevertheless Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah had made intercession to the king that he would not burn the roll: but he would not hear them.” (Ver. 22-25.) Jehoiakim saw no more than a roll, but his guilty conscience felt a horror of that roll which betrayed his fears under veil of the contempt which cut it up and consumed its leaves in the fire.

Vain hope to escape from the hand of Jehovah, who not only hid His servants, but repeated His threats and yet more: “But the king commanded Jerahmeel the son of Hammelech, and Seraiah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel, to take Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet: but the Lord hid them. Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, after that the king had burned the roll, and the words which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah, saying, Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned. And thou shalt say to Jehoiakim king of Judah, Thus saith the Lord; Thou hast burned this roll, saying, Why hast thou written therein, saying, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast? therefore thus saith the Lord of Jehoiakim king of Judah;

He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them; but they hearkened not. Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah; who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had hurried in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many like words." (Ver. 26 -32.) How implicitly we may commit ourselves and our testimony to the Lord who watches over all to do good, and to warn of evil, without ever letting go the reins over that which is beyond our control. May we only and always cherish the guidance of His word by the Spirit!

Jeremiah 37

The last two chapters presented an episode quite out of historical connection with what went before or follows after. They showed us the contrast between the sons of Rechab and the men of Judah, and the presumptuous profanity of the king, albeit Josiah's son Jehoiakim. People or prince, all was hopeless evil against the God of Israel.

We now return to the beginning of Zedekiah's history, whom the king of Babylon called to the throne instead of Jechoniah or Jehoiachin. Outwardly it was a contest between the courts of Egypt and Chaldea; in truth, it was the chastening and humiliation of the house of David and of Jerusalem under the hand of God for their

rebellion against His name. “And king Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned instead of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon made king in the land of Judah. But neither he, nor his servants, nor the people of the land, did hearken unto the words of the Lord, which he spake by the prophet Jeremiah. And Zedekiah the king sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah And Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest to the prophet Jeremiah, saying, Pray now unto the Lord our God for us. Now Jeremiah came in and went out among the people: for they had not put him into prison. Then Pharaoh’s army was come forth out of Egypt: and when the Chaldeans that besieged Jerusalem heard tidings of them, they departed from Jerusalem.” (Ver. 1-5.) It was the term of patience which the Lord is wont to give, when evil men do not yet openly and thoroughly pronounce, and appearances favour for a while the false against the true, and faith is thus put to the fuller test. Thus the prophet was not yet treated with manifest contempt and persecution, and the king was still seeking his prayers by one of the house of Aaron as well as by a minister of’ the government. The appearance of Pharaoh’s army on the scene detects the hollowness of all save those who were of faith. Men would like to find God wrong and reduce His word to their own uncertainty, and to this end they avail themselves greedily of the weakness of the instruments He employs, as well as of each shift in the changeful circumstances of this world as it now is. The day is coming when the state of man and of the earth will be an adequate witness of God’s government. It is not so yet, nor will it be till Jesus comes, having received for Himself the kingdom, and slays the enemies who would not have Him to reign over them. Unbelief always assumes that this world, without

and before the return of the Lord to reign, is the scene of God's displayed government, and reasons on present results as the expression and criterion of His ways, than which (spite of the certainty of His ever-controlling providence) nothing can be farther from the truth. Faith knows that, while the faithfulness and care of God never fails, it is the future alone which solves and divulges the riddle of the present. For this we must patiently wait.

Now there was no faith in the policy of Zedekiah or his advisers. They were elated at their momentary relief through the intervention of Egypt, and immediately allow themselves the hope that Jeremiah was mistaken in predicting the supremacy of Nebuchadnezzar and the prostration of Judah. "Then came the word of the Lord unto the prophet Jeremiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel; Thus shall ye say to the king of Judah, that sent you unto me to enquire of me; Behold, Pharaoh's army, which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt into their own land. And the Chaldeans shall come again, and fight against this city, and take it, and burn it with fire. Thus saith the Lord; Deceive not your. selves, saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us: for they shall not depart. For though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans that fight against you, and there remained but wounded men among them, yet should they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire." (Ver. 6-10.) Vain is the help of man against the word of God; not now for the first time had Egypt proved a broken reed, piercing the hand of such as leaned on it. The return of Pharaoh's army without a blow for Judah only deferred the prosecution of the siege by the Chaldeans, who soon came up again to destroy the city with fire.

Jeremiah at least believed the word of Jehovah, and so sought to retire from the city, when relieved for a short space, to his place in the land of Benjamin. This exposed him to the injurious suspicion of his enemies. “And it came to pass, that when the army of the Chaldeans was broken up from Jerusalem for fear of Pharaoh’s army, then Jeremiah went forth out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin, to separate himself thence in the midst of the people. And when he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the ward was there, whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah; and he took Jeremiah the prophet, saying, Thou fallest away to the Chaldeans. Then said Jeremiah, It is false; I fall not away to the Chaldeans. But he hearkened not to him: so Irijah took Jeremiah, and brought him to the princes. Wherefore the princes were wroth with Jeremiah, and smote him, and put him in prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe: for they had made that the prison. (Ver. 11-15.)

The king was not without conscience, when the prophet was sent for and faithfully adhered to the testimony of Jehovah, so humbling to Zedekiah, but assuaged his sufferings in the prison. What an evidence of the lot of him who is true to God in this world! His prophecies were vindicated, but he was persecuted notwithstanding. “When Jeremiah was entered into the dungeon, and into the cabins, and Jeremiah had remained there many days; then Zedekiah the king sent, and took him out: and the king asked him secretly in his house, and said, Is there any word from the Lord? And Jeremiah said, There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon. Moreover Jeremiah said unto king Zedekiah What have I offended

against thee, or against thy servants, or against this people, that ye have put me in prison? Where are now your prophets which prophesied unto you, saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land? Therefore hear now, I pray thee, O my lord the king: let my supplication, I pray thee, be accepted before thee; that thou cause me not to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there. Then Zedekiah the king commanded that they should commit Jeremiah into the court of the prison, and that they should give him daily a piece of bread out of the bakers' street, until all the bread in the city were spent. Thus Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison." (Ver. 16-21.) Vain indeed is the help of man, yea of princes, were they of the house of David

Jeremiah 38

The testimony of God never fails in the end to rouse the enmity of man. And so the prophet proved, especially at their hands who seek present influence in the earth. "Then Shephatiah the son of Mattan, and Gedaliah the son of Pashur, and Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashur the son of Malchiah, heard the words that Jeremiah had spoken unto all the people, saying, Thus saith the Lord, He that remaineth in this city shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live; for he shall have his life for a prey, and shall live. Thus saith the Lord, This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which shall take it. Therefore the princes said unto the king, We beseech thee, let this man be put to death: for thus he weakeneth the hands of the men of war that remain in this city, and the hands of

all the people, in speaking such words unto them: for this man seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the hurt." (Ver. 1-4.)

Alas! the king was a moral picture of the people; for they, like him, had a dim, feeble, ineffectual sense that Jeremiah had the mind of Jehovah. But with neither was there that energy of faith which resists the appearance of present interest; and thus all was exposed to bold men in whom a strong will wrought without conscience or fear of the Lord. To such the counsel of the prophet, which urged submission to the Chaldeans, was distasteful in the extreme. The same spirit which rebelled against Jehovah could not but refuse to bow to His chastisement and their own humiliation. But this is the only path of godly feeling and repentance. To flesh it was not to seek the peace of Israel, but the hurt. And the king yields. "Then Zedekiah the king said, Behold, he is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do any thing against you. Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that was in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire." (Ver. 5, 6.)

The eyes of the Lord however did not watch in vain,. nor weft His ears indifferent to the cry of His suffering witness. He knows]low to draw out help from the least expected quarter; and so it was on this occasion. "Now when Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin; Ebed-melech went forth out of the king's house, and spake to the king, saying, My lord the

king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city. Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die. So Ebed-melech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took thence old cast clouts and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah. And Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so. So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison." (Ver. 7-13.)

But yielding to will for the sake of peace never satisfies conscience; and the uneasy sense of slighting God and His servant provokes the desire to hear what is most dreaded. "Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took Jeremiah the prophet unto him into the third entry that is in the house of the Lord: and the king said unto Jeremiah, I will ask thee a thing: hide nothing from me. Then Jeremiah said unto Zedekiah, If I declare it unto thee, wilt thou not surely put me to death? and if I give thee counsel, wilt thou not hearken unto me? So Zedekiah the king sware secretly unto Jeremiah, saying, As the Lord liveth, that made us this soul, I will not put thee to death, neither will I give thee into the hand of these men that seek thy life. Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah, Thus saith the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: If thou wilt, assuredly go forth unto the king of

Babylon's princes, then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and thou shalt live, and thine house: but if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall this city he given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hands." (Ver. 14-18.)

When the eye is not single, the body is a prey to dark thoughts and groundless fears; He is unseen and forgotten who alone is to be held in awe. "And Zedekiah the king said unto Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they mock me. But Jeremiah said, They shall not deliver thee. Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the Lord, which I speak unto thee: so it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live. But if thou refuse to go forth, this is the word that the Lord hath showed me: And, behold, all the women that are left in the king of Judah's house shall be brought forth to the king of Babylon's princes, and those women shall say, Thy friends have set thee on, and have prevailed against thee: thy feet have sunk in the mire, and they are turned away back. So they shall bring out all thy wives and thy children to the Chaldeans: and thou shalt not escape out of their hand, but shalt be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon: and thou shalt cause this city to be burned with fire." (Ver. 19-23.)

The chapter closes with the king's anxiety lest the princes should hear of the interview with the prophet. What a state of things! But is it so very different now? I doubt it. The highest of this world are often its veriest slaves; and a king is of all men least free as to God's testimony before his court. It is not a new thought, that

a real Christian is apt to make a bad and weak monarch. For conscience and policy are sorry companions and allies, which can never rely on each other's succour. Here the result was painful in the extreme, and the cowardice of the king dragged down the prophet into the least worthy passage of his chequered life. "Then said Zedekiah unto Jeremiah, Let no man know of these words, and thou shalt not die. But if the princes hear that I have talked with thee, and they come unto thee, and say unto thee, Declare unto us now what thou hast said unto the king, bide it not from us, and we will not put thee to death; also what the king said unto thee: then thou shalt say unto them, I presented my supplication before the king, that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house to die there. Then came all the princes unto Jeremiah, and asked him: and he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded. So they left off speaking with him; for the matter was not perceived. So Jeremiah abode in the court of the prison until the day that Jerusalem was taken: and he was there when Jerusalem was taken." (Ver. 24-28.)

It is in Christ that the light shone in its perfection for He, He only, is the true light. Yet, wondrous grace! we who were darkness are made light in the Lord. Falsehood and deceit are now fully judged; as there was none in Him, so all is condemned that was ours in His cross, and the life of which we thenceforward live is Christ. Hence in Christianity, as in Him, nothing is tolerable which is inconsistent with the nature and glory of God.

Jeremiah 39

The inevitable hour was now at hand. Hopes founded on man are vain, most of all for God's people when He is morally judging. Unbelief is abundant in nothing but devices to parry (not so much conviction as) submission to God. At length, however, the due moment arrives to accomplish the warning so long slighted, and then the stout-hearted become cravens so much the more because they have a guilty conscience. "In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, came Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon and all his army against Jerusalem, and they besieged it. And in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, the ninth day of the month, the city was broken up. And all the princes of the king of Babylon came in, and sat in the middle gate, even Nergal-sharezer, Shamgar-nebo, Sarsechim, Rab-saris, Nergal-sharezer, Rabmag, with all the residue of the princes of the king of Babylon. And it came to pass, that when Zedekiah the king of Judah saw them, and all the men of war, then they fled, and went forth out of the city by night, by the way of the king's garden, by the gate betwixt the two walls: and he went out the way of the plain." (Ver. 1-4.)

It is solemn to observe how little the spirit that has yielded to man's thoughts against God's word remembers in the moment of supreme need what might even yet have profited both city and people and prince. Had not the prophet assured Zedekiah that, if he went forth to the king of Babylon's princes, he and his house should live, and the city should not be burnt with fire? Alas! it is one of the effects of the evil heart that departs from the living God that it always seems to forget the word when it is most wanted, only to feel its force when

it has again betaken itself to some new plan of its own, as disappointing as all before it. How bitter to recollect too late, that all the heart clung to must be given up to vengeance and the enemy, and that the destruction soon to follow is the fruit of one's own folly. "But the Chaldeans' army pursued after them, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho: and when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he gave judgment upon him. Then the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah in Riblah before his eyes: also the king of Babylon slew all the nobles of Judah. Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him with chains, to carry him to Babylon. And the Chaldeans burned the king's house, and the houses of the people, with fire, and brake down the walls of Jerusalem." (Ver. 5-8.)

Let it be observed how the facts recorded here explain the seeming inconsistency between the statements of Jeremiah 34:3 and Ezekiel 12:13. Both prophets implied that, though he might try to escape, he should be taken; both affirmed that he must go to Babylon. But Ezekiel predicted "yet shall he not see it (Babylon, the land of the Chaldees), though he shall die there; 11 Jeremiah predicted "thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth." To a superficial reader this might seem hard to reconcile, if not a contradiction. But such a thought would be only ignorance, not to speak of irreverence; for they each gave out from God beforehand what was made good in the history of the case. For the fugitive king was pursued and overtaken before he crossed the Jordan; and the king of Babylon in Riblah, after judging the matter, had Zedekiah's sons slain before their guilty

father’s eyes, then put out Zedekiah’s eyes, bound him with chains and carried him to Babylon. Thus he did not see Babylon, though he went there; yet he did see the indignant conqueror’s eyes who spoke with him mouth to mouth. No word of the Lord falls to the ground.

Nevertheless the riddance was not complete. The poor did not fail in the land; some were left in it — a pledge, little as the stranger thought, of the return of a poor remnant, and of a nation yet to be poor in spirit when God will bring back the captivity of His people, and Jacob shall rejoice and Israel shall be glad. “Then Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard carried away captive into Babylon the remnant of the people that remained in the city, and those that fell away, that fell to him, with the rest of the people that remained. But Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard left of the poor of the people, which had nothing, in the land of Judah, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time.” Ver. 9, 10.)

But there is respect for God sometimes where it might be by some least expected. “Now Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon gave charge concerning Jeremiah to Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard, saying, Take him, and look well to him, and do him no harm; but do unto him even as he shall say unto thee. So Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard sent, and Nebushasban, Rab-saris, and Nergal-sharezer, Rab-mag, and all the king of Babylon’s princes; even they sent, and took Jeremiah out of the court of the prison, and committed him unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, that he should carry him home: so he dwelt among the people.” (Ver. 11-14.)

While imprisoned Jeremiah had a message from Jehovah for him who had interceded for the prophet when cast into the dungeon and about to die of hunger in the mire where he had sunk. God forgets not mercy for the righteous who showed mercy, though His judgments must be executed on the haughty city where the evil counsellors lived who urged the feeble faulty son of David to his ruin. “Now the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah, while he was shut up in the court of the prison, saying, Go and speak to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring my words upon this city for evil, and not for good; and they shall be accomplished in that day before thee. But I will deliver thee in that day, saith the Lord: and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee: because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord.” (Ver. 15-18.) Trust in the Lord is never vain, though none but Himself could see Ebed-melech’s for its scant measure. It is better then to trust in Jehovah than to put confidence in man; it is better to trust in Jehovah than to put confidence in princes. He is of all power and might against the enemy; and His grace toward ourselves knows no bounds.

Jeremiah 40

This is the first of a series of chapters which present the disorder and moral confusion that reigned among the Jews left behind in or near the land when the rest were carried captives to Babylon. Judgment by the hand of man has no softening effect on those who slight the word of God. We shall find those who would not bow to

the chastening of Jehovah false and treacherous in their dealings with their brethren. The heathen shine in comparison with a reckless Jew without the fear of God, who in His word throws no veil over those that, nominally His people, had their hearts far from Him.

“The word that came to Jeremiah from Jehovah, after that Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he had taken him being bound in chains among all that were carried away captive of Jerusalem and Judah, which were carried away captive unto Babylon. And the captain of the guard took Jeremiah, And said unto him, The Lord thy God hath pronounced this evil upon this place. Now the Lord hath brought it, and done according as he hath said: because ye have sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed his voice, therefore this thing is come upon you.” (Ver. 1-3.) We see hence that it is easy even for a man who has no part in God’s blessing for His people to own the truth after prophecy is accomplished, especially when it is to one’s own exaltation over the fallen adversaries. Nebuzar-adan can talk piously when his master had gained the victory over Jerusalem according to the declaration of the Lord. It is confessed that He had warned, and finally accomplished His word, and this because of their sins.

“And now, behold I loose thee this day from the chains which were upon thine hand. If it seem good unto thee to come with me into Babylon, come; and I will look well unto thee; but if it seem ill unto thee to come with me into Babylon, forbear: behold, all the land is before thee: whither it seemeth good and convenient for thee to go, thither go.” (Ver. 4.) But Jeremiah had no heart for Chaldea, whatever attractions might seem to be there.

He preferred to suffer in the land with the meanest that man left behind. “Now while he was not yet gone back, he said, Go back also to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon hath made governor over the cities of Judah, and dwell with him among the people: or go wheresoever it seemeth convenient unto thee to go. So the captain of the guard gave him victuals and a reward, and let him go. Then went Jeremiah unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah; and dwelt with him among the people that were left in the land.” (Ver. 5, 6.) It was love to abide in the scene of their humiliation; it was a pledge of restoration.

But the people of God can never be a sphere of ease, least of all can they afford security save where faith looks straight to the Lord. “Now when all the captains of the forces which were in the fields, even they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam governor in the land, and had committed unto him men, and women, and children, and of the poor of the land, of them that were not carried away, captive to Babylon; then they came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, even Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth, and the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, and Jezaniah the son of a Maachathite, they and their men.” (Ver. 7, 8.)

Things however were all out of course, and the return of the scattered captains and their forces was nothing, because the Lord was not at all in their thoughts. And a strange inversion is seen in the governor swearing to them, not they to him. “And Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan sware unto them and to their men, saying, Fear not to serve the Chaldeans: dwell in the

land, and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you. As for me, behold, I will dwell at Mizpah, to serve the Chaldeans, which will come unto us: but ye, gather ye wine, and summer fruits, and oil, and put them in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that ye have taken." (Ver. 9, 10.) Nothing could be more conciliatory than the governor's words nor more sincere than his ways. For he was content to do his duty to the conqueror in the distressful condition of the land, but to serve the people to the utmost of his power. And this had its effect. "Likewise when all the Jews that were in Moab, and among the Ammonites, and in Edom, and that Were in all the countries, heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant of Judah, and that he had set over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan; even all the Jews returned out of all places whither they were driven, and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah, unto Mizpah, and gathered wine and summer fruits very much." (Ver. 11, 12.)

Thus there might have been a state of things, far from bright certainly, but by no means destitute of mercy from the Lord for the poor in the land. But sin ruins all and everywhere; and ambition and intrigue, treachery and violence, can work in prostrate Judea as surely as in victorious Babylon and more painfully. Evil men find nothing so intolerable as the good; and their own deep obligations sometimes may make the purpose so much the worse. Nor has wickedness long to wait for an opportunity, even if it have no excuse to cover its shame. A wicked Jew lends himself to the plans of a heathen neighbour, jealous of any order or mitigation of sorrow in the land. "Moreover Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that were in the fields,

came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, and said unto him, Dost thou certainly know that Baalis the king of the Ammonites hath sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to slay thee? But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam believed them not." (Ver. 13, 14.)

Thus, God did not fail to give timely and sufficient warning of the danger that hung over Gedaliah. And surely he was imprudent and careless to have despised it. But a good man does not love to hear evil; and having no feeling but of kindness toward others is slow to credit the malice of those he had only sought to serve. Nevertheless in this case it was not without fault. He was in a public and responsible position, and his life was of no small moment both for the help of the poor and as a security against the suspicion or the displeasure of the Chaldeans. When ample witnesses, more than two or three, bore their testimony to him of the plot between the king of the Ammonites and Ishmael against his life, Gedaliah ought to have inquired further and stood on his guard. But he believed them not and soon paid the price of his temerity.

It is not that Johanan was much better than Ishmael; as we shall see in the subsequent course of events, he had no real faith in God's word and hardened himself in pride and rebellion of heart. And it is possible that Gedaliah knew there was little to choose between them; and so rejected the good warning no less than the bad offer to get rid of Ishmael made by Johanan "Then Johanan the son of Kareah spake to Gedaliah in Mizpah secretly, saying, Let me go, I pray thee, and I will slay Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no man shall know it: wherefore should he slay thee, that all the Jews which are gathered unto thee should be scattered and the

remnant in Judah perish? But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said unto Johanan the son of Kareah, Thou shalt not do this thing: for thou speakest falsely of Ishmael." (Ver. 15, 16.) But in that evil day it was not wise nor well to despise the report that came even from a suspicious quarter. And Gedaliah, had he waited on God, would have been less quick either to impute falsehood to the one or to have acquitted the other. May we learn, though in another way suited to the christian calling, to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves!

Jeremiah 41

The history of the degradation of the Jews in or near the land is still pursued. "Now it came to pass in the seventh month, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah the son of Elishama, of the seed royal, and the princes of the king, even ten men with him, came unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah; and there they did eat bread together in Mizpah. Then arose Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and the ten men that were with him, and smote Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan with the sword, and slew him, whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land. Ishmael also slew all the Jews that were with him, even with Gedaliah, at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans that were found there, and the men of war." Ver. 1-3.) It is not an unmeaning description that the Holy Spirit adds to the name and kin of Ishmael, "of the seed royal." Ordinarily and rightly this would have been a guarantee of help to a governor, and a stay and shelter to the people. But God was forgotten, His judgments as well as His will slighted, and human corruption takes its course where it was least becoming. Truly the ruin of Israel was complete,

when the seed royal sank into the basest form of cunning, treachery, and murder, and this of the best of their own people, yea, of God's people in the goodly land, now a moral as well as material desert.

Nor was it only jealousy of the good man who fell unsuspectingly at his own board, where he had hospitably received these emissaries of Belial; nor was it simple rebellion against the conquering king of Babylon, which then broke out against the native governor and the foreign soldiers at Mizpah; the royal desperado had tasted blood and would pursue his desperate career, careless whom or why he slew. "And it came to pass the second day after he had slain Gedaliah, and no man knew it, that there came certain from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria, even fourscore men, having their beards shaven, and their clothes rent, and having cut themselves, with offerings and incense in their hand, to bring them to the house of the lord. And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah went forth from Mizpah to meet them, weeping all along as he went; and it came to pass, as he met them, he said unto them, Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam. And it was so, when they came into the midst of the city, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah slew them, and cast them into the midst of the pit, he, and the men that were with him." (Ver. 4-7.)

It adds to the horrors of the picture too, that Ishmael was as avaricious as he was violent and deceitful. "But ten men were found among them that said unto Ishmael, Slay us not: for we have treasures in the field, of wheat, and of barley, and of oil, and of honey. So he forbare, and slew them not among their brethren." (Ver. 8.)

Who can doubt that God was pleased to take away Gedaliah, and those who sorrowed over the desolations of Israel, from evil to come? It was mercy to themselves; it was an additional chastening on the guilty people, high or low, that those who did and felt most becomingly should be swept away, and that by their brethren's hands. What a stigma, that a trench made for self-defence should become the promiscuous burying-place of the best of the remnant thus shamefully put to death! Now the pit wherein Ishmael had cast all the dead bodies of the men, whom he had slain because of Gedaliah, was it which Asa the king had made for fear of Baasha king of Israel: and Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it with them that were slain." (Ver. 9.)

In furtherance, apparently, of the designs concocted with the king of the Ammonites, Ishmael proceeds next to carry away those whom he did not slay. "Then Ishmael carried away captive all the residue of the people that were in Mizpah, even the king's daughters, and all the people that remained in Mizpah, whom Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard had committed to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam: and Ishmael the son of Nethaniah carried them away captive, and departed to go over to the Ammonites." (Ver. 10.) Yet even when God permits the severest measures of shame and suffering, He disappoints the guilty in the moment of their greatest success. "But when Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that were with him, heard of all the evil that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done, then they took all the men, and went to fight with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and found him by the great waters that are in Gibeon. Now it came to pass, that when all the people that were with Ishmael saw

Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that were with him, then they were glad. So all the people that Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah cast about and returned, and went unto Johanan the son of Kareah." (Ver. 11-14.)

It is true that Ishmael was not slain. Possibly to return bootless, and disappointed of the prey, to the king who had sent him as a destroyer of his own people and a plunderer for the Ammonites, may have been for the moment a more bitter cup to the conspirators.

Alas! he who delivered the captives and put to flight their enemy was no true friend of Israel, because he paid little heed to the word of Jehovah. "But Ishmael the son of Nethaniah escaped from Johanan with eight men, and went to the Ammonites. Then took Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that were with him, all the remnant of the people whom he had recovered from Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, from Mizpah, after that he had slain Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, even mighty men of war, and the women, and the children, and the eunuchs, whom he had brought again from Gibeon: and they departed and dwelt in the habitation of Chimham, which is by Bethlehem, to go to enter into Egypt, because of the Chaldeans: for they were afraid of them, because Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had slain Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon made governor in the land." (Ver. 15-18.) Fear is an evidence of unbelief as certainly if not so grossly as bold or treacherous rebellion. The prophet had warned them to submit to the king of Babylon, not to flee into Egypt. What was the issue of this disobedience, flowing from distrust, we have yet to learn. How blessed for the believer that he is entitled to

trample on fears, and to confide without anxiety to the word of the lord!

Jeremiah 42

The heart, even where unrenewed, feels the need of religion till hardened by sin without conscience or blinded by the speculations of a misguided mind. But, however fair its promise or its actual form, the will is soon put to the test of God's word, which nothing stands but faith.

"Then all the captains of the forces, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least even unto the greatest, came near, and said unto Jeremiah the prophet, Let, we beseech thee, our supplication be accepted before thee, and pray for us unto the Lord thy God, even for all this remnant (for we are left but a few of many, as thine eyes do behold us): that the Lord thy God may show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we way do." (ver. 1-8.)

Real faith is unsuspicious, and it can afford to be so; for the believer knows in whom he has believed, and can commit oneself and others, the present and the future, to the One whose grace has looked on us for eternity, and whose righteous government notices every word and way and feeling and desire along the road. Hence if wise, one is spared from censoriousness; and though liable to be deceived, it is only when we fail to bring every difficulty to our God. So it was here. "Then Jeremiah the prophet said unto them, I have heard you; behold, I will pray unto the Lord your God according to your words; and it shall come to pass, that whatsoever thing the Lord shall answer you, I will declare it unto

you; I will keep nothing back from you. Then they said to Jeremiah, The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us. Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send thee; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the Lord our God." (Ver. 4-6.) If protestation could have assured the prophet, there was enough then; but he was not ignorant either of man or of Satan. His trust was in God, let the Jew be true or false.

But how painful it is to prove that the flesh betrays itself quite as much by its excessive show of piety as by profanity! It is not by want of fervour that its hollowness is detected by the experienced eye, but rather by too profuse, or at least too self-confident, a readiness to obey the divine will, whatever it be. The duty may be plain; but what of the heart? of the power to go on and to go through? Faith supposes the sense of our own weakness as surely as it counts on God and His grace. Human resolution in divine things has its force only where it is allowed its own will.

"And it came to pass after ten days, that the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah. Then called he Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces which were with him, and all the people from the least even to the greatest. And said unto them, Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, unto whom ye sent me to present your supplication before him; if ye will still abide in this land, then will I build you, and not pull you down, and I will plant you, and not pluck you up. for I repent me of the evil that I have done unto you. Be not afraid of the king of Babylon of whom ye are afraid; be not afraid of him,

saith the Lord: for I am with you to save you, and to deliver you from his hand. And I will show mercy unto you, that he may have mercy upon you, and cause you to return to your own land." (Ver. 7-12.) The prophet himself waits till the divine answer comes: it was no question of his wisdom, but of God's word. And God now as peremptorily warns against fleeing into Egypt for protection, as He had before admonished them to submit to the king of Babylon. Faith accepts the chastening of sin, yet withal confides in God and His grace. Unbelief is fruitful in resources, all of which are merely the workings of a rebellious heart and secure nothing but ruin to those who are carried away by it. If they believed, low as their estate was, they need not make haste, and would surely be established; for they would be in His hand who could turn the heart of Nebuchadnezzar toward them: why should they be terrified by their adversaries? "But if ye say, We will not dwell in this land, neither obey the voice of the Lord your God, saying, No; but we will go into the land of Egypt, where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor have hunger of bread; and there will we dwell: and now therefore hear the word of the Lord, ye remnant of Judah; Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, If ye wholly set your faces to enter into Egypt, and go to sojourn there; then it shall come to pass, that the sword, which ye feared, shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine, whereof ye were afraid, shall follow close after you there in Egypt; and there ye shall die. So shall it be with all the men that set their faces to go into Egypt to sojourn there; they shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: and none of them shall remain or escape from the evil that I will bring upon them. For thus saith

the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; As mine anger and my fury hath been poured forth upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem; so shall my fury be poured forth upon you, when ye shall enter into Egypt: and ye shall be an execration, and an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach; and ye shall see this place no more." (Ver. 13-18.)

Thus God in the long run invariably accomplishes His will. Happy they who are in its current all the way through! If men resist, they gain nothing but grief and disappointment, which temporary success only embitters; but far from hindering the word of Jehovah, they only accomplish it by the measures intended to give effect to their own wishes, and the evils they most dread they bring infallibly on themselves.

"The LORD hath said concerning you, O ye remnant of Judah; Go ye not into Egypt: know certainly that I have admonished you this day. For ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the Lord your God, saying, Pray for us unto the Lord our God, and according unto all that the Lord our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it. And now I have this day declared it to you; but ye have not obeyed the voice of the Lord your God, nor any thing for the which he hath sent me unto you. Now therefore know certainly that ye shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, in the place whither ye desire to go and to sojourn." (Ver. 19-22.)

The prophet had walked in patience, the people in dissimulation, and God made all plain to His own glory and in His own time. Justly are those destroyed for their

disobedience of God who had made the most pious protestation of unswerving devotedness to His will,

Jeremiah 43

The preceding scene ended with the gravest warning to the Jews in the land who had consulted the prophet. The present chapter shows how soon it proved unavailing. Will was at work. The difficulty lay there. They trusted themselves. They did not trust God. Egypt was near, Nebuchadnezzar at a distance. He who had chastised the apostate pride of Judah was offensive to them. They refused to bow to the word, or to confide in the working of the Lord in their favour. They had nevertheless loudly proffered to obey His voice; and He forbade them by His prophet to go down into Egypt, whither they wished to betake themselves.

“And it came to pass, that when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking unto all the people all the words of the Lord their God, for which the Lord their God had sent him to them, even all these words, then spake Azariah the son of Hoshaiah, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the proud men, saying unto Jeremiah, Thou speakest falsely: the Lord our God hath not sent thee to say, Go Lot into Egypt to sojourn there: but Baruch the son of Neriah setteth thee on against us, for to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they might put us to death, and carry us away captives into Babylon.” (Ver. 1-3.) Unbelief may go on quietly for a while, and even put forth pious professions; but a time of trial inevitably comes, and tests whether it is God’s will, or our own, that we are really seeking. Johanan, the son of Kareah (who had so lately opposed the crafty assassin and royal plunderer, Ishmael), is one of the proud men who insult

the prophet and reject the message God sent by him. Had there been a lowly and contrite spirit, he would have trembled, and been enabled to hear the voice of Jehovah. But he was Lot of God; and an unjudged will blinded his eyes and dulled his ears. Perhaps he honestly thought what he said. but if so, how did he come to think so? What' ground had Jeremiah given to sanction or so much as to excuse a doubt of his communication as from Jehovah? His own evil heart of unbelief not only mistrusted the prophet, but gave itself loose reins in surmising a plot between Baruch and the prophet to hand the rest over to the Chaldean conquerors. The credulity of the unbeliever is proverbial; and an evil self-willed action promptly follows.

"So Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces, and all the people, obeyed not the voice of the Lord, to dwell in the land of Judah. But Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces, took all the remnant of Judah that were returned from all nations, whither they had been driven, to dwell in the land of Judah: even men, and women, and children, and the king's daughters, and every person that Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Jeremiah the prophet, and Baruch the son of Neriah. So they came into the land of Egypt: for they obeyed not the voice of the Lord: thus came they even to Tahpanhes." (Ver. 4-7.) Those who believe can afford to be calm and submit. If the hand of power compels them to go here or there, it is no longer their responsibility, but the guilt of such as despise the word of the Lord. Till Jesus returns in glory, the faithful, above all those entrusted with the

testimony, have to swim against the current, and to suffer where overborne by violence.

But this does not silence the prophet, however naturally timid and sensitive. “Then came the word of the Lord unto Jeremiah in Tahpanhes, saying, Take great stones in thine hand, and hide them in the clay in the brick-kiln, which is at the entry of Pharaoh’s house in Tahpanhes, in the sight of the men of Judah; and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will send and fake Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and set his throne upon these stones that I have hid: and he shall spread his royal pavilion over them. And when he cometh, he shall smite the land of Egypt, and deliver such as are for death to death; and such as are for captivity to captivity; and such as are for the sword to the sword. And I will kindle a fire in the houses of the gods of Egypt; and he shall burn them, and carry them, away captives: and he shall array himself with the land of Egypt, as a shepherd putteth on his garment; and he shall go forth from thence in peace. He shall break also the images of Beth-shemesh, that is in the land of Egypt; and the houses of the gods of the Egyptians shall he burn with fire.” (Ver. 8-13.) Little did “all the proud men” expect that they were only carrying along with them one whose voice would so shortly open in Egypt to pronounce their doom; and this by the hand of the very conqueror against whom they hoped to erect an impassable barrier in the power of the king of the south. Vain hope to escape the hand of the God they despised! Out of their own will and in defiance of His word, did they retire into Egypt for shelter? For this very reason destruction fell not only on themselves, but on the broken reed in which they trusted.

So it is always. In righteous government our sin becomes ere long our chastening and the world's woe, and what our blindness built on as the rock turns out to be a quicksand, the sport of waves and winds in the swift-coming day of visitation.

Jeremiah 44

The path of unbelief is a rapid descent when the heart hardens itself against a direct warning of the Lord; and the greater the profession of piety before, the more profound the fall. To go down into Egypt for safety was not natural in those who had ever reluctantly bowed to Babylon, and dreaded the wrath of the Chaldean king because of the murder of the governor and the rest. But it was a fatal step when the prophet gave them the word of Jehovah, and they were assured of safety in the land subject to Nebuchadnezzar, of destruction in Egypt whither their impulse, yea determination, was to go prudentially for shelter. God loves to be the Saviour of those who bear His name; if they desert Him for another, woe to them! It cannot but be to their shame, sorrow and ruin. Even when they have revolted to the uttermost, they are not left without a message, if peradventure any might yet hear and escape.

"The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews which dwell in the land of Egypt, which dwell at Migdol, and at Tahpanhes, and at Noph, and in the country of Pathros, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Ye have seen all the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, and upon all the cities of Judah; and, behold, this day they are a desolation, and no man dwelleth therein, because of their wickedness which they have committed to provoke me to anger, in

that they went to burn incense, and to serve other gods, whom they know not, neither they, ye, nor your fathers. Howbeit I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense unto other gods. Wherefore my fury and mine anger was poured forth, and was kindled in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they are wasted and desolate, as at this day." (Ver. 1-6.) Such was the wretched part of the chosen people and their king.

Had God pleasure in recounting their sins, and His judgments as well as warnings? Nay, it was His pity and desire that those in Egypt might at length hearken. "Therefore now thus saith the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls, to cut of from you man and woman, child and suckling, out of Judah, to leave you none to remain: In that ye provoke me unto wrath with the works of your hands, burning incense unto other gods in the land of Egypt, whither ye be gone to dwell, that ye might cut yourselves off, and that ye might be a curse and a reproach among all the nations of the earth? Have ye forgotten the wickedness of your fathers, and the wickedness of the kings of Judah, and the wickedness of their wives, and your own wickedness, and the wickedness of your wives, which they have committed in the land of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem? They are not humbled even unto this day, neither have they feared, nor walked in my law, nor in my statutes, that I set before you and before your fathers." (Ver. 7-10.) Imminent peril hung over them; Egypt would be a vain

shelter, but meanwhile it was too sure a decoy into idolatry.

Let it be noted here that the prophet lays stress on the wickedness of wives, and the place it had in precipitating the disasters of Israel before and now. Women are more ready to hear and feel, for good or ill, than men. The brighter side we see in the Acts of the Apostles, and also in the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament. The darker side appears here as elsewhere. It is a great grace from the Lord when they receive the truth and are saved; it is an awful sign of speedy judgment when they, renouncing the truth, are bold and shameless in their resolution to serve a false god. But we shall see more presently.

“Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will set my face against you for evil, and to cut off all Judah. And I will take the remnant of Judah, that have set their faces to go into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, and they shall all be consumed, and fall in the land of Egypt; they shall even be consumed by the sword and by the famine: they shall die, from the least even unto the greatest, by the sword and by the famine: and they shall be an execration, and an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach. For I will punish them that dwell in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: so that none of the remnant of Judah, which are gone into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, shall escape or remain, that they should return into the land of Judah, to the which they have a desire to return to dwell there: for none shall return but such as shall escape.” (Ver. 11-14.) Alas! they had ears, but they heard not. The remnant was rotten to the core.

“Then all the men which knew that their wives had burned incense unto other gods, and all the women that stood by, a great multitude, even all the people that dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying, As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine. And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven, and poured out drink offerings unto her, did we mike her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink offerings unto her, without our men?” (Ver. 15-19.) Thus they gloried in their shame, regarding not the works of Jehovah nor the operation of His hands, to their own destruction. Their calamities they interpreted as the consequence of slighting the queen of heaven,1 for their will was thoroughly committed to a so-called religion, which consecrated mere depravity and passion.

Why did they not attribute their troubles, as was the truth, to the chastening hand of God? This is precisely what the prophet charges home with the simplicity and force of truth. “Then Jeremiah said unto all the people, to the men, and to the women, and to all the people which had given him that answer, saying, The incense that ye burned in the cities of Judah, and in the streets

of Jerusalem, ye, and your fathers, your kings, and your princes, and the people of the land, did not the Lord remember them, and came it not into his mind? So that the Lord could no longer hear, because of the evil of your doings, and because of the abominations which ye have committed; therefore is your land a desolation, and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day. Because ye have burned incense, and because ye have sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord, nor walked in his law, nor in his statutes, nor in his testimonies; therefore this evil is happened unto you, as at this day." (Ver. 20-23.)

Next the prophet solemnly lays before all of Judah in Egypt the inevitable end of their idolatry, as in former chapters of their unbelief and rebellious disobedience. "Moreover Jeremiah said unto all the people, and to all the women, Hear the word of the Lord, all Judah that are in the land of Egypt: thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, Ye and your wives have both spoken with your mouths, and fulfilled with your hand, saying, We will surely perform our vows that we have vowed, to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her: ye will surely accomplish your vows, and surely perform your vows. Therefore hear ye the word of the Lord, all Judah that dwell in the land of Egypt; Behold, I have sworn by my great name, saith the Lord, that my name shall no more be named in the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, The Lord God liveth. Behold, I will watch over them for evil, and not for good: and all the men of Judah that are in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword and by the famine, until there be an end of them. Yet a small number that escape the

sword shall return out of the land of Egypt into the land of Judah, and all the remnant of Judah, that are gone into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, shall know whose words shall stand, mine or their's. And this shall be a sign unto you, saith the Lord, that I will punish you in this place, that ye may know that my words shall surely stand against you for evil: thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will give Pharaoh-hophra king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies, and into the hand of them that seek his life: as I gave Zedekiah king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, his enemy, and that sought his life." (Ver. 24-30.) The sign should be the utter downfall of Pharaoh-hophra (Apries in Herodotus, and Uaphris in Manetho), who was then reigning, and historically known as a singularly self-confident monarch; and yet he was put down ignominiously by a revolt of his own subjects, who set up a rival king; and he finally, spite of intervening kindness, gave him up to the Egyptians, who strangled him. Those who forgot the ruin of Zedekiah should soon see the arrogant reed of Egypt break before the blast which was not to spare their own guilt.

Jeremiah 45

No little speculation has been expended on this chapter and the reason why it is found here. Historically, it would follow Jeremiah 36. It stands as a fact wholly apart from what precedes and follows. But I do not entertain a doubt that its divinely assigned place is where we find it in the Hebrew Bible, the order of which is of course adhered to in the authorized version.

It is plain that, as Jeremiah 44 gives us the last direct account of the life of Jeremiah, chapter 45 furnishes the

latest notice of his friend and scribe Baruch, though in point of fact the message here inserted was delivered some twenty years before the scene immediately before described in the land of Egypt.

But moral considerations enter also; and, as I think, of greater moment than any such motive for collocation. It is not merely at a reason of danger from an incensed monarch that the mind of God conveyed by the prophet is of value; it may be increasingly needed when that pressure yields to a crowd of disasters, and a spurious calm succeeds blast after blast of evil. The question is, how Jehovah would have one who served Him to feel and act in a day of grief, and when His hand is still held out to execute summary judgment on the guilty people who dishonour His name entrusted to their keeping. This the prophet answers from God. May we have ears to heir what was said to Baruch!

“The word that Jeremiah the prophet spake unto Baruch the son of Neriah, when he had written these words in a book at the mouth of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, saying, Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, unto thee, O Baruch; thou didst say, Woe is me now! for the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest.” (Ver. 1-3.) It is evident that Baruch was not only troubled on every side, but straitened, his way hedged up as he thought, abandoned to distress without measure or end, and destruction staring him in the face. He was disheartened and weary; he could find no rest for his soul. This should never be for the believer. Not only the Christian now can never be thus without sin and unbelief at work; but even of old it ought not to have been. For, as Isaiah declares not only the everlasting

God, Jehovah, faints not nor is weary, but He gives power to the faint and increases strength to those who have no might. Thus, while nature's vigour fails utterly in the hour of trial, they that wait on Jehovah but change their strength, mount up as eagles, run without being weary and walk without being faint. How much more should we not be it weary pilgrims," though we may well wait in sorrow though surely with a joyful hope in the Spirit!

There is always in such cases an inner forgetfulness of the Lord, a lack of communion with His mind and ways, an allowance of desires which spring from self whatever be the plausible cover they may wear in our eves or before others.

Did Baruch simply and thoroughly vindicate Jehovah's ways with Israel? Did he in his heart sanctify the Lord God who had broken to pieces the people that He loved? This I gravely doubt. Otherwise he had not been so overwhelmed, but would surely have looked to Him and found an answer of repose in his spirit for the tears which He puts in His bottle. But as with us, so with His afflicted servant of old: God knew every thought and intent of the heart; and this in pitifulness, yet fidelity withal. Hence the word that follows: "Thus shalt thou say unto him, The Lord saith thus: Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up, even this whole land. And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not: for, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the Lord: but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest." Verses 4, 5.

This instruction is of great price to us who are partakers of a heavenly calling in the present ruined state of Christendom. Not that it was ever allowed to the Christian to seek great things for self or even for the church. True discipleship is inseparable from the cross, as our hoped for portion in the glory of God depends on the crucified One. And Christianity only comes in when God had tried man and found him wanting in every time and way and place; in the end of the world, as it is said (or rather consummation of the ages) when the proof was complete and manifest that the creature, as far as his own responsibility was concerned, was in no less ruin and misery than dishonour to God; and, in principle therefore, it could be said, “now is the judgment of this world.” Thereon the wisdom of God gave those He separated to Himself by Christ Jesus in grace now, and for heavenly glory in hope, a place not of the world — while in it and passing through it, not of the world as Christ is not. This, however, it becomes us even more peremptorily to hold fast, now that the outward framework of the christian profession must be added to the ruins of man and of Israel; and we cannot but testify according to the word of our Lord His speedy appearing to judge the world in righteousness. We, it is true, have a blessed hope and await His coming to receive us to Himself. Baruch had but his life guaranteed to him, come what might, and wherever he might go. Our place as Christians is association with Christ — the cross, and the glory. May we never forget it, nor seek aught inconsistent with Him in both! But if we be ever so right in other respects, we fail if we do not act and feel suitably to the ways or God in a day when He has pronounced on evil and is about to judge. Lowliness especially becomes him whom grace has separated from

that which is offensive to God; pride and hardness and self-seeking, always evil, become such an one least of all, and especially at such a time.

Jeremiah 46

We now enter on a series of prophetic threatenings against various nations, beginning with Egypt and going through with the neighbouring foes of the Jews, and ending with the utter destruction of Babylon; for the last chapter is an appendix, inspired but not Jeremiah's, though (I doubt not) rightly winding all up with the ruin of Zedekiah, and of the temple, and of the poor captives of Judah, among whom we see the royal son of David the pensioner of Evil-merodach king of Babylon. It is a complete picture of the then woes on the guilty people of Jehovah with judgment on their enemies. Israel had as yet wrought no deliverance in the earth. I do not doubt that the order of the Hebrew, followed by the Authorized Version and most others, is put in moral order by God, and that a mere chronological sequence would defeat this intention. Our business is not to arrange but believe.

Our chapter consists of two parts which refer to transactions severed by a considerable interval. The opening verse is general, "the word of Jehovah which came to Jeremiah against the Gentiles," and seems to introduce Jeremiah 46 - 51. Verses 2-12 comprise the first of the two denunciations of Egypt which fill the chapter; as verses 13-28 the second.

The first then runs, "Against Egypt, against the army of Pharaoh-necho king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates in Carchemish, which Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon smote in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son

of Josiah king of Judah. Order ye the buckler and shield and draw near to battle. Harness the horses; and get up, ye horsemen, and stand forth with your helmets; furbish the spears, and put on the brigandines." (Ver. 2-4.) It was the same energetic king whom Josiah attacked at Megiddo on his route to Carchemish but to his own ruin, not at all by any design of the Egyptian monarch who in vain begged the king of Judah to leave him alone. He subsequently deposed Jehoahaz and set up Eliakim as king, changing his name to Jehoiakim. But reverse was at hand. His army at Carchemish was utterly routed by Nebuchadnezzar, and the consequence was not merely the loss of all Asiatic possessions, but the shutting up of the king within his own land henceforth. "Wherefore have I seen them dismayed and turned away back? and their mighty ones are beaten down, and are fled apace, and look not back: for fear was round about, saith Jehovah. Let not the swift flee away, nor the mighty man escape; they shall stumble, and fall toward the north by the river Euphrates. Who is this that cometh up as a flood, whose waters are moved as the rivers? Egypt riseth up like a flood, and his waters are moved like the rivers; and he saith, I will go up, and will cover the earth; I will destroy the city and the inhabitants thereof. Come up, ye horses; and rage, ye chariots; and let the mighty men come forth; the Ethiopians and the Libyans, that handle the shield; and the Lydians, that handle and bend the bow. For this is the day of Jehovah God of hosts, a day of vengeance, that he way avenge him of his adversaries; and the sword shall devour, and it shall be satiate and made drunk with their blood: for the Jehovah of hosts hath a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates, Go up into Gilead, and take balm, O virgin, the daughter of Egypt: in vain shalt thou use many

medicines; for thou shalt not be cured. The nations have heard of thy shame, and thy cry hath filled the land: for the mighty man hath stumbled against the mighty, and they are fallen both together." (Ver. 5-12.)

The rest of the chapter is another word of Jehovah and relates to Pharaoh-hophra (the Apries of Herodotus and Uaphris of Manetho), who was attacked by Nebuchadnezzar in his own dominions, as we saw in Jeremiah 44. "The word that the Lord spake to Jeremiah the prophet, how Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon should come and smite the land of Egypt. Declare ye in Egypt, and publish in Migdol, and publish in Noph, and in Tahpanhes: say ye, Stand fast and prepare thee; for the sword shall devour round about thee. Why are thy valiant men swept away? they stood not, because the Lord did drive them, He made many to fall, yea, one fell upon another: and they said, Arise, and let us go again to our own people, and to the land of our nativity, from the oppressing sword. They did cry there, Pharaoh king of Egypt is but a noise; he hath passed the time appointed. As I live, saith the King, whose name is the Lord of hosts, Surely as Tabor is among the mountains, and as Carmel by the sea, so shall he come." (Ver. 13-18.) Nothing can be conceived more life-like. As proud as he was prosperous, he trusted chiefly to mercenaries. This is noticeable in the prophecy, verse 16; and it is repeated in verse 21. It is known indeed that his own subjects revolted, fought and defeated his foreign supports, as they also in the end put him to death. But whatever the disasters on Egypt: inflicted by the king of Babylon or his servants, "Afterwards it shall be inhabited, as in the days of old, saith Jehovah." (Ver. 26.)

The chapter ends with consolation to the chosen people who might have dreaded now at least utter extinction for their folly and self-will. “But fear not thou, O my servant Jacob, and be not dismayed, O Israel: for, behold, I will save thee from afar of, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and be in rest and at ease, and none shall make him afraid. Fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith the Lord: for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee: but I will not make a full end of thee, but correct thee in measure; yet will I not leave thee wholly unpunished.” (Ver. 26, 27.) The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

Jeremiah 47

Jehovah was now judging: who could escape? Certainly not the Philistines. They were very far from the importance of Egypt; but it was the judgment of the nations under God’s hand, and their diminished might since the days of Saul, or their insignificance compared with a power which aspired (though in vain) to the sovereignty of the world, could furnish no protection.

“The word of Jehovah that came to Jeremiah the prophet against the Philistines, before that Pharaoh smote Gaza. Thus saith Jehovah; Behold, waters rise up out of the north, and shall be an overflowing flood, and shall overflow the land, and all that is therein; the city, and them that dwell therein. then the men shall cry, and all the inhabitants of the land shall howl.” (Ver. 1, 2.) The king of the south might smite Gaza; but there were graver perils impending from a wholly different quarter, and this too announced before the blow struck by the king of Egypt. Under the well-known figure of rising

waters and an overflowing flood, which Isaiah makes so familiar to his reader, was set forth the overwhelming scourge, and this from “the north,” by which God was going to visit the neighbours of Israel on their south-western frontier. Utter devastation should come through their Chaldean invaders. Country and town should alike feel, men and all howl for anguish.

“At the noise of the stamping of the hoofs of his strong horses, at the rushing of his chariots, and at the rumbling of his wheels, the fathers shall not look back to their children for feebleness of hands; because of the day that cometh to spoil all the Philistines, and to cut off from Tyrus and Zidon every helper that remaineth. for Jehovah will spoil the Philistines, the remnant of the country of Caphtor. Baldness is come upon Gaza; Ashkelon is cut off with the remnant of their valley; how long wilt thou cut thyself?” (Ver. 3-5.) Thus does the Spirit energetically set forth the might of the assailants bearing down all before them, and the helpless agony of the once proud lords who formerly tyrannized over Israel, when they should look in vain for succour to Tyre and Zidon, and superstitious humiliation before their gods be as useless as the help of their old allies, themselves wasted and cut off. In truth, as the prophet tells them, it was Jehovah who would spoil the Philistines, whatever instrumentality he might be pleased to employ; and even this, to make all the more evidently of Himself, is not obscurely intimated.

Hence the bold appeal of the closing verses: “O thou sword of Jehovah, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still. How can it be quiet, seeing Jehovah hath given it a charge against Ashkelon, and against the sea shore? there hath

he appointed it." (Ver. 6, 7.) It is a tremendous thought that Jehovah's sword should have no rest; but so it was. Little did Nebuchadnezzar think that Jehovah arranged the campaign of that bitter and hasty nation whose judgment and dignity proceeded of themselves. Little did Ashkelon on the sea shore see in those swift and fiery horsemen a charge appointed of Jehovah against them.

Jeremiah 48

Against [or "concerning," for it is not exclusively a prediction of calamity] Moab thus saith Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel." The judgments of God were abroad; and should Moab be unpunished? Confidence in political wisdom is not the characteristic as with Egypt; but pride may be shown in other ways, and in all is most offensive to God: in what land or people was it more conspicuous than in Moab P "Woe unto Nebo! for it is spoiled: Kiriathaim is confounded and taken: Misgab is confounded and dismayed. There shall be no more praise of Moab: in Heshbon they have devised evil against it: come, and let us cut it of from being a nation. Also thou shalt be cut down, O Madmen; the sword shall pursue thee. A voice of crying shall be from Horonaim, spoiling and great destruction. Moab is destroyed; her little ones have caused a cry to be heard. For in the going up of Luhith continual weeping shall go up; for in the going down of Horonaim the enemies have heard a cry of destruction." (Ver. 1-6.) The language, especially in what follows, so echoes that of Isaiah that one can hardly resist the inference that the same judgment is before the eyes of the revealing Spirit. Only we must bear in mind that the earlier prophet appends to "the

burden of Moab," in the last verse of Isaiah 16 an approaching blow "within three years," which would be an earnest of still deeper humiliation in store when Nebuchadnezzar would bring them to the dust. To this latter Jeremiah confines himself save so far as room may be left for both judgment and mercy in the then far distant future — the yet future day of Jehovah.

In verses 6-9 the prophet addresses his solemn counsel: "Flee, save your lives, and be like the heath in the wilderness. For because thou hast trusted in thy works and in thy treasures, thou shalt also be taken: and Chemosh shall go forth into captivity with his priests and his princes together. And the spoiler shall come upon every city, and no city shall escape; the valley also shall perish, and the plain shall be destroyed, as Jehovah hath spoken. Give wings unto Moab, that it may flee and get away: for the cities thereof shall be desolate, without any to dwell therein." They had flesh for their arm and trusted in man, departing in heart from Jehovah. But wings do not suffice to flee away, when Jehovah directs the blow, denouncing him that does His work with negligence. "Cursed be he that doeth the work of Jehovah deceitfully, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood. Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and be hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed, Therefore, behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will send unto him wanderers, that shall cause him to wander, and shall empty his vessels, and break their bottles.

And Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Beth-el their confidence. How say

ye, We are mighty and strong men for the war? Moab is spoiled, and gone up out of her cities, and his chosen young men are gone down to the slaughter, saith the King, whose name is Jehovah of hosts. The calamity of Moab is near to come, and his affliction hasteneth fast. All ye that are about him, bemoan him; and all ye that know his name, say, How is the strong staff broken, and the beautiful rod!" (Ver. 10-17.)

Then calls follow to the daughter that inhabits Dibon to come down, and to the inhabitress of Aroer to stand and espy. (Ver. 18, 19.) The truth is, the time of ruin was surely come: Moab was confounded, and spoiled, and judgment come on the plain and on all the cities of the land far or near. (Ver. 20-24.) "The horn of Moab is cut off, and his arm is broken, saith Jehovah. Make ye him drunken: for he magnified himself against Jehovah: Moab also shall wallow in his vomit, and he also shall be in derision. For was not Israel a derision unto thee? was he found among thieves? for since thou spakest of him, thou skippedst for joy. O ye that dwell in Moab, leave the cities, and dwell in the rock, and be like the dove that maketh her nest in the sides of the hole's mouth. We have heard the pride of Moab, (he is exceeding proud) his loftiness, and his arrogancy, and pride, and the haughtiness of his heart. I know his wrath, saith Jehovah; but it shall not be so; his lies shall not so effect it." (Ver. 25-30.)

The prophet then adopts Isaiah's words, as also his howling for its fallen pride. "Therefore will I howl for Moab, and I will cry out for all Moab; mine heart shall mourn for the men of Kir-heres. O vine of Sibmah, I will weep for thee with the weeping of Jazer: thy plants are gone over the sea, they reach even to the sea of Jazer:

the spoiler is fallen upon thy summer fruits and upon thy vintage. And joy and gladness is taken from the plentiful field, and from the land of Moab; and I have caused wine to fail from the winepresses: none shall tread with shouting; their shouting shall be no shouting. From the cry of Heshbon even unto Elealeh, and even unto Jahaz, have they uttered their voice, from Zoar even unto Horonairn, as an heifer of three years old: for the waters also of Nimrim shall be desolate. More. over I will cause to cease in Moab, saith Jehovah, him that offereth in the high places, and him that burneth incense to his gods. Therefore mine heart shall sound for Moab, like pipes, and mine heart shall sound like pipes for the men of Kir-heres; because the riches that he hath gotten are perished." (Ver. 31-36.) But the picture is much amplified here: "For every head shall be bald, and every beard clipped: upon all the hands shall be cuttings, and upon the loins sackcloth. There shall be lamentation generally upon all the housetops of Moab, and in the streets thereof: for I have broken Moab like a vessel wherein is no pleasure, saith Jehovah. They shall howl, saying, How is it broken down! how hath Moab turned the back with shame! so shall Moab be a derision and a dismaying to all them about him." (Ver. 37-39.)

In verses 40-46 is given a vigorous sketch of their enemy's resistless course of victory, and of Moab's presage of helpless ruin, under Jehovah's resolve against those who magnified themselves against Him. "For thus saith Jehovah; Behold, he shall fly as an eagle, and shall spread his wings over Moab. Kerioth is taken and the strongholds are surprised, and the mighty men's hearts in Moab at that day shall be as the heart of a woman in her pangs. And Moab shall be destroyed from

being a people, because he hath magnified himself against Jehovah. Fear, and the pit, and the snare, shall be upon thee, O inhabitant of Moab, saith Jehovah. He that fleeth from the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that getteth up out of the pit shall be taken in the snare: for I will bring upon it, even upon Moab, the year of their visitation saith Jehovah. They that fled stood under the shadow of Heshbon because of the force: but a fire shall come forth out of Heshbon, and a flame from the midst of Sihon, and shall devour the corner of Moab, and the crown of the head of the tumultuous ones. Woe be unto thee, O Moab! the people of Chemosh perisheth, for thy sons are taken captives, and thy daughters captives."

Yet the last verse (47) which pronounces this awful course of judgment on Moab declares that Jehovah will bring again the captivity of Moab in the latter days. Has He spoken and will He not perform? Nothing is more sure.

Jeremiah 49

The judgment of Moab is followed by that of Ammon, kindred alike in their source, their conduct to Israel and Jehovah, as well as in the end His mercy would assign them.

"Concerning the Ammonites, thus saith Jehovah; Hath Israel no sons? hath he no heir? why then doth their king inherit Gad, and his people dwell in his cities? Therefore, behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will cause an alarm of war to be heard in Rabbah of the Ammonites; and it shall be a desolate heap, and her daughters shall be burned with fire: then shall Israel be heir unto them that were his heirs, saith the Lord. Howl,

O Heshbon, for Ai is spoiled: cry, ye daughters of Rabbah, gird you with sackcloth; lament, and run to and fro by the hedges; for their king shall go into captivity, and his priests and his princes together. Wherefore gloriest thou in the valleys, thy flowing valley, O backsliding daughter? that trusted in her treasures, saying, Who shall come unto me? Behold, I will bring a fear upon thee, saith Jehovah God of hosts, from all those that be about thee; and ye shall be driven out every man right forth; and none shall gather up him that wandereth. And afterward I will bring again the captivity of the children of Ammon, saith Jehovah." (Ver. 1-6.) Jehovah demands what right they had to the land of Gad. For this was one of their sins as we see in Amos, a violent raid on Gilead and a possession of the land and cities for a season. But they are here shown that, secure as they thought themselves, their own capital should know the alarm of war, and their daughters share its destruction, when Israel shall be heir to those that were his heirs. It is a poor interpretation which finds in the Church the accomplishment of such prophecies; but this is owing to ignorance on the part of many that God is going to bring Christ in His kingdom to inherit the earth and all nations at His coming; as distinct from the gospel now as from the eternal state which follows the judgment of the great white throne. That desolation befell Moab, Ammon, with the rest, in the day of Nebuchadnezzar, through linking their fortunes with Egypt, the great southern rival of the Chaldean, is, I suppose, the fact. Possibly the howling and lamentation and panic, the more piteous because of previous self-complacency and boast, described in verses 3-5, may also precede the return of their captivity in the last days. (Ver. 6.)

With Edom (ver. 7-22), Damascus (ver, 23-27), and Hazor (28-33), there is a different future in the sovereign wisdom of God. They are to be destroyed without remedy, though not all, it would seem, for the same reason, though all assuredly in perfect justice. Let us follow the prophet:

“Concerning Edom, thus saith Jehovah of hosts; Is wisdom no inure in Teman? is counsel perished from the prudent? is their wisdom vanished? Flee ye, turn back, dwell deep, O inhabitants of Dedan; for I will bring the calamity of Esau upon him, the time that I will visit him. If grape-gatherers come to thee, would they not leave some gleaning grapes? if thieves by night, they will destroy till they have enough. But I have made Esau bare, I have uncovered his secret places, and he shall not be able to hide himself: his reed is spoiled, and his brethren, and his neighbours, and he is not. Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me. For thus saith Jehovah; Behold, they whose judgment was not to drink of the cup have assuredly drunken; and art thou be that shall altogether go unpunished? thou shalt not go unpunished, but thou shalt surely drink of it. For I have sworn by myself, saith Jehovah, that Bozrah shall become a desolation, a reproach, a waste, and a curse; and all the cities thereof shall be perpetual wastes. I have heard a rumour from Jehovah, and an ambassador is sent unto the heathen, saying, Gather ye together, and come against her, and rise up to the battle. For, lo, I will make thee small among the heathen, and despised among men. Thy terribleness hath deceived thee, and the pride of thine heart, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, that holdest the height of the hill: though thou shouldest

make thy nest as high as the eagle, I will bring thee down from thence, saith Jehovah. Also Edom shall be a desolation, every one that goeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss at all the plagues thereof. As in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the neighbour cities thereof, saith the Lord, no man shall abide there, neither shall a son of man dwell in it. Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the swelling of Jordan against the habitation of the strong: but I will suddenly make him run away from her, and who is a chosen man, that I may appoint over her? for who is like me? and who will appoint me the time? and who is that shepherd that will stand before me? therefore hear the counsel of Jehovah, that he hath taken against Edom; and his purposes, that he hath purposed against the inhabitants of Teman. Surely the least of the flock shall draw them out: surely he shall make their habitations desolate with them. The earth is moved at the noise of their fill, at the cry the noise thereof was heard in the Red Sea. Behold, be shall come up and fly as the eagle, and spread his wings over Bozrah: and at that day shall the heart of the mighty men of Edom be as the heart of a woman in her pangs." (Ver. 7-22.)

Thus wisdom would not avail the proud relentless enemy of Israel who ought to have been a friend and should have enjoyed the honour God was pleased to put on his kinsman. Esau's calamity should be theirs in the day of divine visitation. The stripping of a vine by grape-gatherers would be light compared with what awaits Esau's race: for if Israel drank of that cup of woe, could they go unpunished? Impossible. No clefts should hide, no heights avail. Edom should be made small, yea a waste like the cities of the plain. One should come like a

lion to give effect to Jehovah's purposes which should be so complete that even the least one should suffice against their once haughty strength. Whatever might be God's remembrance of kin in Moab or Ammon, in Edom it tells in an opposite way; for it made their implacable hatred. of Israel unbearable and only closed in their own perdition.

Damascus and Hazor follow. "Concerning Damascus: Hamath is confounded, and Arpad: for they have heard evil tidings: they are fainthearted; there is sorrow on the sea; it cannot be quiet. Damascus is waxed feeble, and turneth herself to flee, and fear hath seized on her: anguish and sorrows have taken her, as a woman in travail. How is the city of praise not left, the city of my joy! therefore her young men shall fall in her streets, and all the men of war shall be cut off in that day, saith Jehovah of hosts. And I will kindle a fire in the will of Damascus, and it shall consume the palaces of Ben-hadad. Concerning Kedar, and concerning the kingdoms of Hazor, which Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon shall smite, thus saith Jehovah: Arise ye, go up to Kedar, and spoil the men of the cast. Their tents and their flocks shall they take away: they shall take to themselves their curtains, and all their vessels, and their camels; and they shall cry unto them, Fear is on every side. Flee, get you far off dwell deep, O ye inhabitants of Hazor, saith Jehovah; for Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon hath taken counsel against you and hath conceived a purpose against you. Arise, get you up unto the wealthy nation, that dwelleth without care, saith Jehovah, which have neither gates nor bars, which dwell alone. And their camels shall be a booty, and the multitude of their cattle a spoil: and I will scatter into all winds them that are in

the utmost corners; and I will bring their calamity from all sides thereof, saith Jehovah. And Hazor shall be a dwelling for dragons, and a desolation for ever: there shall no man abide there, nor any son of man dwell in it." (Ver. 23-33.) Here too destruction falls: no restoration is foretold; but there is no such solemn knell of judgment as in Edom's case. They justly deserved what God did by the Chaldean, as they will whatever God may do by and by; but as they had no special tie, so they will meet with no special judgment, any more than exemption or restoration in the last days.

But the chapter closes with another. "The word of Jehovah that came to Jeremiah the prophet against Elam in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; Behold, I will break the bow of Elam, the chief of their might. And upon Elam will I bring the four winds from the four quarters of heaven, and will scatter them toward all those winds; and there shall be no nation whither the outcasts of Elam shall not come. For I will cause Elam to be dismayed before their enemies, and before them that seek their life: and I will bring evil upon them, even my fierce anger, saith Jehovah; and I will send the sword after them, till I have consumed them. and I will set my throne in Elam, and will destroy from thence the king and the princes, saith Jehovah. But it shall come to pass in the bitter days, that I will bring again the captivity of Elam, saith Jehovah." (Ver. 34-39.) Here mercy rejoices at length against judgment. The portion of Elam did not interfere, like Philistia, Damascus or Hazor, with the due development reserved for Israel in the latter day; and God will show His goodness in behalf of Elam when the kingdom comes. To refer its fulfilment to Acts 2:9, as

Calvin and others do, is only to show how little such men enter into either the old or the new.

Jeremiah 50

The last of the heathen objects of judgment is now brought before us. They had been judged chiefly by Babylon whose turn is come. It is the greatest, the earliest, and most characteristic of the world's empires, Babylon of the Chaldees.

"The word that Jehovah spake against Babylon and against the land of the Chaldeans by Jeremiah the prophet. Declare ye among the nations, and publish and set up a standard; publish, and conceal not: say, Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces; her idols are confounded, her images are broken in pieces. For out of the north there cometh up a nation against her, which shall make her land desolate, and none shall dwell therein: they shall remove, they shall depart, both man and beast." (Ver. 1-3.) Its doom is come under the Medes, led on by Cyrus the Persian. The consequence of deepest interest to God is, that the fall of Babylon opens the door for the return of His people from captivity. It is the type of a final deliverance, when a greater than Cyrus shall be there to the utter destruction of the last holder of the last empire. Compare Daniel 2, 7.

Hence says the prophet immediately after, "In those days, and in that time, saith Jehovah, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go and seek Jehovah their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come and let us join ourselves to Jehovah in a perpetual covenant that shall

not be forgotten. My people hath been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their resting-place. All that found them, have devoured them: and their adversaries said, We offend not, because they have sinned against Jehovah, the habitation of justice, even Jehovah, the hope of their fathers." (Ver. 4-7.) It seems clear that, whatever the application to the past, these words cannot be satisfactorily explained without awaiting a yet larger and closer fulfilment in the last days, when the sons of both Israel and Judah shall take the place of penitence and shall return from their long and distant wanderings to Zion under the everlasting covenant and their Messiah. As Jehovah bore witness of their ruin, so they will confess their sins themselves, instead of leaving it to their enemies to make their evil an excuse for their own hatred and plunder.

Then from verse 8 the prophet calls to remove from the city devoted to so decisive a judgment. "Remove out of the midst of Babylon, and go forth out of the land of the Chaldeans, and be as the he goats before the flocks. For, lo, I will raise and cause to come up against Babylon an assembly of great nations from the north country: and they shall set themselves in array against her; from thence she shall be taken: their arrows shall be as of a mighty expert man; none shall return in vain. And Chaldea shall be a spoil: all that spoil her shall be satisfied, saith Jehovah." (Ver. 8-10.)

From verse 11 there is a reproachful rebuke to the destroyers of Israel and their land. "Because ye were glad, because ye rejoiced, O ye destroyers of mine heritage, because ye are grown fit as the heifer at grass,

and bellow is bulls: your mother shall be sore confounded; she that bare you shall be ashamed; behold, the hindermost of the nations shall be a wilderness, a dry land and a desert. Because of the wrath of Jehovah it shall not be inhabited, but it shall be wholly desolate: every one that goeth by Babylon shall be astonished, and hiss at all her plagues." (Ver, 11-13.)

Next, all warriors are summoned against this queen of the nations. "Put yourselves in array against Babylon round about; all ye that bend the bow, shoot at her, spare no arrows; for she hath sinned against Jehovah. Shout against her round about. she hath given her hand: her foundations are fallen, her walls are thrown down: for it is the vengeance of Jehovah: take vengeance upon her; as she hath done, do unto her. Cut off the sower from Babylon, and him that handleth the sickle in the time of harvest: for fear of the oppressing sword they shall turn every one to his people, and they shall flee every one to his own land. Israel is a scattered sheep; the lions have driven him away: first the king of Assyria hath devoured him; and last this Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon hath broken his bones. Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria. And I will bring Israel again to his habitation, and he shall feed on Carmel and Bashan, and his soul shall be satisfied on mount Ephraim and Gilead. In those days, and in that time, saith Jehovah, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve." (Ver. 14-20.) The heart of the prophet, like Jehovah Himself, ever turns from the judgment of the great foe to poor guilty Israel;

nor is it pity only that is pledged but restoration so truly divine that the end will far surpass all beginnings. It is moral too, not national only. The heart is to be set right with God, as surely as they are destined to refreshment and repose in their land.

Again, from verse 21 there is a renewal of the call to go up against the imperial city, described as doubly rebellious and the object of visitation. “Go up the land of Merathaim, even against it, and against the inhabitants of Pekod: waste and utterly destroy after them, saith Jehovah, and do according to all that I have commanded thee. A sound of battle is in the land, and of great destruction. How is the hammer of the whole earth cut asunder and broken! how is Babylon become a desolation among the nations! I have laid a snare for thee, and thou art also taken, O Babylon and thou wast not aware: thou art found, and also caught, because thou hast striven against Jehovah. Jehovah hath opened his armoury, and hath brought forth the weapons of his indignation: for this is the work of Jehovah God of hosts in the land of the Chaldeans. Come against her from the utmost border, open her storehouses: cast her up as heaps, and destroy her utterly: let nothing of her be left. Slay all her bullocks; let them go down to the slaughter: woe unto them! for their day is come, the time of their visitation. The voice of them that flee and escape out of the land of Babylon, to declare in Zion the vengeance of Jehovah our God, the vengeance of his temple. Call together the archers against Babylon: all ye that bend the bow, camp against it round about; let none thereof escape: recompense her according to her work; according to all that she hath done, do unto her: for she hath been proud against Jehovah, against the Holy One

of Israel. Therefore shall her young men fall in the streets, and all her men of war shall be cut off in that day, saith Jehovah. Behold, I am against thee, O thou most proud, saith Jehovah God of Hosts: for thy day is come, the time that I will visit thee. And the most proud shall stumble and fall, and none shall raise him up: and I will kindle a fire in his cities, and it shall devour all round about him." (Ver. 21-32.) Here Jehovah intimates the special ground for unsparing vengeance on Babylon for desecration of His temple, and pride against Himself, the Holy One of Israel.

Again also the prophet resumes the note of relief to Israel from the trouble of Babylon. If Assyria and her haughty rival vied in contemptuous oppression of Israel, Jehovah would plead the cause of His people thoroughly. "Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; the children of Israel and the children of Judah were oppressed together: and all that took them captives held them fast: they refused to let them go. Their Redeemer is strong; Jehovah of hosts is his name: he shall throughly plead their cause, that he may give rest to the land, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon. A sword is upon the Chaldeans, saith Jehovah, and upon the inhabitants of Babylon, and upon her princes, and upon her wise men. A sword is upon the liars; and they shall dote: a sword is upon her mighty men; and they shall be dismayed. A sword is upon their horses, and upon their chariots, and upon all the mingled people that are in the midst of her; and they shall become as women: a sword is upon her treasures; and they shall be robbed. A drought is upon her waters; and they shall be dried up: for it is the land of graven images, and they are mad upon their idols, Therefore the wild beasts of the desert with the wild beasts of the

islands shall dwell there, and the owls shall dwell therein: and it shall be no more inhabited for ever; neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation. As God overthrow Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbour cities thereof, saith Jehovah; so shall no man abide there, neither shall any son of man dwell therein. Behold a people shall come from the north, and a great nation! and many kings shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth. They shall hold the bow and the lance: they are cruel, and will not show mercy: their voice shall roar like the sea, and they shall ride upon horses, every one put in array, like a man to the battle, against thee, O daughter of Babylon. The king of Babylon hath heard the report of them, and his hands waxed feeble: anguish took hold of him, and pangs as of a woman in travail. Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the swelling of Jordan unto the habitation of the strong: but I will make them suddenly run away from her: and who is a chosen man, that I may appoint over her? for who is like me? and who will appoint me the time? and who is that shepherd that will stand before me? Therefore hear ye the counsel of Jehovah, that he hath taken against Babylon; and his purposes, that he hath purposed against the land of the Chaldeans: Surely the least of the flock shall draw them out: surely he shall make their habitation desolate with them. At the noise of the taking of Babylon the earth is moved, and the cry is heard among the nations." (Ver. 33-46.) The allusion to the manner of Babylon's fall in the beginning of verse 38 is as plain as Isaiah's in Isaiah 44:27; yet each preserves his own characteristic style though both refer to the same remarkable fact which was yet to be accomplished. The picture of the king's anguish, in verse 43, may be

compared with the description in Isaiah 21, and with the history in Daniel 5.

Jeremiah 51

There is a renewal of the divine warning against Babylon. Nothing seemed less likely than the fall of the haughty city which had for the first time succeeded in achieving a world-wide supremacy, where the civilization of that age prevailed. It was well therefore to express in the clearest manner and repeated by a reverse of which men could have had no previous experience, and this as a sign that Jehovah had not widowed His people, spite of their sin and its punishment in their land.

“Thus saith Jehovah; Behold, I will raise up against Babylon, and against them that dwell in the midst of them that rise up against me, a destroying wind; and will send unto Babylon fanners, that shall fan her, and shall empty her land: for in the day of trouble they shall be against her round about. Against him that bendeth let the archer bend his bow, and against him that lifteth himself up in his brigandine: and spare ye not her young men; destroy ye utterly all her host. Thus the slain shall fall in the land of the Chaldeans, and they that are thrust through in her streets. For Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of His God, of Jehovah of hosts; though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel.” (Ver. 1-5.) The reference is to the Medo-Persian conqueror, who should make a clear riddance of all that man valued in Babylon and among the Chaldeans.

Some read [this] not as the preposition but as the negative. The difference in the sense resulting from the

latter would be that the verse would begin with a call to the defender of Babylon not to bend his bow, nor to be proud of his coat of mail; while the same verse would close, as admitted on all sides, with a charge to the followers of Cyrus to spare not their enemies.

Then verse 6 calls on the Jews to hasten their escape from the guilty and doomed city, once used of Jehovah in vengeance on others (ver. 7), now the object of His vengeance herself (ver. 8), so that her allies, though challenged, own her hopeless ruin. (Ver. 9.)

“Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity; for this is the time of Jehovah’s vengeance; he will render unto her a recompence. Babylon hath been a golden cup in Jehovah’s hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad. Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed: howl for her; take balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed. We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed: forsake her, and lot us go every one into his own country: for her judgment reacheth unto heaven, and is lifted up even to the skies. Jehovah hath brought forth our righteousness: come, and lot us declare in Zion the work of Jehovah our God.” (Ver. 6-10.) Babylon’s fall is the justification of Judah, who thence turns in heart to Zion, that they might there publish the work of Jehovah their God.

Babylon had need of all its military appliances now; for Jehovah had roused the spirit of her northern foes against her, and resolved to destroy her. Hence the prophet says, “Make bright the arrows; gather the shields: Jehovah hath raised up the spirit of the kings of

the Medes: for his device is against Babylon, to destroy it; because it is the vengeance of Jehovah, the vengeance of his temple. Set up the standard upon the walls of Babylon, make the watch strong, set up the watchmen, prepare the ambushes: for Jehovah hath both devised and done that which he spake against the inhabitants of Babylon. O thou that dwellest upon many waters, abundant in treasures, thine end is come, and the measure of thy covetousness. Jehovah of hosts hath sworn by himself, saying, Surely I will fill thee with men, as with caterpillars; and they shall lift up a shout against thee." (Ver. 11-14.)

This is followed by a noble testimony to God, in contrast with idols and their votaries, in verses 15-19. "He hath made the earth by His power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heaven by his understanding. When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens; and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth: he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures. Every man is brutish by his knowledge; every founder is confounded by the graven image: fell his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them, They are vanity, the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish. The portion of Jacob is not like them; for he is the former of all things. and Israel is the rod of his inheritance: Jehovah of hosts is his name." This differs from Jeremiah 10:12-16, only in the omission of Israel in the last verse. It is evidently understood, if we regard its insertion as a correction of some of the copies.

Then the Spirit of prophecy addresses Babylon in a minutely graphic enumeration of the ways in which she

had been employed of God before her fall. “Thou [not “art” but] wast my battle axe, weapons of war: with thee I have broken nations in pieces; and with thee I have destroyed kingdoms. And with thee I have broken in pieces the horse and his rider; and with thee I have broken in pieces the chariot and its rider; and with thee I have broken in pieces the husband and the wife; and with thee I have broken in pieces the aged and the young; and with thee I have broken in pieces the youth and the maid. And with thee I have broken in pieces the shepherd and his flock; and with thee I have broken in pieces the ploughman and his team; and with thee I have broken in pieces the governors and prefects. And I have rendered unto Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea all the evil which they have done in Zion in your sight, saith Jehovah.” But this did not hinder His vengeance now. “Behold, I am against thee, O destroying mountain, saith Jehovah, which destroyest all the earth: and I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and will make thee a burnt mountain. And they shall not take of thee a stone for a corner, nor a stone for foundations; but thou shalt be desolate for ever, saith Jehovah.” (Ver. 25, 26.) The Medes would be joined by the nations in Asia Minor or the neighbourhood. “Set ye up a standard in the land, blow the trumpet among the nations, prepare the nations against her, call together against her the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashchenaz; appoint a captain against her; cause the horses to come up as the rough caterpillars. Prepare against her the nations with the kings of the Medes, the captains thereof, and all the rulers thereof, and all the land of his dominion.” (Ver. 27, 28.) Jehovah’s purpose was fixed and sure. Babylon must be reduced to a desolation without an inhabitant. The

circumstances of its fall next portrayed confirms this. “And the land shall tremble and sorrow: for every purpose of Jehovah shall be performed against Babylon, to make the land of Babylon a desolation without an inhabitant. The mighty men of Babylon have forborne to fight, they have remained in their holds: their might hath failed; they became as women: they have burned her dwelling-places; her bars are broken. One post shall run to meet another, and one messenger to meet another, to show the king of Babylon that his city is taken at one end, and that the passages are stopped, and the reeds they have burned with fire, and the men of war are affrighted. For thus saith Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel; The daughter of Babylon is like a threshing-floor, it is time to thresh her: yet a little while, and the time of her harvest shall come.” (Ver. 29-83.)

In verses 34, 35, is given the plaint of Jerusalem. “Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon hath devoured me, he hath crushed me, he hath made me an empty vessel, he hath swallowed me up like a dragon, he hath filled his belly with my delicates, he hath cast me out. The violence done to me and to my flesh be upon Babylon, shall the inhabitant of Zion say; and my blood upon the inhabitants of Chaldea, shall Jerusalem say.” (Ver. 24, 35.)

This the answer of Jehovah follows at length in verses 36-44. “Therefore thus saith Jehovah; Behold, I will plead thy cause, and take vengeance for thee; and I will dry up her sea, and make her springs dry. And Babylon shall become heaps, a dwelling place for dragons, an astonishment, and an hissing, without an inhabitant. They shall roar together like lions; they shall yell as lions’ whelps. In their bent I will make their feasts, and I

will make them drunken, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith Jehovah. I will bring them down like lambs to the slaughter, like rams with he-goats. How is Sheshach taken! and how is the praise of the whole earth surprised! how is Babylon become an astonishment among the nations! The sea is come up upon Babylon: she is covered with the multitude of the waves thereof. Her cities are a desolation, a dry land, and a wilderness, a land wherein no man dwelleth, neither doth any son of man pass thereby. And I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he hath swallowed up: and the nations shall not Row together any more unto him: yea, the wall of Babylon shall fall." The prophet thereon exhorts the people to leave a city, which, far from sheltering any, could only expose to its own destruction. "My people, go ye out of the midst of her, and deliver ye every man his soul from the fierce anger of Jehovah. And lest your heart faint, and ye fear for the rumour that shall be heard in the land; a rumour shall both come one year, and after that in another year shall come a rumour, and violence in the land, ruler against ruler." (Ver. 45, 46.)

Jehovah again takes up the word of judgment for her idols in verses 47-58. "Therefore, behold, the days come, that I will do judgment upon the graven images of Babylon; and her whole land shall be confounded, and all her slain shall fall in the midst of her. Then the heaven and the earth, and all that is therein, shall sing for Babylon: for the spoilers shall come unto her from the north, saith Jehovah. As Babylon hath caused the slain of Israel to fall, so at Babylon shall fill the slain of all the earth. Ye that have escaped the sword, go away,

stand not still, remember Jehovah afar off, and let Jerusalem come into your mind. We are confounded, because we have heard reproach: shame hath covered our faces: for strangers are come into the sanctuaries of Jehovah's house. Wherefore, behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will do judgment upon her graven images, and through all her land the wounded shall groan. Though Babylon should mount up to heaven, and though she should fortify the height of her strength, yet from me shall spoilers come unto her, saith Jehovah. A sound of a cry cometh from Babylon, and great destruction from the land of the Chaldeans: because Jehovah hath spoiled Babylon, and destroyed out of her the great voice; when her waves do roar like great waters, a noise of their voice is uttered: because the spoiler is come upon her, even upon Babylon, and her mighty men are taken, every one of their bows is broken: for Jehovah God of recompenses shall surely requite. And I will make drunk her princes, and her wise men, her captains, and her rulers, and her mighty men: and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the King, whose name is Jehovah of hosts. Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall be burned with fire; and the people shall labour in vain, and the folk in the fire, and they shall be weary."

The closing verses (59-64) constitute a kind of seal on the charge laid by Jeremiah on Seraiah, who, after coming to Babylon, was to read this book, and cast it with a stone attached to it into the Euphrates in token of the sure and total fall of Babylon.

Jeremiah 52

The last chapter appears to be an inspired appendix to the prophecy of Jeremiah rather than his own composition. it is substantially similar to the last chapter of 2 Kings, but with some remarkable points of difference in dates and numbers, owing, I presume, to a difference in the way of looking at the facts.

The chapter opens with Zedekiah's reign in Jerusalem for eleven years, evil in Jehovah's eyes according to that of Jehoiakim. There was this especially which provoked the anger of Jehovah, that he rebelled against the king of Babylon, to whom, on the apostasy of Judah, the empire of the world had been given. It was the bounden duty of the faithful to bow to God's sovereignty in this, and the more because it was the idolatrous sin of the people of Judah and the king of David's house, which was the final occasion of this solemn change in the government of the world.

Zedekiah ought to have been a pattern of subjection therefore, in owning the just judgment of God. It was their evil pre-eminently which had not only hindered the blessing of all nations of the earth as independent powers; but had precipitated not themselves only, but all others with them, under the empire of the golden head, the king of Babylon. And now Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon, which was really against the sentence of Jehovah, who was thus, as it were, morally compelled to cast out the Jews from His presence. (Ver. 1-3.)

"And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it, and

built forts against it round about. So the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah, And in the fourth mouth, in the ninth day of the month, the famine was sore in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land. Then the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled, and went forth out of the city by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, which was by the king's garden (now the Chaldeans were by the city round about); and they went by the way of the plain. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him. Then they took the king, and carried him up unto the king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath; where he gave judgment upon him. And the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes: he slew also all the princes of Judah in Riblah. Then be put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and the king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death." (Ver. 4-11.) Thus far the account minutely agrees, dates and all, with 2 Kings 25:1-7, save that Jeremiah 52 is somewhat more detailed, and attributes to the king of Babylon personally what the history gives to his servants under his orders.

Verse 12 furnishes an instance of the first striking discrepancy in appearance with 2 Kings 25, verse 8 of which seems at first sight to fix the entrance of Nebuzar-adan to the seventh day of the fifth month, whereas in the prophecy it is connected with the tenth. But there is a real difference in the original statement which the Authorized Version appears to have represented by "unto Jerusalem" in 2 Kings, and "into Jerusalem" in Jeremiah; and this is substantially correct. The truth is

that there is no preposition whatever in the former, and therefore the natural rendering would be that the servant of the king of Babylon had only come to Jerusalem on the seventh day, not that he had actually entered then. On the other hand, in the prophecy, we are told that he was in Jerusalem on the tenth day of the mouth; and this is distinctly expressed by the particle.

Nebuzar-adan then “burned the house of Jehovah, and the king’s house: and all the houses of Jerusalem, and all the houses of the great men, burned he with fire: and all the army of the Chaldeans, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down all the walls of Jerusalem round about. Then Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard carried away captive certain of the poor of the people, and the residue of the people that remained in the city, and those that fell away, that fell to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the multitude. But Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard left certain of the poor of the land for vinedressers and for husbandmen. Also the pillars of brass that were in the house of Jehovah, and the bases, and the brazen sea that was in the house of Jehovah, the Chaldeans brake, and carried all the brass of them to Babylon. The caldrons also, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the bowls, and the spoons, and all the vessels of brass, wherewith they ministered, took they away. And the basons, and the firepans, and the bowls, and the caldrons, and the candlesticks, and the spoons, and the cups; that which was of gold in gold, and that which was of silver in silver, took the captain of the guard away, The two pillars, one sea, and twelve brazen bulls that were under the bases, which king Solomon had made in the house of Jehovah: the brass of all these vessels was without weight. And concerning the pillars,

the height of one pillar was eighteen cubits; and a fillet of twelve cubits did compass it; and the thickness thereof was four fingers: it was hollow. And a chapiter of brass was upon it; and the height of one chapiter was five cubits, with network and pomegranites upon the chapiters round about, all of brass. The second pillar also and the pomegranates were like unto these. And there were ninety and six pomegranates on a side; and all the pomegranates upon the network were an hundred round about." (Ver. 13-23.)

It is remarkable that among the prisoners who are specified in verse 25, we have seven men here who answer to five men in 2 Kings 25:19. I presume that two more were added of which this inspired account takes notice in addition to the more general description given in the history. We have already remarked its greater precision. There were five, but this does not hinder the addition of two more in a notice of greater detail. "So Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard took them, and brought them, to the king of Babylon to Riblah. And the king of Babylon smote them, and put them to death in Riblah in the land of Hamath. Thus Judah was carried away captive out of his own land." (Ver. 26, 27.)

In verses 28-30 we have an account of three minor deportations to Babylon in the seventh, eighteenth, and twenty third years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, amounting in all to four thousand and six hundred. But 2 Kings 24:12, 16 speaks of another carrying away of Jews, as Daniel 1 tells us of those that were carried away in the first year of his reign, which was a more considerable affair.

The last incident of the chapter is the compassion which Evil-merodach the king of Babylon extended to Jehoiachin in the seven and thirtieth year2 of his captivity. Not only did he bring the captive king of Judah out of prison with kind words, But set his throne above the subject monarchs that were there, and gave him to eat bread before himself continually for the rest of his life. Thus, if after solemn warnings of the prophets, one king of Judah was now proving the truth in his own misery, God was showing in Jehoiachin's case that He has the hearts of all men under His control, and that long years of languishing may be changed at His will to a peaceful end of life, though not a prosperous one, according to His word. (Jer. 22:30.) But this does not hinder His pitifulness and tender mercy.

1 This was the female form of Baal or Bel, named Beltic, Ashtaroth, Astarte, Alitta, Mylitta, Aphrodite, etc., Whose worship was attended by the grossest immorality.

2 Dr. Henderson changes the twenty-fifth to the fifteenth day of the twelfth month, as it would appear against the form of the word, and perhaps through mere oversight, as he makes no remark. The usual version is right.