


Prophecy
and the
Prophets

Barnard C. Taylor



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PROPHECY AND THE PROPHETS

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By

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TO
MY FATHER AND MY MOTHER
WHO TAUGHT ME AS A CHILD TO REVERE THE BIBLE
AS THE WORD OF GOD, AND LED ME TO FIND IN IT
THE WAY OF LIFE IN JESUS CHRIST SON OF GOD
THIS BOOK IS GRATEFULLY
DEDICATED

PREFACE

IN Part I of this book the purpose of the author has been to present in a brief way the characteristic features of Prophecy so that the ordinary reader may be helped to understand better this most important part of the Scriptures. An exhaustive study of the subject has not been undertaken. Such a study will be found by any one who has access to the excellent work of Fairbairn on Prophecy, or the later work of Davidson. Both of these may be highly recommended. While Old Testament Prophecy is generally regarded as a difficult part of the Bible, the difficulties are not too great to be overcome, and any effort to this end will be richly rewarded.

In Part II there is given in a concise way the conditions, political, social, and religious, of the Israelites at the time of each prophet that the reader may get a clearer insight into the meaning of the prophet's message. The divisions of each book are also suggested,

Preface

so that the scope of the different parts and their mutual relations may be better comprehended. A further attempt is made to give briefly the course of thought in each chapter or minor division, as it is believed that in many cases this will be of as great help as a commentary on the separate verses or phrases. The work is not a commentary, nor is it intended to take the place of commentaries. Without question the best of commentaries are almost indispensable to one who would fully understand the prophets. It is hoped however, that what is here offered may be of some use, especially to those who do not have access to the commentaries. Any contribution, however slight, that will help to a higher appreciation of this rich portion of God's word, it is confidently believed, will be acceptable to those who will read the prophets.

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PART I

OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

I

OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY DEFINED

THE term is applied to those books called the Prophets, beginning with Isaiah and ending with Malachi. There are some prophecies found in the other books of the Old Testament, and in some of these Prophets there occur historical narratives. In the Hebrew Scriptures most of the books that we call Historical are called Prophets. The name was probably given to them because they were regarded as the work of members of the prophetic class.

The word "prophet" means one who speaks for another, and it is well explained by the directions given to Moses with reference to Aaron's relation to him. (Exod. 7 : 1, 2.) What Moses wished to say to the people he was to speak to Aaron, and the latter, as a prophet, was to speak it to the people.

The very common idea that a prophet was one who foretold, is inadequate. It is true that we find prediction in prophecy, but it is in reality only a relatively small part of prophecy. In some of the prophets there is scarcely any prediction.

Prophecy as we find it in the Old Testament may be defined as special messages given by God to special men to be delivered to the people at particular times.

Some things that we find in the Prophets are also found in other of the Old Testament books. Some

of the work of the prophets may be common to the work of the modern Christian preacher. But in its essential features Old Testament Prophecy is unique.

In elaborating the above definition it is to be noted:

1. *The prophets were specially chosen men.* It was evidently expedient that any word from God to the people must be given through particular men, and not directly to the people in mass. While the message was intended for all, it had to be given through some. No charge of partiality can be based upon this method, as all alike could receive the message.

During much of the history of the Israelites there was among them a class of men called "prophets" who at times, at least, lived in communities more or less separated from the rest of the people, and whose chief purpose seems to have been to maintain in Israel a knowledge of Jehovah, and to secure continued loyalty to him. Not all of these men performed the distinctive functions of "prophets." But nearly all of those prophets whose writings we have belonged to this class. They were chosen by God to deliver messages from him.

The kings of Israel, especially those of the line of David, ascended the throne by right of birth, not by a special divine commission. Likewise the priests, belonging to the other of the three divinely appointed institutions, engaged in the priestly work because of descent from Aaron. But a prophet entered upon the work of speaking for God only if he was specially commissioned to do so.

Usually the prophets furnish no evidence by which others could be assured that their claim that God had

directed them to speak was true except the evidence furnished by the character of their messages. At times the fulfilment of a prediction was relied upon as a final test of authority. But such was not always available. Convincing proof was found when the message of a prophet was in harmony with the character of God as already revealed, and with his truth as already delivered. In most cases we do not know how the prophet knew he was called. He was conscious of the fact that his words were the words of Jehovah. This divine authority for the messages was the constant claim of the prophets, and this claim was not denied by the people, except when the message condemned too severely their conduct or was in conflict with their hopes.

The men thus chosen were fit for their work because of their natural endowments, their environments, and their experiences. They were not of equal mental ability, nor were they alike in their surroundings and experiences. These differences may account in large part for the differences that we find in prophecies they have left on record. But their messages did not originate either in themselves or in their surroundings. The style of Isaiah differs from that of Jeremiah; that of Hosea, from that of Haggai. Each of these with his characteristic style was chosen by God for his individual work. That which is specially to be noted is that these prophets did not undertake their work because they were prompted by the needs of the people, nor because they were conscious of having the ability to speak, but because God commanded them to speak. Their words were with divine authority.

2. *These messengers received from God special messages to be delivered to the people on particular occasions.* What they had to say was not what they had thought out for themselves. It was not merely the result of their own experience or observation. It may be that sometimes they were made to see the full significance of what they were commanded to speak by the experiences through which they had passed, or by realizing the depths to which their people were sunken in sin. Yet what they uttered was specially given them for the occasion.

To be thus special it was not necessary that the message be original with the prophet who then delivered it. The substance of it may have been used before. Sometimes the thought of a prophet is practically identical with that of a former prophet. Sometimes its meaning did not go beyond what was already current in prophetic teaching. The truth they were to speak on any occasion need not be new. It did not matter how many times that special truth had been uttered before, if it had been used at all; it did not matter whether the facts they were to proclaim were already known to others, or were revealed to them by God at the time of their mission; what they spoke at any time was specially commanded them by Jehovah who sent them. Thus their words were always claimed to be what Jehovah had spoken to them.

In a number of instances we find parallel passages in the prophets. Thus Isaiah 2 : 2-5 is the same as Micah 4 : 1-5, except a few slight verbal changes. Whether one of these quoted from the other, or both from some unknown source, or whether each is origi-

nal, does not in the least affect the value of the message of either of them. Each was to deliver that message at that time. Another case of parallel thought is found in Obadiah and Jeremiah 49 : 7-22. In this instance the arrangement of the thought is not the same in the two prophets.

The prophets delivered messages only occasionally. They were not engaged in this work all the time. In some cases, as that of Amos, it seems they had but one or two messages to deliver, and then returned to their usual occupation. At times, several years passed without any word from God being given to the prophet, if we may judge from what is left on record. This is especially clear in the case of Isaiah.

3. *The methods by which the word of God was communicated to the prophets were not always the same.* The dream and vision seem to have been common methods, and may be regarded as of a lower order. In contrast with these God said he would speak with Moses "mouth to mouth" (Num. 12 : 6-8). The term "vision" is used at times in a sense wider than an ecstatic condition. It is so used in the title to the book of Isaiah, and applies to the entire contents of his prophecies, most of which must have been received by the prophet in ways other than in a vision in the ordinary sense.

Because dreams usually have no special significance, it does not follow that God did not give thoughts to these prophets at times by means of dreams. It is difficult to know just what was the mental state of a prophet when he had a vision. In case of either dream

or vision the prophet knew that God had spoken to him, and the divine authority of his message must be admitted.

Most of the ideas of the prophets they probably received when their minds were in a specially exalted state, though otherwise in a normal condition. How the Holy Spirit conveyed thoughts to the mind of the prophet directly, without the medium of the physical senses, we cannot explain. Neither can we explain how a thought passes by means of the sense of hearing to the consciousness of a man in ordinary conversation. But we cannot deny the fact in the one case any more than in the other.

We may the more readily admit the claims of the prophets that God had thus spoken to them, while we would doubt such a claim in our own day, because the prophets belonged to that period of teaching when God was revealing to men his will, which period came to an end in the culminating work of Jesus Christ. Such teaching is no longer needed. It was needed then. (See I Cor. 10 : 11 ; Heb. 1 : 1, 2.)

II

THE SPECIAL WORK OF THE PROPHETS

THERE are two distinguishable features of the purpose of Prophecy: that which was for the benefit of those who heard the prophet speak, and that which when written was to form an important part of the sacred Scriptures. The use of the latter was to be for all times. Much of the former was likewise of such character as to be of permanent use. In some of the prophecies one or the other of these features may predominate, or may appear to the exclusion of the other. In some cases it may be difficult to determine to what extent a prophet's message was special or temporary only.

We will first consider the prophet's message as meant for his own times.

In the consideration of this part of the subject it is to be noted:

1. *Both the matter and form of a prophetic message were, in most cases at least, determined largely by the political, moral, or religious condition of the people to whom the prophet spoke.* Only rarely was the word of the prophet so general in its character that it might belong equally to any occasion.

In order to understand then in full what a prophecy meant we must study the times and conditions of its delivery. It can, for instance, be easily seen that sim-

ilar expressions might have widely different meanings if delivered before or after the exile. We must learn, so far as possible, what it was that led the prophet to say what he did, and thus better understand what he meant. If we know the historical occasion, we may infer that some things were in the mind of the prophet that the prophet did not express. If we can know how gross were the forms of idolatry that the people were practising at the time of a prophet, we can better measure the terms of condemnation that he utters. We should, if possible, put ourselves in the position of the people and listen to the prophet from that position.

2. *Most of the energy of the prophets was spent in trying to induce the chosen people to be faithful to Jehovah.* The Israelites were so constantly and so grievously sinning against God, that the chief work of the prophets was rebuking and threatening them because of their sins. The work of Elijah was representative. He sought to turn Israel back from Baal to Jehovah. For this he prayed to God at the contest on Carmel. (1 Kings 18 : 37.) The Israelites had been chosen for a special people, not that they alone might receive blessings from God, but that through them Jehovah might be made known to men; that the oracles of God might be entrusted to them. (Rom. 3 : 2.) This purpose would be prevented or hindered if Israel should deny that Jehovah was the true God and should serve idols. In direct contradiction to the statement sometimes made that the Israelites were naturally monotheistic, the fact is they were almost all the time practising polytheism to a greater or less degree. In all their history they sinned by worshiping

idols. (Deut. 9 : 24; 1 Sam. 8 : 8; Hos. 11 : 1, 2; Amos 5 : 25, 26.)

The character of Jehovah as holy was to be taught through his chosen people, not merely by what they said of him, but by being like him in holiness. In this the Israelites most miserably failed in much of their career. There was chief need that the prophets rebuke them for their sinfulness, whether that was shown in their conduct toward God, or in their oppression of their fellows. Since a trespass against a fellow Israelite, who was one of God's people, was a sin against God, we find the prophets often threatening their hearers for such sin.

The reforms instituted in Judah by Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah, though with little success, were no doubt mainly due to the work of the prophets of these times.

3. *The prophets were besides spokesmen for God in giving assurance of ultimate victory over their enemies and of deliverance from the afflictions that came upon them because of their sins.* The kingdom of Israel, even when greatest, was not equal in power to the kingdoms that sought to subdue it. Because of the position of Palestine, lying as it did on the highway that led from Mesopotamia to Egypt, the Israelites were exposed to invasion from the two great powers that lay on either side of them, Egypt and Assyria (afterward Babylon), in the frequent attempt of each of these to destroy the other. It may easily have seemed to the Israelites when suffering from such invasions that nothing could save them from destruction by these mighty foes. It was in such times that God sent his

prophets with messages of cheer. Not only would his people be kept from destruction, but these terrible foes would themselves be destroyed. Even if the heathen should be called upon to punish God's people for their sins, they could chastise only, not destroy. Israel would be gathered again, even if they should be scattered from their land among all the nations of the earth.

Many of the most important prophecies were occasioned by these dark times of oppression through which Israel had to pass. Desolation by enemies caused prophetic promises of prosperity; the horrors of war caused promises of peace; captivity and exile, it was declared, would be followed by restoration to the land God had given to them. The sins of the rulers, the oppression by the strong, the faithlessness of the kings, gave occasion for the word of God through the prophets declaring that afterward their rulers would be just, Zion would be holy, and a king would come whose reign would be characterized by righteousness. Even when the Israelites were most sunken in sin, there were no doubt some who remained faithful to Jehovah, and it was part of the work of the prophets to give comfort to these.

4. *The Israelites were chosen by God that there might be imparted to them truths, not only for their own enlightenment and guidance, but to be treasured as a permanent possession for later ages.* Hence a large part of the work performed by the prophets was teaching. Much had been taught in the law given through Moses. Many lessons were taught by God's dealings with the Israelites of which we have a record

in the historical books. But there was much instruction besides that was to be given through the prophets.

It was their duty to set forth the principles involved in the laws that were of essential worth, and to teach the people that a mere outward observance of the laws did not satisfy the requirements of God. There are some instances where the words of the prophets seem to set aside the law as of no importance, or even as in conflict with their own higher ethical teaching. And it has been claimed by some that there is antagonism between the law, particularly the ceremonial parts of it, and prophecy. But a fair consideration of the context in such cases will show that the prophets did not condemn the law, but condemned the people who thought there was merit in the heartless observance of it and that sacrifices offered by hands stained with murder would yet be accepted of God.

It was the work of the prophets also to interpret the meaning of the calamities that fell as judgments upon the Israelites. Not all calamities were judgments. Those that were could be known as such by the accompanying message of the prophet. (See Amos 3 : 7 and context.) The great part of the work of Jeremiah was this of interpreting the history of Israel. It had been predicted long before that severe punishment would result from Israel's persistent sinning. Jeremiah showed that the ruin into which his people were entering was the fulfilment of these threats.

The prophets besides taught the great truths about the character of God. Jehovah especially revealed what he was through his prophets. They emphasized the doctrines of his holiness, justice, mercy. They

made known his moral excellence. They preached his hatred of sin, and that he would punish sinners. They also proclaimed in almost every message God's wonderful long suffering, and that he would quickly forgive if men would repent. Our knowledge of the excellence of God's character would be far less than it is if we did not have what the prophets said in the messages God gave them for Israel.

5. *The prophets have been called politicians, statesmen, reformers, teachers of morality. But they were such only incidentally as they endeavored to do their work as spokesmen for God. The political and religious interests of Israel were inseparable from each other because as a nation they had been chosen to accomplish God's purpose. Any course that the kings and leaders of the people entered upon in directing the nation might be very decisive in the achievement of the nation's purpose. In such the counsel or rebuke of the prophet would be most needful. Some of the prophets did a large work in advising right policies and urging the kings to follow their advice, while warning them of the disaster that would result from its rejection.*

They were reformers because there was so much need of turning the Israelites from wrong courses, because social evils were so prevalent among all classes of the people, and because the prophets sought to have the people of God conform their conduct more fully to the requirements of God.

What the prophets taught of morality was not independent of what they taught of religion. The mutual relation of the Israelites was determined by their relation to God.

III

PROPHECY AS SCRIPTURE

IN the preceding chapter there was considered the work of the prophets as related to their own times. But Prophecy had a further and a wider purpose. Its great truths were to form an important part of the body of sacred Scriptures.

It has been insisted upon, especially in more recent times, that we are to find in a prophecy only what we may be sure those who heard it understood; that the prophets did not, either consciously or unconsciously, speak for the future; that the work of each was an independent unit; that Messianic ideas are found in the prophets only when unscientific methods of interpretation are resorted to in order to corroborate unwarranted views to the Bible, but that the prophetic writers themselves intended no such ideas.

In order to reach right conclusions on this point we need to consider both what is probable and what is actual.

1. *The redemption that Christ wrought for man when he was on the earth was the central and the most stupendous fact in all the history of the human race.* It stands out so prominent, so high, so great, that all else dwarfs into comparative insignificance. This redemption was purposed by God from the beginning. It was not an afterthought. It was not wrought to

take the place of something else that failed. Man's Saviour had been provided before man sinned and needed one. All of history before Christ came was related to his coming; all of history since is related to what he accomplished by his coming.

The people of Israel was chosen to be specially God's, not for their own sake, but that through them the need of redemption, and the person and work of the Redeemer might be set forth to such an extent that men of all times might understand and accept Christ as Saviour. This preparation was not merely that Christ might come into the world, but that the purpose of his coming might be understood, and he be acknowledged as the Saviour sent from God. Such preparation was needful, not for the Jews only, but for all men so long as there are sinful men who need a Saviour. For this reason the Old Testament Scriptures, the oracles of God, were committed to the Jews. They were not written for the Jews only, but for all men, for all times.

Instead of its being improbable that the prophets would speak of what was to be realized at a time long after their own, since they were specially chosen that through them God might reveal himself and make known his will concerning man, and since the work of redemption was thus central in all history, it is most improbable that the prophets would be silent on this subject, and it would have been altogether unaccountable if they had not given some intimations, if not more or less clear knowledge, of the purpose of God that was to be accomplished in the future, even though that future was remote.

2. *We are not only justifiable in seeking to know how Christ and the writers of the New Testament interpreted the contents of Prophecy, but we are under obligation to accept their interpretation as valid.* We may not doubt the testimony of the inspired writers of the New Testament on matters that determine our knowledge of Christ, and we cannot assert that Christ was ignorant in matters concerning himself unless he himself confessed such ignorance. When he spoke we must accept his word as final. Of course we must be sure of the real meaning of his words.

It has been said that the writers of the New Testament did not use the methods of scientific exegesis in their interpretations of the Old Testament Scriptures, and that we should not accept their views of the meaning of these. But such a position denies the inspiration of the New Testament writers, and involves the rejection of the Bible as in a true sense God's word.

It has been said of Christ that his *kenosis* included all superhuman knowledge; that he knew only what he had been taught by his Jewish teachers, and that his views of the Scriptures were but the views of his people and his time. But his teaching was not on a level with the teaching of his time. It was so much above it that he was acknowledged to be a Teacher sent from God. And we must claim that he could not have been mistaken about the meaning of the Scriptures that concerned himself as the Messiah.

The further assertion that Christ knew that the views of the Jews about their Scriptures were wrong, but instead of correcting them, used them to confound the Jews in his arguments with them, needs no serious

refutation. Those who know him know he would not do that.

3. Many passages may be cited from the Gospels and the Epistles to show that *the writers of the New Testament understood that the prophets spoke of what was to be true in the Messianic times*. Not merely did they quote specific statements of the prophets as having their fulfilment in the person and work of Jesus Christ, but they constantly refer to the Old Testament Scriptures as having the authority of God's word. They did not concern themselves especially to know which of the prophets uttered a particular prophecy, they rather regarded all of Prophecy as one whole, from which they got their proof that the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand through prophets of those facts and truths that they themselves saw becoming actual in their own time.

Thus Matthew says the birth of Jesus was the fulfilment of what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. (Matt. 1 : 22.)

Luke says, "And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us, in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets" (Luke 1 : 69, 70).

John quotes Philip as saying, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write" (John 1 : 45).

Peter said that God had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets that Christ should suffer. (Acts 3 : 18.)

Peter further said, "Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days" (Acts 3 : 24).

Paul declared that in his continued witnessing to all about Christ he had said no other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come. (Acts 26 : 22.) And when Paul was in Rome he testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets. (Acts 28 : 23.)

4. The testimony of Jesus to the prophets has still greater weight. He said he had not come to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfil them. (Matt. 5 : 17).

He told the twelve, " Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished " (Luke 18 : 31).

He said to the two disciples as they went to Emmaus, " O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke " (Luke 24 : 25). " And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24 : 27.) Well might these disciples say to each other, " Was not our heart burning within us, while he talked to us in the way, while he opened to us the Scriptures? " (Luke 24 : 32.)

5. *This purpose of Prophecy* as a part of the Old Testament Scriptures which were intended as an aid to understand Christ when he came, *gives a unity to the various prophetic messages that they would not otherwise have had.* While each prophet had a work for his own time, he also had a part in the work for all time. The hearers of the prophet, even the prophet himself, may not have fully understood the wider

significance of any message, but that fact does not prevent us from believing that the Holy Spirit who was speaking through the prophets, thus gave truths that were parts of a larger whole.

When we consider the work of these prophets in its special relation to the needs of their own times in view of this wider purpose of Prophecy, it appears that even what was meant for the special good of the hearers, had also a permanent value for the instruction of the readers.

The people of Israel were chosen that they might receive and transmit truths concerning redemption, and the instruction which they received through the prophets, the rebukes, threats, and exhortations, by which they were shown God's character and will, formed an important part of these redemptive truths. Not only may we see that the lessons taught the Israelites are applicable to our own times, but that these lessons were meant for our own times.

IV

THE THEME OF PROPHECY AS SCRIPTURE

THE special work of the prophets as applicable to their times and conditions has already been considered. It is intended in this chapter to consider what we find in Prophecy as a part of the Scriptures.

Here also we find that all their messages center about the idea of a people of God, or as it might be put, a kingdom of God on earth. It is to be noted, however, that while the prophets spoke of a people or kingdom that should be in the future, their teachings about that people were put in general terms; they did not attempt to give in minute detail the history of that coming kingdom.

1. *The fact that God purposed to have a people on the earth, a people in a real sense separate and distinguishable from all others, is made evident from the first, and this purpose was not thwarted, nor could it be prevented, by the failure of the Israelites to be faithful to God.* Even when Israel, nominally God's, turned from him and worshiped idols, when they had rejected the Holy One of Israel, his prophets declared that in that future which they foresaw there would be a real people of God.

It was natural, if not necessary, that prophetic references to this true people of God, should be put in terms that fitted Israel's relation to Jehovah. Prob-

ably the prophets could not have spoken to those of their own times and have been understood, without using Israelite terms. That people of God of the future is thus called "Israel"; their home is the "Holy Land"; their chief city is "Zion"; their enemies are "Edom," "Egypt," "Philistia," "Assyria," and "Babylon."

But the prophetic idea of God's future people was clearly larger than Israel. It was to be a people not distinguished by family descent, nor marked off by national barriers. There would be included in it men of all nations, even of those who had been the perpetual, hating enemies of the Israelites. There are very many passages that show this, none perhaps more certainly than Isaiah 19 : 24, 25, where it is declared that Israel shall be one of three, the other two being Egypt and Assyria, and terms of close relationship to God that had been applied to Israel only, are here applied to these veteran enemies of Israel. "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance."

2. *This future people of God would be his by virtue of the fact that he would choose them out of the world for himself.* They would be the objects of his favor, the recipients of his grace. It would be a people whose sins would be forgiven because of the vicarious suffering of the Servant whom God would send. The highest idea of the work of the suffering innocent One, through whom the nations would be turned back to Jehovah, and who would himself bear the stripes due the guilty, is given in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. No interpretation of this wonderful passage

that denies its reference to Christ can ever be finally acceptable. Of the two divisions of the Messianic ideas presented in the Old Testament, that of the Sovereign and that of the Sufferer, the climax of the latter is reached in this passage.

3. *The prophetic assertion that a King would reign over this future people of God is not a mere figure of speech* suggested by the fact of the Israelite kingdom, but rather the kingdom of Israel was established under the direction of Jehovah, with a king of his own choosing, that it might be a type of the spiritual kingdom still future. By the character and history of the first kings of Israel we learn what the Theocratic, Messianic King was to be, though the reality far exceeded what was thus foreshadowed.

The failures of Israel's kings gave occasion for the prophets to predict the coming of a King who would rule in accord with the will of God; who would reign in righteousness; whose scepter would be one of justice; whose sway would be as wide as the earth; a King whom other kings would serve, and whose rule would be one of peace.

The two chief functions of the Israelite king were to be realized in him: that of defender, and that of judge. He would defend his people from all their enemies. Under his reign they would be secure from oppression. And he would be a just Judge, arbitrating all cases with equity, and rendering to each according to his deserts.

This Messianic idea in its twofold aspect is a dominant one in Old Testament Prophecy. Sometimes the Messianic thought is given only in outline and very

general terms; sometimes, especially towards the close of the prophetic period, the delineation of the person and work of the Messiah stands out with more clearness. Yet all that we get is far less than what was revealed by the Messiah himself when he at last came. What is here given is but an introduction that we might become acquainted with him later.

4. *This people of God was to be characterized by righteousness, justice, mercy or loving-kindness, and holiness.* All these characteristics would result from the fact that they were the people of Jehovah, and that they were to be like him. While the Israelites were nominally God's people, in character they were scarcely different from the nations about them during much of their career. They were distinguished by name as the worshipers of Jehovah, though in practise the mass of them much of the time worshiped idols. They followed the formal ceremonies of their religious ritual, but too often their worship was the form only, while in heart they were far from God.

The prophets declared that in the future the people of God would have his law written in their hearts; that they would be faithful to Jehovah, instead of forsaking him and worshiping the gods of the heathen. There would be none unholy among them. The city where they would dwell would be called the city of righteousness, and none but those with a character like God's would be found in it.

In their relation to the peoples about them this people of God was to be preeminent. All the other nations were to be subservient to them. This idea was especially suggested, and especially comforting, at a time

when the Israelites were being ruled over by the heathen. They were invaded, despoiled, oppressed, exiled. These conditions would not obtain in the Messianic times. These terms are undoubtedly figurative, yet there is in them the great truth that it was God's purpose that all the nations of the earth should be made to contribute to the glory of his kingdom. Not only should the world powers be prevented from dominating his people, but his people should be served by the world powers.

V

THE INTERPRETATION OF PROPHECY

THE principles by which Prophecy is to be interpreted are for the most part the same as those to be followed in other parts of the Bible, but because of the nature of the subject there are in addition some special facts to be observed.

I. The interest of the prophet in what was to be in the future as well as in what concerned his own time has already been noted. *Not only specific instances of prediction, but the general outlook of the prophets toward the Messianic times, involves the obligation of interpreting the messages of the prophets with reference to the culmination of, not only Prophecy, but the entire Old Testament period.* The claim that a prophet could see only what was within his own horizon might be admitted if we make his horizon wide enough. A prophet could see what the Holy Spirit showed to him, however far off it might be.

The claim that a prophet could get only those thoughts that were associated with, or the outgrowth of, thoughts that he already had, that we must limit the meaning of his message to what we can understand was genetically connected with truths that were already held, practically denies the fact, or possibility, of revelation, and the prophets persistently claimed that revelations were given to them.

In interpreting Prophecy we may well begin by seeing what our Lord and the New Testament writers stated was contained in it. There may be much of which they did not speak, and the meaning of which we must seek without such special guidance, but what they assert to be the meaning of a prophet's words gives us a helpful clue to understand the rest.

2. In close connection with the preceding it is to be noted that *any prophet, or any part of a prophet's message, is to be interpreted in view of a wider whole.* The words of the prophets are not to be regarded as isolated, and independent assertions, or teachings, but as parts of the whole of Prophecy, and this itself as a part of the entire word of God.

In any case of interpretation we need to study the context of a passage to determine its meaning, and here we must take into consideration, not only all that the prophet which we study said, but all that the other prophets may have said that bears upon the truth of the special part to be interpreted. The later prophets based much of their teaching upon that which the former prophets had already taught; and the earlier prophets at times presented but a sketch of what was to be filled in by those who should come after them. It is most essential that the general theme and scope of Prophecy be got well in mind in order fairly to interpret its various parts.

3. *What the prophets foretold of the future people of God was given in general terms, not in minute detail, except in a comparatively few instances.* It is held by some interpreters that Prophecy was a fore-writing of history; that all that the prophets spoke of

the future was to be literally fulfilled; that we may search the prophets to find out what is yet to take place, or to find a prediction of what is taking place. But we would neither expect this, nor do we find it to be the case.

The prophets told of a true people of God who should be faithful to him in the end of the days; they portrayed the character of that people; they gave assurance of the preeminence of God's people over all opposing powers; they told of a Sufferer who should accomplish the purpose of God who would send him; they predicted a King, and described his glorious reign; they declared his rule would be without limit, and unbounded peace would result from it. But these great truths were given by the prophets in general terms. They did not picture in minute detail all that would take place in the Messianic times, nor give a particular account of all that would be realized.

The claim that the prophets were writing the details of future history has led to the view that since much they predicted has not been literally fulfilled, they were merely guessing about the future, expressing their un-inspired hopes, which were to prove false ones, or else that their predictions are yet to be so fulfilled, however impossible such fulfilment may seem to be. Thus not only are the Jews to be restored to Palestine, and their city to be rebuilt, but the temple and its entire system of sacrifices will be seen again in Jerusalem. Since Babylon was not destroyed in strict accordance with the prediction of the prophets, it shall be rebuilt so that it may thus be destroyed.

It has well been pointed out that we should look to

the New Testament for the latest and fullest word about the destiny of the Jews.

4. *Some prophecies were conditional.* The words of the prophets that are of the nature of predictions may be divided into two classes: threats and promises. Threats were made against both the Israelites and the outside nations. Almost all of those against the heathen were because of their hostility toward God's people; were never meant for the ears of the heathen, with some exceptions, and were merely intended for teaching the Israelites themselves: showing them God's hatred of sin, that it would be punished, and assuring them that their God would protect them from the oppression of the enemies.

Threats against the Israelites were intended to turn them from sin and to lead to their repentance. If such repentance followed the prophet's message, the punishment threatened would of course be averted, and the prediction in form would be unfulfilled. The condition upon which the predicted calamity might be averted was not always stated. But if the threat was to secure repentance, the conditional character of it was necessarily implied.

It seems that in some cases the people had persisted in sin for so long a time that no degree of repentance would be able to secure their escape from punishment. Most, if not all, of the special calamities sent upon the Israelites as judgments from God for sin were intended for didactic purposes. They were to teach great lessons meant for all ages, and at times the repentance of Israel would have come too late to stop the teaching of such lessons.

Promises were made to God's people only, or to those besides who were willing to identify themselves with his people. These promises were likewise often conditional, though the mercy of God was so great, and his redemptive purposes were so eternal, that even the faithlessness of the chosen people could not prevent the fulfilment of his promises. Thus the promise of a Saviour from sin could not be conditioned upon the goodness of the Israelites. Sin itself was the condition of his coming.

In the absence of any expressed condition accompanying either threat or promise, there is need of special care in the interpretation to decide whether the prophecy is conditional or not. Each instance must be decided by itself.

5. *Prophecy abounds in figurative language.* Almost all of the writings of the prophets are in the form of poetry. *This must be taken into account in determining its meaning.* Besides the specially elevated style of composition common to all poetry, we find very abundant figures of speech used by the prophets. Especially is this to be noted in what they say of the future.

They were speaking in Old Testament times under conditions that then obtained, and they used terms suggested by such conditions, and which alone could have been understood by their hearers. Thus they spoke of Israel, meaning God's people of whatever blood; of Zion, meaning the place where God dwelt among his people; Egypt, Edom, Babylon, and the rest, meaning the enemies of God's people wherever they might be found, or to whatever nation they might belong. They

spoke of returning from exile at times when their words involved much more than a literal return of the Jews from Babylon. The splendor of Solomon's reign is used by the prophet to furnish terms to portray the splendor and preeminence of the people of God, though this was never to be realized literally, but shall be most fully in a spiritual sense.

Here too, whether the language is to be understood literally or figuratively must be determined by the context, and by a full study of the whole theme and scope of Prophecy.

6. It has been seen that a large part of the work of a prophet grew out of the needs and conditions of his own times. In order to understand the meaning of this part of a prophet's words *we must put ourselves so far as possible in the times of the prophet*. It is necessary to consider the historical setting of the prophecy in order to discover its exact meaning. This is true of almost all the prophets. Sometimes, however, the theme of the prophet is so general in character that its truth remains of equal value whatever its time of delivery.

Much help is got for understanding the prophets from the historical books. The weakness of a king; the idolatry prevalent among the people; the faithlessness and crimes of the leaders; the approach of an enemy; the attempts to form alliances with the heathen nations, and the amount of success achieved in attempted reforms, are to be taken into consideration in order to interpret correctly the messages of the prophets.

VI

PROPHECY IN RELATION TO ISRAEL'S HISTORY

ONLY a brief sketch of the work of the prophets in their relation to the history of the Israelites is purposed in this chapter. A complete consideration of the subject of Prophecy would involve a study of what has been termed the "preprophetic period." Many fundamental truths were taught during this time, truths that were elaborated and added to by the writing prophets. No one indeed surpassed Moses in the qualities that distinguish the Old Testament prophets. God communicated to him directly some of the highest conceptions of his own character, and the laws and principles of the relations that existed between Jehovah and his chosen people.

It was promised through Moses that prophets would be raised up after Moses should be taken away, who would instruct the Israelites in their duties toward God and each other. Before the time of the monarchy these promised prophets do not seem to have been frequent, nor their work of very great significance. After that time the prophetic institution became of prime importance.

I. About the time of the transition from the Judges to the Kings, the need of special messengers from God became imperative. The priests had been appointed,

not only to officiate at the altar, but also as the religious teachers of the people. But *the priests themselves had become corrupt*; they were often chief among the sinners of the Israelites. Their failure may have been due in part to the lack of support by the rest of the tribes. Tithes were withheld, and sacrifices were not offered. *Their failure gave occasion for bringing into prominence the prophetic institution*, which was appointed of God, not merely to make good that in respect to which the priests had failed, but to reveal with greater fulness the character of God and his will. Samuel is regarded as the founder of the so-called "schools of the prophets." There were, however, prophets before his day. His great work as prophet was to encourage these schools and to regulate their activity.

2. In the days of Ahab the northern kingdom had adopted the worship of Baal so generally that the worship of Jehovah was almost excluded. There were but relatively few that remained faithful to the God of their fathers. The two prophets *Elijah and Elisha were raised up to endeavor to bring Israel back to the faithful service of Jehovah*. The work of each supplemented that of the other. Elijah, by condemnation and punishment, sought to arouse the people to a consciousness of their sin, while Elisha followed with repeated assurances of God's readiness to show mercy if they would repent. There was but a temporary check given to the downward course of the rebellious people. There were, however, some great truths added to the contents of prophetic teaching. Elijah was shown on Horeb that the real people of God, the true

Israel, were those who were faithful to Jehovah, and that they would abide after the sinners of the chosen people were destroyed. Through the beneficent miracles of Elisha there was taught the truth of permanent worth, that the mercy of God was unbounded. He would bruise, but he would also bind up.

3. *During the time that the Israelites, both the northern and the southern kingdom, were in contact with the Assyrian power, called the "Assyrian" period in Israel's history, the prophets that were chiefly important were Amos and Hosea in the North and Isaiah and Micah in the South.*

The reign of Jeroboam II was exceedingly prosperous. Riches were abundant, luxury was everywhere, and there was consequent wickedness. The people gave themselves up to the gratification of all sensuous appetites, and the poor were especially oppressed by the avarice of the rich and strong. Amos was sent from Judah to condemn the northern sinners for their crimes, and to warn them of imminent punishment. They were secure in the belief that the "day of Jehovah" predicted by Joel would come with destruction for the heathen nations only. Amos assured them that Israelite sinners would perish like the rest. Being God's chosen people would not save them.

Hosea prophesied during the same conditions, and had in part a message like that of Amos, but as a background for the portrayal of the blackness of their sin and the terribleness of the coming calamity he set forth in strongest terms the wonderful love that Jehovah had shown them from the first. But since God's love had been spurned by them, the punishment they de-

served was all the greater. Hosea preached God's love, but his threats were terrific.

The greater part of the work of the two prophets Isaiah and Micah in Judah centers about the reign of Ahaz, who sought an alliance with Assyria against his two enemies Israel and Aramea, and the reign of Hezekiah, who was attacked by Sennacherib because the customary tribute from Judah was withheld. The refusal of Ahaz to trust Jehovah gave occasion for severe denunciation by Isaiah, and the prediction that destruction would come upon Judah. But the king's infidelity also led to the prophet's prediction that God would raise up a true King. Hezekiah's refusal to yield to the demands of the Assyrian king who had already captured some of the cities of Judah, but who was not content with less than the complete surrender of Jerusalem, was most likely due to the encouragement given him by Isaiah. The help of Jehovah was never promised with greater assurance than in this dark hour of Judah's threatened downfall. Micah's prophecies were likewise in great part occasioned by the immanence of Assyria's blow.

4. *In what is called the "Babylonian" period* there remained the kingdom of Judah only. Israel had fallen in 722. About a hundred years later the fall of the Assyrian power, which had been dominant in the east for many centuries, was succeeded by the supremacy of Babylon. This power lasted but a short time, but it was a very mighty force in determining the destiny of Judah. The end of this kingdom was now near. The sins of many generations were at last to be punished by the captivity of the chosen people, the

destruction of their holy temple and the desolation of their sacred city.

At this time *Jeremiah in Judah and Ezekiel among those already carried captive* were chief of those who prophesied to the kings and common people. Their work differs in its special character from that of the prophets who had preceded them. Very many of the messages of each grew out of the personal experiences through which they passed. The truths they proclaimed, the lessons they taught, form an important part of Prophecy. The minor prophets *Habakkuk and Obadiah* emphasized special truths that were pertinent to this critical time.

It was just in the midst of the ruin of Judah, when there seemed no prospect but one of final defeat, that *Daniel* prophesied of the overthrow of the world powers and of the glorious triumph of the kingdom of God.

5. *After the Jews had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple, the special work that the prophets had to do was to give them encouragement in the face of weakness, poverty, and the hostility of their enemies. Haggai and Zechariah were especially concerned with the work on the temple. Malachi sought to check the tendency of the Jews to intermarry with the heathen, and he condemned those who denied the importance of serving Jehovah. The work of all these post-exilic prophets was needed to keep distinctly in the minds of the chosen people that they were a separate nation, Jehovah's special possession.*

6. *The work of the prophets is thus seen to be intimately connected with the history of Israel. It is not*

something apart from, an addition to, the manifestation of the purpose of God in his dealings with his people. The threats and promises of the prophets arose from the moral and political condition of the Israelites. We learn from both the historical condition and the prophecy occasioned by it what Jehovah revealed concerning himself and what he demands of man. We are taught by his act and by his prophetic word that he will punish sin, which he hates, and that his mercy is beyond expression in words. Old Testament Prophecy stands out preeminent, towering above all else that was given to aid us in understanding Christ, but it stood amid the every-day doings of the Israelites. It continually interpreted to Israel the meaning of what God sent upon them, warned them of the results of their sins, and exhorted them to righteousness. The messages of the prophets abide as the fullest revelation that God made before his final revelation in Christ. They demand and they will reward the most careful and sympathetic study.

PART II

**A STUDY OF THE INDIVIDUAL
PROPHETS**

I

ISAIAH

Parallel Reading: 2 Kings 14 to 21; 2 Chronicles 26 to 33; Micah; Hosea; Amos.

1. Date and Occasion

The exact date of the beginning of Isaiah's work is not known, but it was before Uzziah died. (1 : 1.) He continued to prophesy at intervals until the close of the reign of Hezekiah, possibly was slain by the next king, Manasseh. A period of about forty years, 740-698 B. C.

Judah was flourishing in the reign of Uzziah, or as he is otherwise called, Azariah. Wealth there, as in Israel under Jeroboam II, produced wickedness, vice, oppression. Jotham is classed among the better kings of Judah, but some of the rebukes of Isaiah were caused by the sin of his reign. Ahaz was the worst king Judah had because he deliberately chose to trust in a heathen power instead of Jehovah. The destiny of Judah was largely determined by the infidelity of Ahaz. His unwise policy of seeking help from Assyria led to Judah's becoming tributary to Assyria. Much that we have in Isaiah was occasioned by the sins of this reign. The remarkable Immanuel prophecy (7 to 12) was made the day Ahaz rejected Jehovah. This wicked

king was succeeded by his good son, Hezekiah. His attempted reforms were probably encouraged by Isaiah. His kingdom was threatened by the invasion of the Assyrians under Sennacherib. These two prominent features occasioned many of the important messages of Isaiah. Thus very much of the book of Isaiah was due to the political and religious condition of Judah in the reigns of the two important kings, Ahaz and Hezekiah.

The northern kingdom came to an end while Hezekiah was king of Judah, 722 B. C., but before it fell Isaiah was interested in its religious condition. His work included threats against these Israelite sinners. The prophecies of Hosea and Amos help us to understand what it was that Isaiah had to condemn in the northern kingdom. Both Israel and Judah were the people of Jehovah. The apostasy of Israel concerned the prophet of Judah. Crimes of all kinds were committed by the people. Idol worship in forms practised by all the surrounding heathen was adopted by the Israelites, north and south. Idolatry was worse in Israel, but prevalent in Judah. Such conditions, political, social, religious, characterized the time of Isaiah, and they must be kept in mind in studying his prophecies.

Judging from what we have in his book he was not prophesying all the time. There seem to have been intervals of several years between some of his messages during which he was silent. The dates of the prophecies cannot be determined in many cases, except approximately. A few of them are dated. Thus we know the occasion of their delivery. Some can be

placed by internal evidence. When we know the date, we can better understand the message.

2. The Divisions of the Book

The book is made up of a collection of prophecies delivered at different times. Some of the prophecies form only a chapter, or but part of a chapter, some of his messages make a number of chapters. Thus chapter 5 is a separate prophecy; so is chapter 6. The contents of the six chapters, 7 to 12, seem to be practically all of one discourse, at least so far as the chief thought is concerned.

These various prophecies may be arranged in groups for convenience of study.

The entire book is divided into two parts, chs. 1 to 39, and 40 to 66. There are easily recognized differences between the thought, outlook, purpose, teaching, and style of these two parts.

In part one, chs. 1 to 39, we find prominent: Charge of sins; rebuke for crimes; threats of punishment, including even the overthrow of the kingdom, because the people have forsaken Jehovah. The prophet is deeply interested in what he sees going on about him. Only occasionally he lifts his eyes to the future and speaks of a brighter time. The key-word of the Prophet, even while he threatens, is, however, the word "Remnant." There would be destruction, but not total.

In part two, chs. 40 to 66, what we find of charge of sin is made in order to explain the punishment that had come, or was seen as having come, upon the chosen people. The time of affliction is regarded as passed,

the time of favor has come. God was about to visit his people and deliver them from the results of their sins and from their sin.

In the first part the actual condition of Israel at the time is most prominent in the prophet's mind; the future Messianic times are only occasionally presented.

In the second part the Messianic times are the chief theme, while the present actual condition of Israel is incidental.

In the first part the Messianic idea is that of King. In the second part it is that of Sufferer. In the first God's people are oppressed, invaded, exiled; in the second, restored, prosperous, triumphant, dominant.

In the first part the style suggests oral speech, delivered to the assembled people in the midst of stirring times. In the second part we find calm, consecutive composition, with elaborately sustained argument.

These differences give evidence for the view of a diverse authorship, but they do not prove it. Other facts are cited for oneness of authorship. The meaning of the book for us remains practically the same on either view. We will lose none of the rich truth of these prophecies if we read them as Isaiah's. We will gain much of the evidence furnished by the power of Jehovah to predict, if we place the whole in the days of Isaiah.

See especially chapters 44, 45, and 48, where the claim that Jehovah is the only God is argued from the fact that he alone can predict. The facts here mentioned must have been so far in the future at the time they were foretold that the prophet could not have merely guessed they would come to pass.

(1) The first part of the book may be subdivided into the following sections:

a. Chapters 1 to 11. Of these ch. 1 is an introduction to the entire book, giving a summary of the main thought of Isaiah: rebuke for sins; threatened punishment, and promise of God's favor. The sudden transition from charge and condemnation to exhortation and promise is found in many places in Isaiah.

Chs. 2 to 4 form one message, beginning with a prediction of a time when all nations would serve Jehovah, and then exhorting Israel to be faithful to him, with the threat that all their wicked haughtiness would be brought low, and ending with a prediction of a purified people with Jehovah dwelling among them.

Ch. 5 sets forth God's disappointment in his people from whom he had expected righteousness. Woes are pronounced upon various classes of sinners with a threat of the nation's fall.

Ch. 6 gives the vision the prophet saw by which he was impressed with the thought of God's holiness and his people's sinfulness, and showing the mercy of God who cleansed the prophet of his sin.

Chs. 7 to 12 contain the Immanuel prophecy, occasioned by the refusal of Ahaz to accept the prophet's offer of help from Jehovah, because he was looking for help from Assyria, to whose king he had sent a bribe when he was threatened by the combined powers of Israel and Syria. The chief points of the prophecy are found in ch. 7, where the birth of the Immanuel is told to Ahaz, who, however, is threatened with punishment because he would not trust Jehovah; in ch. 9, where the character of the coming King

Immanuel is given, and in ch. 11, where the character and peaceful effects of his reign are foretold. In ch. 8 there is a message to the people of an import similar to that given to the king in the preceding chapter. In both cases the prophecy takes on a twofold aspect: assurance is given that the people cannot perish because God is with them, as the name Immanuel shows, but the desolation of the land is also announced. In ch. 10 it is declared that the Assyrians would be used as God's agent to punish his people, and that the Assyrians would themselves be punished. In chs. 11 and 12 is given a prediction of the restoration of the people, and their triumph, like that over the Egyptians when they came out of Egypt.

b. Chapters 13 to 23. This group of prophecies is almost entirely concerned with the heathen nations, delivered at various dates, but collected and put by themselves. In most cases the complete destruction of the nation mentioned is foretold. They are to be punished because of hostility towards God's people. These messages were not expected to reach the peoples named, but were intended as comfort to the Israelites, whose enemies would thus perish, and to teach the permanent lesson that enmity to God will be punished.

Babylon and Egypt are prominent in this number of heathen nations. The description of the fall of Moab is graphic. It is declared that Egypt will turn to Jehovah after her punishment, a most remarkable prophecy. The small neighboring peoples are especially condemned because they showed hate toward Israel instead of friendship.

c. Chapters 24 to 35. In this group are prophecies

most difficult to understand. They have in part an apocalyptic character, and the connection of thought is by no means clear.

Chs. 24 to 27 are to some extent connected with the preceding group and contain a threat of punishment upon the whole world. The description of the destruction in chapter 24 is terrific. Then ch. 25 shows that salvation will come to the nations after their punishment. Ch. 26 gives the song of triumph by Israel, God's chosen people, and ch. 27 shows that Israel, though desolated, will flourish again.

Chs. 28 to 33 contain woes pronounced against God's people, which were prophesied at various times by Isaiah. The condemnation and threats are severe because they have sinned against the Holy One of Israel. But even in the midst of such denunciation there is held out the hope of mercy from Jehovah. Isaiah seldom delivered a message that did not have some comfort in it. It is declared that the peoples to whom Israel looked for help should themselves perish. God alone would make his people strong.

Chs. 34 and 35 may be taken together as giving in contrast the most terrible destruction that was to come upon the heathen, especially Edom, and the glad restoration of God's people from captivity. The land of the enemy shall forever lie waste, the land of Israel shall blossom abundantly. In this case as in most of those where outside nations are mentioned, Edom may be taken as representative of the enemies of God's people. The prophecy would have its fulfilment in the punishment of any people that persisted in hostility towards the people of God.

d. Chapters 36 to 39. This may be regarded as a sort of appendix to the first part of the book. It is simple history, rather than prophecy of the usual character. It gives an account of the invasion by the Assyrian king in the days of Hezekiah; the message of assurance given by Isaiah in answer to the prayer of Hezekiah; the account of the king's illness and recovery, and of the embassy that came from Babylon to congratulate him on his recovery, with the rebuke of the prophet because Hezekiah had shown a willingness to form an alliance with Babylon.

This division is pertinent here because it shows how Judah came into contact with Babylon, and gives the prediction that Babylon should at last take Judah captive. This prepares the way for the second part of Isaiah, in which the captivity is assumed as a background for the promises of restoration, which is a chief thought of the second part.

(2) The second part of Isaiah is divided into three groups of nine chapters each: 40 to 48; 49 to 57; 58 to 66. There is a common refrain at the end of each of these divisions.

The theme of the whole of this part is found in ch. 40: the announcement that God is coming to deliver his people. This is given at first in general terms. Then the prophet shows that God's coming will be in the person of a Deliverer, and that he is coming to rescue his people from oppression. The real thought here is that of a spiritual deliverance, which had its fulfilment in the work of Jesus Christ. The teaching of Isaiah here is not surpassed in the Old Testament.

a. In the first group of this part, chs. 40-48, chief

emphasis is put upon the fact of deliverance. The prediction of the work of Cyrus in delivering Israel from captivity forms an important part of this thought, but it is not this deliverance that is the chief thing in the mind of the prophet. Cyrus and his work illustrated the greater deliverance that would be wrought by the greater Deliverer.

The term "servant" occurring in these chapters is used in two or three ways. Sometimes it means the whole people of Israel, sometimes the true people of God called Israel, and sometimes an individual distinguished from Israel, for whom he is to do a work. This use is found in chapter 49 also.

Special comfort is given in chs. 40, 41, 43, because God will deliver his people from their affliction. He will be with them and protect them. Ch. 42 describes the work of the servant in general terms. In chs. 44 and 45 it is declared that God would raise up Cyrus to cause his people to return to their land and build their temple. It is said that this is predicted in order that Cyrus might know that he was victorious by the help of Jehovah.

Chs. 46 and 47 give assurance of the fall of Babylon the oppressor of God's people. In the first part of ch. 46 occurs one of those frequent instances of teaching by contrast that Isaiah uses. The people of the idols carry their idols, Jehovah carries his people. Ch. 48 shows the chief purpose of prediction: to give evidence that Jehovah was the true God, and that there was no other god.

b. Chapters 49-57. In this division the greatest thought is that of the Deliverer, in ch. 53. But the

great love of God for his people is emphasized in it all. In ch. 49 we find the thought, afterwards so fully developed, that the Servant seems at first to fail, though at last he is to triumph. This reaches its climax in ch. 53, where the seeming defeat reaches even to death, but the sufferer succeeds, not in spite of death merely, but by means of it. This is the only place in the Old Testament where the idea of vicarious suffering is so plainly taught in words. The same truth was taught in all the bloody sacrifices.

In chs. 51 and 52, Zion is called to arise because her deliverance is at hand. She is described as rejoicing in the goodness of God. So in ch. 54 it is declared that the time of Zion's chastisement is passed. In chs. 55 and 56 the thought is all of gladness and rejoicing in the mercy of God. Ch. 57 teaches that Israel's suffering was due to her sin, but God had mercy and saved.

c. Chapters 58-66. In this division the greater emphasis is put upon the condition of the people delivered. The triumph of glorious Zion is the theme.

In ch. 58 the true conditions of favor with God are given. Ch. 59 shows that sins caused their calamities, and that God will redeem his people. Ch. 60 describes all the nations as serving God's people, contributing their wealth for the glory of his house. Ch. 61 is a message of liberty. The prosperity of the people of God shall be boundless. Ch. 62 gives assurance of the power of God on behalf of his people. They shall no more be forsaken. Salvation has come. In ch. 63 God's punishment of the Edomites, Israel's enemy, is graphically portrayed, and though his people had sinned, he would show mercy. In chs. 64 and 65

there is a confession that God's people had sinned against him, yet the infinite mercy of God would secure the redemption of Israel and their future glory. Then in the last chapter there is a summing up of the doctrine that God will severely punish sin, but will save with a mighty power those who put their trust in him. At last all nations shall worship Jehovah.

II

JEREMIAH

Parallel reading: 2 Kings 22 to 25; 2 Chronicles 34 to 36; Obadiah; Habakkuk; Zephaniah: Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28, 29.

1. Date and Occasion

THIS prophet began his work among the people of the kingdom of Judah about 627 B. C., in the reign of Josiah, and continued in the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah till the fall of Jerusalem, 586 B. C. How long he prophesied after this date is not certain, but he delivered some prophecies while in Egypt whither he had gone with the little band escaping from Judah, which had been left at home when the army of Babylon carried away the Jews into captivity.

Jeremiah's career was thus during the overthrow of Judah. The reforms in the days of Josiah effected little in averting destruction. Jehoiakim and Zedekiah were wicked kings, and their sin was all the greater because the punishment threatened was so imminent. The people generally seem to have been given up to idolatry of all forms more completely than at any other period. The worship of Jehovah was continued, but it was perfunctory, not genuine.

It was the Babylonian period, because Babylon was the dominant, threatening, crushing power, having suc-

ceeded the Assyrian. The political conditions, so far as they affected God's people, were practically the same as in the Assyrian period.

2. The Chief Work of Jeremiah

This was to interpret the calamities that were falling upon Judah as the fulfilment of early and repeated threats made by the former prophets. Moses and the prophets had declared that even exile would result if the people persisted in sin. They sinned, and exile was now at hand. Jeremiah was in the midst of the crash, to explain, direct, counsel, warn. He had not only to face the angry defiance of professed loyalists, the party urging an alliance with Egypt, and those urging independence, but had also to advise the king to surrender to Babylon to save himself from destruction by Babylon. No prophet before Jeremiah had such personal opposition to meet, and none showed greater courage. He is called the weeping prophet. He wept over his nation's sin and fall.

3. The Chief Teaching of Jeremiah

For the most part the views that this prophet got were not new. He got rather a clearer conception of views already given by former prophets. These had seen a future in which God's people would be punished, and then restored, purified, dominant, and ideally faithful to Jehovah. They did not see a radical change, but a lopping off of dead branches; a purging away of all dross from those already God's people. Government, political relations, and worship that obtained in their days were so prominently in view, that

radical changes to other conditions were not clearly seen by these earlier prophets.

Jeremiah sees government, political relations, and forms of worship breaking to pieces before his eyes. But he does not believe that all is lost, he is rather triumphantly sure of a glorious issue, which will be, not the old conditions restored and bettered, but in reality a new people based on a new covenant. The kernel will germinate though it fall to its death. The essential part will not perish. And this central essential substance will be a new growth rather than a branch. And all this will be the fulfilment of God's former purpose. In the midst of the terrific storm that has come upon God's people, Jeremiah looks beyond the ruins. In the flashes of God's anger he gets views of the calm heavens above it all, and of God enthroned directing all.

4. The General Style of Jeremiah's Prophecies

There is something of abruptness, a lacking of finish, seen in the messages of this prophet. This was probably due in part to the fact that he was in the midst of the calamities, and his spirit was agitated by what he saw; in part it may be due to the fact that what we have in his book is sometimes but abstracts recalled from the addresses that were delivered orally to the people. Parts of his prophecies were closely connected with his personal experience when persecuted by the Jewish officials. At the outset of his work he saw its difficulties and shrank from it, and during its progress he often longed for release from the cruel strain. He remained steady and faithful to his duty. It was well

for him that he knew that God had chosen him for this work, and that he would defend him in it.

5. The Divisions of the Book

We find here no large distinct divisions such as are found in Isaiah. Except one small group of chapters placed at the end of the book, all the prophecies are concerned about Judah, were delivered under practically similar conditions, and they present the same general themes.

There will result some advantage from subdividing the main body of the prophecies, chapter 1 to 45, into smaller groups, and examining the special meaning of each of these.

The first twenty-four chapters differ chiefly from what follows in that they were not so closely connected with the personal experiences of the prophet. The main thought is the punishment that is about to come upon Judah because of her sin. The horrors of the invasion are described, but the invader is not yet at hand. The people are without excuse. The love of Jehovah has been constantly shown them, but they have forsaken Jehovah and become sunken in idolatry. The heart of the prophet is torn at the sight of the sin of Judah and in view of the awful punishment that is coming.

The chapters from 25 to 39 show this in common, that the prophet himself is prominent. His suffering and persecution are not the chief facts given, but they show the occasion of the prophecies uttered during the reigns of the two kings, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. These are not placed in the chronological order of their

delivery. Later prophecies are put before earlier ones. Their significance is not affected by this. The personal life of no other prophet enters so much into his message as does that of Jeremiah into his.

Chapters 40 to 45 belong to the time immediately after Jerusalem had fallen, and are concerned with the history of the little company the Babylonians left in the land when they took the rest captive. These Jews purpose going into Egypt. The prophet advises against it.

Chapters 46 to 51 contain prophecies delivered at various times against the outside nations, who are threatened with destruction because of their hostility against God's people.

6. The Chief Thought in Each Prophecy

Chapter 1 contains the account of Jeremiah's call to his work. He feels incapable, but is assured of help and safety in danger.

Chs. 2 and 3 give a severe charge against Judah for turning away from Jehovah who had loved her. Israel's fate had not been heeded by Judah, hence she too must suffer. But her God would take her back afterwards.

Chs. 4, 5, and 6 are of the same general character. Great devastation from an invader from the north is predicted because of the persistent sin of the people. All classes have sinned. All are indifferent about the threatened danger.

Ch. 7 has an important teaching: The temple because of which they thought themselves safe, since it was Jehovah's dwelling-place, would itself be destroyed as

Shiloh was. Not sacrifices, but obedience and righteousness were required.

Chs. 8 and 9 show the lamentable condition of Judah, and the terrible punishment imminent, including captivity.

Ch. 10 may be compared with ch. 44 of Isaiah, in which Jehovah is contrasted with the wooden idols of the heathen.

Ch. 11 gives the command to Jeremiah to show the people what was demanded by the covenant made with their fathers, and the punishment that would come because they had violated it.

In ch. 12 we have Jeremiah's perplexity because the wicked flourish, then the prediction that God would give up his inheritance to desolation, followed by an assurance of restoration of his people and the promise that other nations would join them if they would serve Jehovah.

Ch. 13 contains an account of one of those prophetic actions meant to teach a truth. The prophet was to hide his girdle in the ground and afterwards find it soiled. So Judah would be removed into exile and marred. The people would be dashed to destruction like drunken men. Sin was the cause of all this.

In chs. 14 and 15 Jeremiah predicts a great famine and destruction; the false prophets deny that these will come, but they shall depart with the rest into a strange land. Intercession even by the most holy men of God could not avert the calamity, because the people have so wretchedly sinned. In the latter part of ch. 15 we have the discouragement of Jeremiah because of his sad task, but he is assured of help and safety.

Chs. 16 and 17 continue to give threats of captivity, the sin specially named being idolatry. The people have forsaken Jehovah for idols. Jeremiah promises them the favor of God if they will keep his sabbaths, and thus show they are his people doing his will.

Chs. 18 and 19 are connected by the use of one figure, that of a potter making an earthen vessel. God has power to do as he will with a nation. Repentance only can prevent his purpose to destroy a nation. His purpose is to destroy Judah because of her apostasy. Jeremiah's life is threatened. Then he is directed to break a potter's vessel in their sight as a sign of their impending fate.

Ch. 20 gives the suffering of Jeremiah caused by his bold speaking. He thinks his life a failure; the people do not heed him, but reproach, and like Job he wishes he had never been born.

The thought in chapter 21 is simple. Zebekiah asks the prophet if the Lord will deliver them from the army of Babylon. The answer is, No.

Ch. 22 belongs to the time of Jehoiakim, before the event of ch. 21. Threats are made against the kings of Judah because of their sins that bring desolation upon the land. It is to be noticed that in all this book the chief sin condemned is that of forsaking Jehovah for other gods.

Ch. 23 contains a severe threat against the pastors of the people, which term seems to include both kings and false prophets. The latter are especially condemned because they claimed falsely to have a word from Jehovah. They not only failed to warn of danger, but assured the people of safety.

In ch. 24 under the figure of baskets of figs it is shown that those already taken captive are better off than those left in Jerusalem.

In ch. 25 we have the specific prediction of the fall of Judah because the people have not listened to the prophet and repented. But here occurs the wonderful promise that the destroying enemies shall themselves afterwards be destroyed, and God's people shall return to their land at the end of seventy years.

Ch. 26 gives the account of Jeremiah's trial because he had said Jerusalem should fall like Shiloh. He was not condemned to die as some wished.

The figure of the yoke indicating bondage occurs in chs. 27 and 28. Hananiah opposed Jeremiah, and as predicted, died in two months for his false prophecy.

Ch. 29 tells of letters sent between Jerusalem and the captives in Babylonia. Jeremiah says they will not soon return. False prophets there write to have Jeremiah killed for such predictions, God declared that these prophets should therefore perish.

Chs. 30 and 31 belong together. The improbable thing that the Jews would again be gathered to their land is not only predicted, but the prediction was to be written in a book, as a permanent witness to the certainty of God's word. Not only will they be brought back, but God's people in that future would have God's law in their heart under a new covenant. This was the more wonderful prediction as it was made just at the time that Judah's case seemed the most hopeless. Utter destruction was at hand.

Chs. 32 and 33 belong to the year before the city fell while it was besieged. Jeremiah was in prison.

Captivity is sure, yet the prophet was to buy a field in Anathoth, to show that they would come back. And out of his prison Jeremiah predicts the most glorious prosperity and glad joy of his people according to God's word, and that was as sure as the ordinances of the heavens. Day and night were no more sure.

In reading ch. 34 it must be borne in mind that the besieging army had departed from the city for a time to meet the advancing Egyptians. Before they went Jewish slaves had been set free by their Jewish owners. When the siege was raised the slaves were taken back. Jeremiah repeats his warnings of destruction.

Ch. 35 gives the condemnation of the Jews because they were not so faithful in obedience as the Rechabites, who obeyed their ancestor in abstaining from wine. The Jews would not obey Jehovah their God.

In ch. 36 we have the account of Jeremiah's writing all his earlier prophecies, which the king cut and burnt when they were read to him, thinking he could prevent their fulfilment. But the prophet renews his threats.

Chs. 37, 38, and 39 are immediately connected with the city's fall. Jeremiah's suffering is described, showing the wickedness of the Jews to the very end.

Chs. 40 to 43 are historical, giving an account of the Jews left in the land.

Ch. 44 contains a prophecy by Jeremiah while in Egypt against the Jews who still sinned in spite of their punishment. Pharaoh himself whom they trusted would be destroyed by Babylon.

Ch. 45 is one of comfort to Baruch the attendant of the prophet.

In the prophecies against the heathen nations recorded in chs. 46-51 it should be noted that all these are to be punished because of their enmity to God's people, and that along with the threat of punishment there is also a prediction of restoration in the case of all of them except Philistia, where nothing is said about it, and in the case of Edom and Babylon, who would have no remnant, but would be desolate forever. These were the two most uncompromising enemies of Judah.

Ch. 52 gives the history of the fall of the city. It adds an account of the release from prison of king Jehoiachin, who had been taken captive thirty-seven years before.

III

EZEKIEL

Parallel reading: The same passages as in Jeremiah.

1. Date and Occasion

EZEKIEL was taken into captivity 597 B. C., when the king Jehoiachin was taken and many of the leading Jews with him. The prophet began his work in the fifth year of his exile, 592-3. His whole career as prophet was spent in Babylonia. He continued to prophesy until 570 at least, perhaps longer.

Jeremiah had been prophesying for thirty years before Ezekiel was carried away, and without doubt the latter had often listened to his words of condemnation and threat. The messages of the two had much in common, and we may suppose that Ezekiel was in part influenced by Jeremiah. He probably heard all the prophecies against Jehoiakim; he may have seen something of the reforms attempted by Josiah. Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel was in the midst of the ruin of Judah, but part of it he passed through with the captives in exile.

There are good reasons for believing that the words of the former prophets besides those of Jeremiah had been collected into a body of writings that were regarded as having divine authority, as being inspired Scriptures. The messages of the prophets when deliv-

ered by them were accepted as coming from God, as the prophets claimed, and it is evident that these words had been preserved in written form. We may well suppose that Ezekiel had access to these, or at least was acquainted with their contents.

Ezekiel was a priest, and as such he must have been informed about the earlier history of the Israelites: God's purpose in choosing them; their constant tendency to depart from Jehovah; the many instances of punishment that had already come upon them; the threat long before made that their sins would result in exile, as well as the bright promises held out by the former prophets of a future of restoration and glory.

This knowledge that Ezekiel had was not the source of the messages he had to deliver, nor did it altogether determine their character, yet his prophecies were in view of these facts of which he had knowledge. What we have in the book of Ezekiel could have been produced at no other time, nor occasioned by other conditions.

Both Ezekiel and Jeremiah belong to the period when it may be truly said Prophecy had reached its climax; not had reached its fulfilment, except in one prominent, but incidental feature, the extreme of Israel's punishment. The stream of Prophecy had been flowing for centuries, and had been gradually augmented in its course, till now it reached its full strength. All the essential truths of Prophecy had been taught when Ezekiel finished his teaching. So far as the chief purpose of Prophecy was concerned, it ended with the work of Ezekiel. He stood on the border-line that divided Israel's past of sin and punish-

ment from Israel's future of favor and blessing. Some centuries would yet pass before that future should reach its culmination, but the time of comfort had arrived. The prophets of the post-exilic period added no truth of an import different from what had been given by the time of Ezekiel.

2. Chief Work of Ezekiel

In part the work of Ezekiel was like that of Jeremiah: he had to interpret the calamities that were falling upon Judah as judgments long before predicted because of sin. Both these prophets were near enough to that "future," that "end of the days," of which the earlier prophets had spoken, to get full views of it. Jeremiah saw a "new covenant," practically a new people, not merely Israel reformed. Ezekiel got a fuller view of what this new people of God would be.

He gives more definitely the goal and purpose of all the dealings of Jehovah with his people in the past. He stood nearer the dawn of the greatest day in the world's history. That goal and purpose was the making known of Jehovah to all the nations of the earth. Thus we find in Ezekiel the frequent refrain, "and they shall know that I am Jehovah."

The restoration of Israel which should reveal the glory of Jehovah was to take place in order that Jehovah might be known to the nations. The people thus restored were to bear witness to Jehovah as the true and only God. But this restoration and this witnessing were necessarily conditioned upon the righteousness of the individual Israelite. Not the might of Jehovah but his moral excellence was to be manifested to the

nations as proof that he was God and as the important truth about him as God. What he was should be shown by the people among whom he would dwell, not shown by the nation as a whole, but by the individual.

3. The Chief Teaching of Ezekiel

Ezekiel puts emphasis upon the individual. It is not, however, true that hitherto the individual had been lost in the mass. While many of the laws were national in form, most of them involved individual obligation, and most of the laws were meant for the individual. The sacrifices were nearly all individualistic. The offerer confessed his own sin, and was himself forgiven. Yet it can be said that most of the recorded dealings of God with his people were of a national character. They were treated as a unit, as a solidarity. When the king sinned the nation was punished, as in the case of David's numbering the people. In Ezekiel there is emphasis put upon the fact that each individual has personal relations to Jehovah.

But the individual was not the end in view. He was the means to an end, and that was the manifestation of the holy God. The holiness of God is the underlying thought of the prophecies of Ezekiel, and thus the main thought that he emphasizes is the need of holiness on the part of the individual people of God. The doctrine of the holiness of God is given in Isaiah in the repeated title "Holy One of Israel." In the book of Ezekiel it is given rather in the sublime theophanies that he describes, especially at the beginning of his ministry. This doctrine had also been taught by the laws enjoining holiness upon the people because the

holy God was dwelling among them. The key-word of Leviticus is "holiness."

The elaborate and wonderful ritual that Ezekiel describes for the restored people of God, with the temple in which they would worship, makes prominent this great truth of the holiness of Jehovah and of the people of Jehovah because they were his and he was dwelling among them. In his early work the prophet had to portray the awful wickedness of the people, and then in contrast he gives a vivid picture of the time when the people would be holy, and the holy God would dwell among them, manifest to all the nations of the earth. This is Ezekiel's chief contribution to the Bible's great truths.

4. The Style of Ezekiel and Form of His Prophecies

The chief distinguishing feature of the contents of this book is the vision. Ezekiel saw a vision at the beginning of his ministry, a theophany that gave him an impression that remained with him in all his work. There came to him a revelation of God. It was not so much a conviction of some attribute of God; not the solitary truth of his holiness, of his might, or his omniscience, but the great, overwhelming, sublime thought, "God." The parts of the vision that Ezekiel attempts to describe are not distinct, but the impression made by the whole is vivid. From its effect the prophet fell prostrate.

He gave messages in the form of visions, and the last great truth of his book, the chief thought of all that he gives, is the vision of the holy people in the holy land worshiping God in the holy temple. There are

several instances of what may be called prophetic actions, either really performed, or else described as if performed, meant to convey important truths to the people. The personality of the prophet is prominent in some places, not so fully as in the case of Jeremiah, but more so than either of the other prophets, except Jonah, whose work was one of action rather than of words.

Aside from the visions the prophecies of Ezekiel are not difficult to interpret. Some of the figures that he uses are given with much detail, and have been characterized as crude compared with our Western manner of speech. There seldom appears the abruptness of speech, indicating agitation of spirit, that is seen in Isaiah and in some of the Minor Prophets. Some of his prophecies were delivered to the captive Jews as they gathered to the prophet to learn what word had come from Jehovah. And while he delivers messages to these captives, his words are usually meant to apply to those in the homeland, and to the whole people in all their history. Ezekiel is a captive, but in his exile he sees as if before him the sacred Jerusalem falling to ruin.

5. The Divisions of the Book

Both the general divisions and the subdivisions of this book are clearly marked off from each other.

There are two principal divisions: one half of the book, chs. 1 to 24, having to do with the punishment of Jerusalem for sin; the other half, chs. 25 to 48, having to do with the destruction of enemies and the restoration of the people. All the first part belongs to

the time before the city fell; the second part after the fall, except some of the prophecies against the heathen. The special purpose of each of these divisions is distinct.

In the first part, there is condemnation for sins that the nation has committed, and sins that are still persisted in, and there are repeated assurances that Jerusalem cannot escape the destruction that threatens her. Ezekiel is at one with Jeremiah in this prediction.

In the second part, after the punishment has fallen upon the city, there is nothing but comfort for God's people: in the threats against their enemies, and in the description of their glorious restoration.

In the first part are the following divisions:

- (1) Chs. 1 to 3. Ezekiel appointed to his ministry.
- (2) Chs. 4 to 7. Destruction foretold, partly by prophetic actions.
- (3) Chs. 8 to 11. The wickedness of the city shown in a vision, with the threat of punishment.
- (4) Chs. 12 to 19. Repeated assurances of the certainty of punishment.
- (5) Chs. 20 to 23. Causes of Israel's destruction and its imminence.
- (6) Ch. 24. Jerusalem to be purified by fire.

In the second part are the following divisions:

- (1) Chs. 25 to 32. Prophecies against the heathen.
- (2) Chs. 33 to 39. God's people revived, restored, established.
- (3) Chs. 40 to 48. The religious reestablishing of God's people: The temple; the ordinances; the dwelling of the tribes.

6. The Chief Thought in Each Group

In chs. 1 to 3 is given the call of Ezekiel to his work. In a theophany he gets the idea of God, awful, sublime, and is prostrated. He is told to preach to a rebellious people. The heathen would be more likely to heed his words than his own people who talk his language. He is to be a watchman. For a time his messages will not be received, so it is said he will be dumb. His speaking will be as though he had not spoken. Later they will hear, his mouth will be open.

Chs. 4 to 7. The destruction of Jerusalem is portrayed very vividly by what the prophet is told to do. It is improbable that Ezekiel actually went through what is here described, though it is given as though he did. The end has come, escape will be impossible.

In chs. 8 to 11 the prophet is represented as being in Jerusalem, observing the abominations that defile the holy city, and declaring that the people are not safe, as they think, but will be destroyed.

In the next division, chs. 12 to 19, there are different prophecies all having the same import: the sin of the people in departing from Jehovah who had so pitied and loved Israel, and the sure punishment that was coming. The prediction that Zedekiah should go to Babylon, but not see it, ch. 12, was literally fulfilled. His eyes were put out. The lying prophets are like men who build a wall with poor mortar, it will not stand. Even intercession by Noah, Job, and Daniel could not avert the calamity. The figure of the cast-out child taken up by Jehovah, loved and cared for, ch. 16, is most full of meaning. The wrong policy of the king

in looking to Egypt for help against Babylon it is declared will only lead to captivity, ch. 17. The great principle of God's justice, and his readiness to forgive is given in ch. 18. The lamentation over the destruction of the princes of Judah, ch. 19, under the figure of a vine, is pathetic.

In the next division, chs. 20 to 23, prominence is given to the causes that have brought about Judah's fall. The nation has sinned from the first. The king of Babylon is at Libnah, deciding by divination whether he shall go against Jerusalem or Ammon. Both are to perish, ch. 21, the two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, under the figure of adulteresses, ch. 23, are to be destroyed by the very powers with which they seek an alliance: as Israel was by Assyria, so Judah shall be by Babylon.

It is to be noted that the prophecy of ch. 24 was delivered the very day the siege of Jerusalem began. The city is likened to a pot in which there is meat, the meat is to be burnt, and the pot purified by the fire. It is not certain whether the statement about the death of the wife of Ezekiel is to be taken literally or not. Such a calamity, greater than any signs of grief could show, was to illustrate the calamity coming upon Judah.

The first division of the second part of the book contains a collection of prophecies against the outside nations, chs. 25 to 32, very similar to those in Isaiah and Jeremiah. They are condemned, not for idolatry, but for hostility against God's people. This teaching by the prophets is an important one, and still has force. The three chapters of prophecies about Tyre are of special interest. Tyre stood for the rich world power.

The effect of her fall would be wide-reaching. The destruction of Egypt is described in terms suggested by that land. It will be like a fish thrown out on the dry ground. The dates given in the case of some of these prophecies are significant. In all these heathen prophecies it is to be remembered that they were not expected to be heard by these peoples. They were meant for the ears of God's people, to give them encouragement from the fact that their enemies were to be destroyed. They were also to teach that sin against God would be punished.

In the first chapter of the next division, ch. 33, it is shown that the evil that came upon Judah was wholly due to their refusal to live righteously, according to the injunction of the prophet. The mercy of God is shown in ch. 34 by his promise to send a faithful Shepherd, "David," who will gather and care for the scattered sheep. Ch. 36 gives promise of restoration; a new heart of flesh will be given to the people, and because of this all peoples shall come to know Jehovah. This prediction occurs like a refrain many times in the book of Ezekiel. The restoration of the people is further predicted in the vision of the dry bones. This probably is meant only in a national sense, not a teaching of the resurrection of the individual after death. The restored, united people, with "David" a shepherd and Prince, had a spiritual significance far beyond the literal Israelites.

In a graphic picture the destruction of the enemies of God's people is described in chs. 38 and 39. All this is in order that Jehovah may be known.

In the last group, chs. 40 to 48, the description of

the temple, the temple service, and the land occupied by the tribes of Israel, should not be taken literally. The idea of the whole is that of "holiness." It is to teach, not only that Mt. Zion would be a holy place, but that wherever God's people were, in all of a far-extended region holiness would prevail. It is put in exact contrast with the former wickedness of the people by which the land had been defiled. In that future there would be nothing to defile. All the place and all the people would be holy, because the holy God would be dwelling there among men.

IV

DANIEL

Parallel reading: Same passages in Kings and Chronicles as for Jeremiah and Ezekiel; Ezra 1 to 3.

1. Date and Historical Occasion

THERE are two widely divergent views concerning the date of this book: in one view, it was written by Daniel approximately within the years 603-635 B. C.; in the other it was produced at the time of the great persecutor of the Jews, Antiochus Epiphanes, 175-163 B. C.

According to the former view it is for the most part prophecy in the sense of prediction; according to the latter view it is history given in allegorical form.

The reasons urged for holding the one or the other of these views need not here be cited. They can be found in Driver's "Introduction," in the Bible Dictionaries, and in commentaries on Daniel.

Assuming that the contents of the book were written by Daniel, the occasion was important. Daniel was among the captives taken by the army of Nebuchadrezzar (605 B. C.) as he was driving the Egyptians back from their campaign into Mesopotamia. Judah at that time became subject to Babylon instead of Egypt. The Jewish kings who were allowed to stay on the throne, were little more than agents to collect tribute

for Babylon. When Zedekiah attempted to withhold the tribute, looking to Egypt for help, he was removed, and Jerusalem was destroyed. (586 B. C.)

Jeremiah was prophesying at Jerusalem and Ezekiel in Babylonia among the exiles, where Daniel was. Ezekiel did not begin his work until 597, six years after Daniel and his companions had been chosen for the royal court. Thus Daniel began his career about eighteen years before Jerusalem fell, and his last message was given after the Jews had returned to build again the temple. (10 : 1.) He lived through the period of the captivity foretold by Jeremiah, and felt the full force of the sway of the world power over the people of God. It may be that the contentment of the Jews in their exile home would make any prospect of restoration seem all the more hopeless. Not only Gentile enemies, but Jewish indifference would prevent the fulfilment of the earlier prophetic hopes.

2. The Chief Work of Daniel

In its formal aspect the work of Daniel was with the rulers of Babylon. He was given the opportunity to teach them truths about the true God, Jehovah, God of the Jews. He was able to show that Jehovah only was almighty, and that he could defend his people against the hate of their enemies. Fundamentally the work of Daniel was to give comfort to God's people. In this his work is like that of Isaiah in the second part of his book. He belongs to the time of God's favor after the time of chastisement, although he lived while the chastisement was still in progress. His work was to give grounds of encouragement to God's people, to help

them see, not so much the cause of their downfall, as shown in Isaiah and Jeremiah, but the certainty that they would come forth again from oppression, that their suffering was no proof that God had forgotten them, that he still was intervening on their behalf, and that all powers that opposed them would at length be overthrown.

3. The Chief Teachings of Daniel

Whichever view be taken of the date of this book the teaching is the same. The following may be noted:

(1) *To give consolation to God's people in their suffering.* The instances recorded of God's deliverance of those who feared him from suffering imposed by the heathen idol-worshippers gave proof of his constant care over them, and the assurance that there would be a favorable issue from all oppression. There was not taught the doctrine that God would prevent his people from all suffering, for they did suffer, but that suffering imposed as a punishment would end in mercy. And in this the chief thought is not freedom from suffering, but the care of God over those who feared him.

(2) Another prominent truth taught in Daniel is that *Jehovah whom the Jews worshiped was the true God*, that there was no other.

Much truth of a theological character had already been given to the Israelites to be handed down through them in the teachings of Moses, in God's dealings with his people as recorded in the historical books and in the earlier prophets. The doctrine of monotheism had before been taught, but it is needful now to emphasize this doctrine. It must be insisted that there was, and

could be, but one God, and that it was he who had made himself known to the Israelites.

Isaiah had taught that Jehovah was above all the gods, indeed he had said these gods were no gods. Daniel was to teach that "gods" were not God. Ezekiel's frequent refrain was, "And they shall know that I am Jehovah." His great thought was that God would be manifested to all the nations.

The consummation of all the pre-Messianic revelations was soon to be reached in the coming of man's Redeemer, and there was need of the incontrovertible proof that Jehovah, who had promised a Redeemer, was God, that it might be known that the Redeemer who should come came from God, not a god. There can be but one. The one God was the God of the Jews. All the grounds of hope for spiritual life that man could have were to be based upon the claims of the Messiah whom Jehovah had promised to send. In order that such grounds might be known to be sure it was needful to teach that God against whom man had sinned was no other than the one sending this Redeemer.

The highest evidence of the character of God is found in the supreme excellence of the moral attributes shown in the manifestations of himself through the prophets, and especially in Christ. But the proof of the existence of the Supreme Being who concerned himself about man must precede the proof of his character. The miraculous is therefore not only unobjectionable but necessary. If God would save men in his mercy he must give proof that it is a Person and not a force that is watching the interests of man, not

a mere power continuing the operations of the laws of nature. Nor was it enough to show omnipotent power, but such power must be exercised with gracious purposes. All recorded Biblical miracles are connected with the unfolding of God's purpose of redemption. They were not simply evidences of almightiness, nor proofs of benevolence, they were didactic. They helped to teach that God willed to redeem men.

It is by no means clear that the heathen kings of Daniel's day came to believe in Jehovah as the true God. The proofs placed before them were intended as the permanent possession of God's people.

(3) The third prominent teaching of Daniel is that *the kingdom of God was to be triumphant over the world powers.*

However much there may be that is common to all men, there yet has always been a distinction between those classed as God's people and those who are not. This is not merely a distinction in character, it is one evidenced in conduct. Men have shown enmity against God by attacks, sometimes apparently successful, against God's people. The one thing for which the Old Testament prophets condemn the heathen is this enmity. At the time of Daniel the heathen enmity had reached its climax in the Jewish captivity. It would seem that God's enemies had been victorious; that God's kingdom would not endure; that his people must perish from the earth.

From this darkest hour sprang the brightest promises with the strongest assurances. The world powers, now triumphant, should at last be overthrown, all opposition should be utterly demolished, and the kingdom of

God, whose beginning would be miraculous and its origin heaven, would itself overthrow, destroy, and endure forever.

Whoever the author, or whatever the date of this book, its teaching is that the triumphant, glorious kingdom of God shall permanently abide. This truth will be valuable so long as opposition to God's people tends to discourage them. Physical opposition may be past; others more potent continue. Whatever the form of opposition to God's cause, his people may rest assured that it cannot be overthrown, though it may be hindered. The final victory of Christ is not uncertain. Its date would seem to be fixed by the amount of valor shown by those who contend for him.

4. The General Character of the Book

In the other prophetic books we find charge, condemnation, and threat predominant. The chief work of the other prophets was to turn the people of Israel back from their sins, to endeavor to secure their fidelity to Jehovah. Besides this, their work was to interpret the calamities that were befalling Israel as judgments sent for punishment.

Daniel does not rebuke nor threaten God's people. He comforts only. The dream and vision is rare in the other prophets except in Ezekiel. In Daniel the dream and vision make up the bulk of the book. The rest is the narrative of miraculous events by which truth was taught.

The other prophets delivered messages to their people, Daniel delivers none directly to them, though all that he writes is for them. Thus this book is unique

among the prophets. This is evident even on the view that the book was written by Daniel. On the other view that it was not produced until the days of the Maccabees, it is regarded as apocryphal. Its apocalyptic character marks it off still more clearly from the other prophets.

5. The General Divisions of the Book

The chapters may be divided into two groups :

(1) Chs. 1 to 6. In these occur narratives of the experiences of Daniel and his companions, and the dreams of the king Nebuchadrezzar and the vision of Belshazzar, which Daniel interpreted.

(2) Chs. 7 to 12. In these we have the visions that Daniel saw; his prayer for the fulfilment of God's promised deliverance, and the revelation made to him, in which he was shown the great conflicts that were to come, in which the people of God would suffer, and from which at last they would be delivered.

The same general truths are found in both these parts, and there is recognized a close correspondence between the meaning of the fourfold image of the king's dream, and the four beasts of Daniel's vision. (Ch. 2; comp. with ch. 7.)

6. The Chief Thought of the Different Chapters

Chapter 1 shows how Daniel came to be among the king's counsellors. The class to which he belonged was famous for learning and wisdom. The objection that was made to the food furnished probably arose from religious scruples.

Ch. 2. The great truth of this chapter is that the

world powers were at length to be overthrown by the kingdom of God. The latter was to have a divine origin. There are different views about what world powers are meant, whether the last of the four is the Roman or the Grecian. On the supposition that the book is only history under the guise of symbolical terms, and was written while Antiochus was persecuting the Jews, the fourth part of the image meant Greece, not Rome. This view limits the scope of teaching, it does not change its character.

Ch. 3. The miraculous escape of the three Jews from the fire of the furnace was to teach that Jehovah, God of the Jews, was the true God, and was the only God. There was also the teaching that he was not only able to deliver, but would. The power of all who hated the servants of Jehovah could not withstand the merciful intervention of Jehovah in behalf of his people. The king was willing to decree at least that none should speak against the God of the Jews.

Ch. 4. The abasement of the proud king narrated in this chapter was to show that Jehovah was not the God of the Jews only, but universal Sovereign. This truth had been taught to some degree from the first. It is not unlikely that even the Israelites themselves during much of their history held the common idea that each country had its own god, and that Jehovah ruled especially, if not only, in Palestine. Such a doctrine was not held by the divinely appointed teachers of Israel, but it could easily have been accepted by the common people from the beliefs of the other nations. The universal sovereignty of Jehovah needed now to be specially emphasized.

Ch. 5. It was when Daniel was old that he was sent for to give the interpretation of the handwriting on the wall. The teaching of the chapter is similar to that of the preceding, with the further condemnation of the king because he profaned the vessels of the holy temple, and praised the gods instead of God.

Ch. 6. It has been difficult to identify Darius the Mede. There are, however, sufficient reasons for regarding the account as trustworthy. He manifests nobility of character, even if something of weakness, in his anxiety for Daniel, whose miraculous deliverance from the death decreed teaches again that Jehovah is God, and that loyalty to him is not only right, but will be rewarded. Not alone our sympathy for Daniel, but our sense of justice makes us approve the fate of those who would stop Daniel from praying to his God because they were jealous of his preeminence.

Ch. 7. The meaning of this vision of Daniel is similar to that of Nebuchadrezzar's dream. (Ch. 2.) It is certain that the scope of the vision included the establishing of the kingdom of Christ on the earth. Its full meaning may not yet be exhausted by what has already taken place, but the interpretation that makes the fourth beast mean the Roman power seems the best one. This is accepted in accordance with the general view that the book is prediction and not history symbolized.

Ch. 8. The general thought of this vision is also one of conflict and desolation. It was in part interpreted to Daniel, in part was left obscure. Daniel himself was overcome by the terribleness of what he saw. This is also regarded as including the Roman power.

Ch. 9. Daniel studied the Scriptures of the former prophets and saw the promise of restoration that God had made. And now he prays that the promise may be fulfilled. He confesses that the affliction that had come upon his people was just, for they had sinned. But he prays that the anger of Jehovah may be turned away from his people. While he prayed the answer came. Gabriel assures the prophet that there shall be desolation, and an end of desolation. The Messiah shall come, and shall be cut off. The length of time is given in terms whose meaning has been disputed. Many attempts have been made to determine from these prophecies of Daniel the date of the fulfilment of God's purposes. It seems to have been left for the event itself to solve.

Chs. 10 to 12 belong together. There is no part of the book more puzzling than this. It is to be noted that the events described took place after Cyrus had given the decree that the Jews might return to build the temple. There is no account of this in Daniel. It is thought that the first chapters of Ezra were originally a part of this book.

The very minute description of the conflict between the powers lends support to the view that it is really a history of what had already taken place in the reign of Antiochus, intentionally made obscure. But the book in general professes to be prophecy, not history. In ch. 12 the revelation given to Daniel goes far beyond what occurred in the Grecian period. It is declared that the distant future is included in the view presented.

Daniel was not told all that should be, but was assured that in the end it would be well for God's peo-

ple, that they would be delivered, and that he himself would stand in his lot at the last. Not only is there the comforting thought that God would care for his people as a whole, but the individual would not be lost sight of.

NOTE—*The Interpretation of Daniel*

A fuller statement seems needed about the different interpretations of this book. What may for convenience be called the traditional view accepts the historical trustworthiness of the narratives, as having been written by Daniel himself, and believes the dreams and visions to have been actual facts. It takes the contents to be prophetic of future events, as the book itself claims. The other view is that the book was produced in the time of Antiochus, and that it only intends to give events already past or conditions then present, but gives these in the form of symbols and allegories. The chief reason for this view is that we do not find other apocalyptic writings in the Old Testament, and that it is not probable that such minute details would have been predicted and so exactly fulfilled. It is said that it was not unusual for writers to place the name of another as the author of their work. This has not been proved. The reader is referred to the articles cited for a full discussion of the subject.

V

HOSEA

Parallel reading: 2 Kings 9 to 17; Amos; Jonah; Ezekiel 23.

1. Date and Occasion

IN the title of the book the time of the prophecy is put during the reign of Jeroboam of Israel, where the prophet worked, and of four kings of Judah, Uzziah to Hezekiah. These are named probably to help indicate more definitely the character of the times of Hosea. Jeroboam died about 745 B. C., and it is likely that Hosea began his career in the latter part of this reign. It is not certain how late he continued to prophesy. Hezekiah of Judah ascended the throne not before 726.

Hosea thus belongs to the Assyrian period. The fall of Samaria was not far in the future. (722.) The reign of Jeroboam was a remarkable one because of the extensive power reached by Israel under this king, and because of the excessive wickedness that resulted from the luxury of the times. The sway of Israel had been no wider at any time since the reign of Solomon. The Syrian power was checked, and Assyria had been going through one of her periods of decline in power. The Israelites were rich and living in ease. They gave themselves up to the gratification of sensuous appe-

tites. They became greedy for gain, and selfish avarice ruled everywhere. They forsook Jehovah even more completely than they had before, and adopted all forms of idolatry. Crime of every sort prevailed, and the greedy rich used their strength to oppress the defenseless poor. It would not be easy to exaggerate the depth of wickedness reached by the Israelites at this time. The two chief national characteristics were idolatry and oppression.

In studying Hosea it must also be kept in mind that the punishment so long threatened was near at hand. For centuries the sins of the people had been accumulating. There were no prospects of reform. Israel was confronted by destruction, though she refused to see it.

Assyria was about to enter upon that last great period of empire sway under the reign of Tiglath-pileser III. Had Israel remained faithful to Jehovah she might have escaped this terrible power, but she was to be swept from her land within a few years.

2. The Chief Work of Hosea

Although the northern tribes had separated from the kingdom of Judah, and established a kingdom of their own, they still called themselves the people of Jehovah, and continued to be treated as such. Their use of the name of Jehovah seems to have been little more than a formal title to distinguish themselves from the nations worshiping other gods, for they had adopted almost all forms of idolatry, while they kept the name of Jehovah. During most of the history of the kingdom of Israel the prophetic class was active in

the endeavor to secure fidelity to Jehovah. These prophets were more numerous in the north than in the south. Elijah and Elisha belonged to Israel, the northern kingdom. The tribes of the north were not cut off from being God's chosen people when they revolted from Rehoboam. Jehovah's care over them and love for them were constantly manifested.

The work to which Hosea was called was that of reproving, condemning, threatening. He shows that Israel's condemnation is all the more certain, and clearly just, because they have despised the love of Jehovah which had been so abundant. Hosea was not only to threaten the Israelites with the punishment that was at hand, but was especially to show that this chiefly resulted because they had despised God's love. Thus his work was to warn and to interpret, and both the warning and the interpretation were for the permanent teaching that God loves man, and that he will punish sin.

3. The Chief Thought of Hosea

Hosea has been called the prophet of love. He does make prominent the fact of Jehovah's great love for his people, but the most of his book is devoted to the description of the sins of the Israelites and the punishment that would come. The love of God is used as a background for destruction, and the destruction would be all the greater because the love was so great.

The figure of speech that appears so often and so prominently in Hosea is that of the marriage relation. Jehovah is the husband, Israel is the wife. The husband loved; the wife was untrue. The spiritual adultery

of Israel would be punished by exile. But Jehovah would take his people back in spite of their faithlessness, just as Hosea was commanded to love a woman who was an adulteress.

The principal truths that are found in Hosea occur in other prophets, though Israel's sinning against the love of God is more emphasized here. So the figure of the marriage relation is used by other prophets, but it is more prominent in Hosea.

4. General Style of Hosea's Writings

It is very likely that what we have in this book is for the most part abstracts of the addresses of the prophet. The style is exceedingly abrupt in places, and there is great difficulty in determining the connection of the thought. In part, it must be remembered that we have prophecies that belong to a number of years, and are not to expect a continuous thought through the book. Sometimes the present chapter divisions do not correspond to the real divisions of thought. Where the thought seems to be continuous, and is yet difficult to understand, it is often most helpful to seek the general course of the thought, and then determine the meaning and connection of each part. This often requires much study and careful thinking. In places the prophet changes to a thought that is suggested by some word or phrase that he has used in a different sense. The connection can be discovered, but it is not obvious. There is an illustration of this in ch. 7. The figure of the oven gives the ideas of heat, bread, eating, then the cake not fit for food, and the people eaten, devoured by the heathen.

5. The Chief Divisions of the Book

Only two divisions are evident: chs. 1 to 3, which are connected with the account of the marriage of the prophet; and chs. 4 to 14. This part of the book is not clearly divisible into minor parts. It is all of the same general character, and could all have been delivered at one time. Little help can be got from any attempt to group some of the chapters together.

6. The General Meaning of These Divisions

The account of the marriage of the prophet mentioned in ch. 1 is differently interpreted. Some think the marriage was actual; some think it an allegory. Most of those who think it actual believe that the woman Hosea married was either bad before he married her or became bad afterwards. Then ch. 3 is understood as showing that his wife left him, became the slave of another, and he bought her back at the command of Jehovah. Many of the reasons for this view are far-fetched. The slave idea is got from the claim that according to Exodus the price of a slave was thirty shekels, and according to 2 Kings 7 : 18 barley was worth a half-shekel per measure, and it is estimated that the woman Hosea bought cost thirty shekels, one half in money, the other in barley.

There is really no evidence that Hosea's wife was a bad woman either before or after her marriage. It is clear from the context that the expression used in connection with her is suggested by the wicked conduct of the people. The children are named, just as were Isaiah's, in order to teach the apostasy of Israel, and

not because of anything wrong in them or in their mother, so far as the account shows. (See Isa. 7 : 3 ; 8 : 3 ; See Hastings' H. D. B., art. "Hosea.")

The idea of the faithless wife, meaning Israel, in ch. 2 is very full of meaning. The people had forsaken Jehovah and turned to Baal. They thought what they possessed was given by Baal as a reward for service. God says by the prophet that he will take away what he has given that Israel may realize that all came from him, and that they may turn back to him. This gives the key to the teaching of the book: Israel has been faithless, and punishment will be sent to bring back Jehovah's people to himself. The certainty of the restoration is given along with the threat.

The general thought in chs. 4 and 5 is the excessive wickedness of the people, and the certainty of punishment. In most of this part the priests are regarded as leaders in sin. When they seek help from Assyria instead of from Jehovah, it will only result in a greater punishment. It was Jehovah who had bruised, and he only could deliver, or bind up. This pair of terms often occur together.

Words of confession and repentance are put into the mouths of the sinning people in the beginning of ch. 6. The rest of the chapter shows that the breaking of the covenant caused the desolation that was coming. And ch. 7 continues the same thought. They had sunken to the lowest depths of sin. They would be devoured. They might fly to Egypt or Assyria for help; they would be taken like birds in a net.

The trumpet sounds the alarm in ch. 8. An invader is coming like an eagle, or vulture, swooping down

upon the nation. Instead of their idols saving them, they would be the cause of their destruction. The heathen to whom they look for help would devour. They treated with contempt the laws that God wrote for them, and so far as they have observed the law it was mere form. So instead of the sacrifices securing a removal of sin, their iniquity would still be remembered.

Ch. 9 contains threats of exile. They shall return to a condition of captivity, such as they experienced in Egypt, hence that country is here named, though it is declared that they shall go to Assyria. The great love of Jehovah for the people of Israel at the beginning of her course is here expressed. But all that was attractive shall perish.

In ch. 10 the course of thought is as follows: Israel has sinned in proportion to her prosperity; altars are many, and shall be destroyed; the very idols men trusted in shall be carried off with the rest; they have sinned from the first as at Gibeah. In ver. 10 the reference is probably to the two calves set up for worship. This suggests the figure of a heifer plowing, and this, the figure of sowing and reaping.

Ch. 11 starts with the thought that Jehovah had loved the people from the beginning, and had been calling to them ever since they came out of Egypt. He had been tenderly holding them. But because of their sins they shall go away into exile. The threat made long before that the land should be like the cities of the plain, shall now be fulfilled. Yet afterwards they shall be gathered again because of God's great love and unswerving purpose.

The thought in ch. 12 is the weakness and poverty of the Israelites in their origin, as illustrated by the history of their ancestor Jacob, the goodness of God shown in all that he had done for them, and the punishment that shall result from their sin.

So in ch. 13 the wickedness of Israel in turning to worship idols is put in strong contrast with the fact that Jehovah had taken the people for his own, and there was no other that could help. The expression in v. 14 is better understood as a threat than a promise, because all the context is threat. Death and the grave are summoned to destroy.

After all the terrible threats in the most of the book, the promise of the wonderful favor of God in ch. 14 is all the more emphatic. They will turn from their false gods, and Jehovah will love them freely. The beautiful figures of the lily and the Lebanon are used to portray the blessed condition of Israel once more faithful to Jehovah.

VI

JOEL

Parallel reading: 2 Kings 11, 12; 2 Chronicles 23, 24; Ezra; Nehemiah.

1. Date and Occasion

THE date of Joel is not given in his book, and it can be decided by internal evidence only. There are two chief views concerning it: some think it to belong to the time of the minority of Joash king of Judah, while Jehoiada the priest was acting as regent, others that it belongs to the post-exilic period. The arguments for these views will be found in the dictionaries and commentaries.

The teaching of the book is so general in character that it does not depend upon the historical occasion of the prophet. Its meaning remains the same whatever date be accepted as correct.

The special occasion of the prophecy was the severe devastation of the land by locusts as a punishment for the sin of turning away from Jehovah. The warning that a worse calamity would come unless the people repented, was heeded. Then the calamity and the blessings promised suggest the more terrible day of Jehovah and greater spiritual blessings.

2. The Chief Work of Joel

Like almost all the other prophets the work of Joel was to induce the people to repent. It is remarkable

that no specific sin is named as being the cause of the calamity that had come. It seems merely that in some way the people had turned away from Jehovah. We might suppose that if they had actually fallen into idolatry, it would have been distinctly mentioned. Unlike what was true of the effect of the messages of the other prophets, Joel's warning was heeded; the people repented, and that gave occasion to the prophet to predict that they would receive abundant blessings from Jehovah, among them the overthrow of their enemies.

3. The Chief Thought of the Book

All the contents of this book may be connected with the term "judgment." The locusts had been sent as a judgment, but a worse one would come if the people did not repent; they could avert it if they did. Then the idea of judgment is presented in the prediction of the gathering of all the nations who had shown enmity to Jehovah that they might be judged in the valley of judgment. Such judgment would result in punishment coming upon the heathen, but blessings upon God's people. Both the locust devastation and the future judgment predicted are associated with the term "day of Jehovah." With this there is always the idea of punishment.

4. The Divisions of the Book

There are two clear divisions: (1) Ch. 1 : 1 to 2 : 17; and (2) 2 : 18 to 3 : 21. In the first division the people of all classes are aroused to the greatness of the calamity that had come, and that might be

still worse. The extent of the devastation is described in vivid terms, and the people are urged to repent. The thought is clear, the style simple.

In the second division, it seems best to understand that the repentance had taken place, rather than to suppose that the prophet assumed that the people would repent. Here we have the answer of Jehovah, promising first every temporal blessing, especially such as would result from the rain that had been sent to end the drought that accompanied the locust calamity. Then spiritual blessings are promised, the greatest being the gift of the Spirit of God, by which the hearts of the people would be refreshed as the ground had been by the rain, and they would all show their close relation to God by the signs common in Old Testament times, dreams and visions.

5. The Chief Teaching of the Book

The fact that God will punish for sin is taught. That some physical calamities were sent as judgments in Old Testament times is also taught. The Israelites could know that the locusts were sent as a judgment because the prophet of God said so. Such judgments were for the purpose of teaching. (I Cor. 10 : 11.) We may not understand calamities as judgments now, because the period of teaching culminated with the coming of Christ.

Joel teaches that God readily forgives when his people repent. The blessings that had been withheld came, it would seem, quickly after the prayer.

The term "day of Jehovah" occurs in Joel for the first time, and it means here, as always, a time of judg-

ment. In the second part of the book the day was one of threatening to the heathen only. A distinction is made between God's people and all others, and here it is determined by nationality. The heathen are sinners and will be punished; God's people are righteous, and will be blessed.

The promised giving of the Spirit of God was not fulfilled till the day of Pentecost, when it only began to be fulfilled.

The whole of the book is very simple and the thought easily followed.

VII

AMOS

Parallel reading: The same as for the book of Hosea, and 2 Chronicles 26.

1. Date and Historical Occasion

AMOS prophesied about 750 B. C., while Jeroboam was king of Israel, and Uzziah king of Judah. His work came before that of Hosea, though the occasion of both was practically the same. His home was in Judah, but he prophesied in Israel, being sent there with a special message.

The further statement that the time was two years before the earthquake is supposed to refer to the fulfilment of a threat found in his prophecy. (Ch. 8 : 8 ; 9 : 5.)

The marked prosperity of the reign of Jeroboam of Israel led to luxury, greed, sensuousness, oppression, religious indifference. Hence Amos was sent from the care of his flocks to condemn Israel, and tell of the imminent punishment.

The purpose in naming the time of a prophecy seems to have been to give aid to understand it. The mention of the reign of Uzziah was probably because the success of that king too led to conditions in Judah similar to those in Israel, and shows how Amos was at times led to include Judah within the scope of his threat.

The northern kingdom began 935 B. C., and when Amos delivered his message the fall of the kingdom was less than thirty years away. These two hundred years had been a period of unbroken sinning. Every king of Israel followed in the wickedness of the first. The longsuffering of God that had spared his people so many years was about to end, so far as that kingdom was concerned. Amos was to sound the alarm.

2. The Chief Work of Amos

There are not sufficient reasons for believing that any parts of this book were added after the first visit of Amos to Bethel. He had one message to deliver. An attempt was made to prevent this, but it was not successful. The prophet himself says he went to Bethel to prophesy because Jehovah sent him. It was not because he had seen the wickedness that prevailed, and was therefore moved to speak. It was not because he was accustomed to simpler living in his tent at Tekoa, and was envious of the splendid houses of the wicked Israelites. He did not go to deliver a message that would have occurred to any one who looked at the state of things, and who would easily see that the end of such a course could be ruin only. The kingdom of Israel was never greater and more powerful than it was at the very time that Amos went to tell them that utter destruction was at hand.

The power and wealth of Israel made the powerful and the rich feel secure. The most cruel oppression was practised to satisfy greater greed. The chief thing that Amos had to do was to condemn this greed, and to warn the oppressors of their impending doom.

The sin of idolatry is also condemned by Amos, but most stress is put upon the oppression of the weak by the strong.

3. The Chief Thought of Amos

Almost all of this prophecy is taken up with condemnation and threat. There is comparatively little of promise found in the book. This is so clearly the case that some claim that what promises we do find must have been added by another, as they are not in accord with the style and general subject of Amos. His dominant thought is, not only destruction, but destruction imminent. It is as near at hand as the enemy is when the alarm trumpet is heard. We may suppose that the danger would have been averted even at this late day if Israel had turned from sin and served Jehovah. But Amos seems to see no prospect of such turning. The end has come.

It cannot be maintained, however, that any promise of restoration was out of harmony with the purpose of Amos, that the assurance of mercy was inconsistent with the message of punishment. If we accept the fact that God had chosen the people of Israel in order that through them he might make known his purpose of redemption; then such people must be holy, and if they sin they must be punished, not to destroy them, but to chastise them. God's purpose was not to be thwarted by the failure of Israel to obey. There must be then ultimate favor; restoration must follow exile; blessing must follow punishment. If Amos or any other prophet did not speak of this aspect of the course of God's dealings with his people, he must yet have known

of it, and believed in it. And as this assurance of permanence was as ancient as the origin of God's people, no prophecy was too early to include the thought.

4. The Divisions of the Book

While the contents of this book form one prophecy, delivered at one time, they may yet be divided for convenience of study into two chief divisions, besides an introduction, and a few verses of promise at the close.

Chs. 1, 2 form the introduction, giving the general thought that God is coming to punish.

Chs. 3 to 6. Three of these chapters begin with the same words, and the general thought of all is, sins that have made punishment certain and near.

Chs. 7 to 9. The main thought of this division does not differ from that of the preceding, but it is here presented in connection with visions that Amos had.

Ch. 9 : 11-15. These closing verses contain the promise of the restoration of God's people and the blessings that should come to them.

5. The Chief Teaching of These Divisions

Amos takes as a sort of text for his entire prophecy the words of Joel 3 : 16,

The Lord will roar from Zion,
And utter his voice from Jerusalem.

The thought is, God will come to punish sin. Amos shows that this will be true, not only in case of the surrounding heathen nations, but also of Judah, and especially of Israel. It is with Israel that he is particu-

larly concerned. But his teaching is that sinners will be punished whoever they are. The heathen shall be punished for hostility to God's people; Judah, because they have despised the law of Jehovah; Israel, for their wickedness.

The repetition of the same phrases in these successive threats was not due to a lack of ability in Amos, but it gave terrible emphasis to his words. The sin of Israel is seen to be all the greater because of what God had done for them. In this introduction Amos declares that the sinner shall not escape.

In the first part of chapter 3 the series of questions show that the prophet has come up to Bethel by the appointment of Jehovah, and he has been sent to warn of danger, for when God sends a judgment upon a city he sends a prophet to interpret it as such. When the lion roars, when the trap springs, when the trumpet sounds, the danger is at hand. The sin that deserved such punishment was so great that even heathen Egypt and Philistia would be astonished at it.

The first part of ch. 4 seems to have been addressed to the wives who were leaders in their husbands' oppression. Their selfish greed shall be fully punished. Then follows a list of a number of chastisements in the past which had not wrought repentance, hence a greater shall now come.

In ch. 5 there is exhortation and promise mingled with threat. Where joy had been there should be wailing. If they sought to flee, they would only run into another danger. In v. 18 we have a thought suggesting the book of Joel. As already stated, that prophet showed that the day of Jehovah would be dark to the

nations only, while Israel would be blessed. These wicked Israelites in the days of Amos seem to be resting in that belief, as though they were safe in sinning. Amos teaches that they will be punished as well as the heathen. Their offerings to Jehovah were not acceptable, coming from wicked hearts. What God demanded was righteousness, justice toward their fellows. From their first days in the wilderness they had turned away from Jehovah. Captivity then is sure.

Ch. 6 shows how completely the Israelites had given themselves up to sensuous gratification. They thought no harm could reach them. They were secure. The leaders are here addressed. But they shall be the first to go into captivity. The desolation shall be complete.

In the second part, beginning with ch. 7, there are a series of visions, the first two indicating punishments that had been sent in the past, which were stopped before the people were utterly consumed. The third vision, that of the plumbline, differs from the former in teaching that God would no longer pass by their sins. The test was to be put to the people, and they must meet it, or be destroyed. The basket of summer fruit of the fourth vision, ch. 8, has the same meaning, but is still more significant. In the Hebrew the word for "summer fruit" and the word for "end" have nearly the same sound.

The attempt of the priest of Bethel to stop Amos from his task gave occasion for the prophet to show why he had journeyed from his home to deliver such severe messages against the northern kingdom. God had sent him.

The wicked greed of the Israelites is especially

shown in the eighth chapter, in their selling to the poor, and even selling them if they could not pay what they owed for a pair of sandals. Hence the earthquake, darkness, and destruction. God then would not hear their cry.

In ch. 9 the altar is smitten, the worshipers cut down by the sword. None shall escape by flight. They thought themselves the people of Jehovah because he brought them from Egypt, so they were safe. But God had caused the other nations also to migrate from one country to another. Israel was to be different in conduct, but they were not, and Israelite sinners must die like others.

Amos did not close his message with darkness. He added a bright promise of hope. Beginning at ver. 11 of ch. 9 we have in few words a remarkable prediction of the restoration and blessing of God's people. The nations would seek Jehovah. (See the quotation in Acts 15 : 17.) The time of captivity would end. God's people should be planted in their land, and not be pulled up again.

VIII

OBADIAH

Parallel reading: 2 Kings 8 : 16-24; 2 Chronicles 21 : 5-17; 2 Kings 25; Jeremiah 52. Compare a similar prophecy in Jeremiah 49 : 7-22.

1. Date and Historical Occasion

SOME think that Obadiah prophesied during the reign of Jehoram king of Judah, when the Edomites rebelled against the authority of Jehoram, and withstood his attack upon them, about 845 B. C. There is more reason for taking the view that the book belongs to the time immediately after the fall of Jerusalem. (586.) Some of the peoples around Judah had aided the army of Nebuchadrezzar in subduing Judah a few years before. (2 Kings 24 : 2.) It may be easily seen that Edom would be glad to share in the despoiling of her old enemy and former ruler. Edom itself afterwards was invaded by enemies, and ceased to exist as an independent people in the days of the Maccabees.

2. The Theme of the Prophecy

This prophecy is concerned wholly about Edom in its relation to Judah. It is the smallest of the prophets, but contains important truth. Edom is condemned for taking part in the overthrow of Judah. When Jerusalem was spoiled, the Edomites shared in the plunder.

Obadiah condemns them for their hostility, declares their rocky fastnesses will not protect them, predicts an invasion of their land and the utter destruction of the whole people. Connected with the threat against Edom there is a prediction of the establishment and prosperity of God's people.

3. The Course of Thought

Messengers are sent to the other nations to summon them to make war upon Edom, ver. 1. Edom thought herself perfectly safe among her lofty crags, but Jehovah would bring her down, and all her treasures would be carried off, far more thoroughly than robbers would do, or grape-gatherers, ver. 3-6. Edom's former allies will not help her, ver. 7. Her own famous wisdom will utterly fail to deliver her, ver. 8, 9.

The reason for this destruction is that Edom had committed violence upon Judah. When Jerusalem was taken, the Edomites had entered the city with the enemy, had shared the spoil, had rejoiced in Judah's calamity, had stood at the crossroads to intercept any that fled, and delivered all the captives they caught into the hand of the chief enemy, ver. 10-14.

Because the "day of Jehovah," that awful day of punishment, is coming upon all the heathen nations, Edom especially will perish for her act, ver. 15, 16.

In the rest of the prophecy there is presented, in strong contrast with the destruction of Edom, the permanence and wide possessions of Jacob. It is to be noticed that the prophet uses the names of the two brothers, Jacob and Esau, founders of the two peoples, thus calling attention to the original promise of

God that the older should serve the younger, and promising now that Jacob shall continue to hold the possessions given him, which Esau cannot take.

Jacob shall be as fire consuming the whole of Esau as stubble. There shall not be even a remnant left to Edom. In the case of almost all the other enemies of Israel there is something of hope held out that they will after punishment come into the favor of God. Edom shall perish.

The translation of ver. 19 obscures the thought, which is quite expressive. The prediction is that instead of the Negeb ("south") being a district held only in part by Judah, it shall be fully inhabited by God's people, and its inhabitants shall extend their possessions to the land where Esau dwells; the Shephelah ("the plain"), the strip of hilly land lying between the highland of Judah and the plain of Philistia, sometimes occupied by the Philistines, sometimes by Judah, the scene of so many conflicts, shall not only be inhabited by Judah, but its inhabitants shall extend their possessions to the very land of Philistia. So all the upper part of the land, and the east of the Jordan, shall be occupied by the people of Jacob. They shall be far from being dispossessed by Esau.

The language of ver. 20 is obscure, but the general thought is clear. The Israelites who should be taken captive, would again return and possess the whole of the land that God had given to them. When Zion should be inhabited by the saved of God's people, Edom should be condemned. This would result from the great fact that the right of kingship belongs to Jehovah. He is sovereign over nations.

IX

JONAH

Parallel reading: 2 Kings 14 : 23-29; Nahum.

1. Date and Occasion of the Book

THE events connected with the career of Jonah here narrated belong to the time of the prosperous reign of Jeroboam, already considered in connection with the prophecies of Hosea and Amos. It was the time of the excessive wickedness of the Israelites. The king had followed the advice of Jonah in some of his policies, and had extended his dominion thereby. (2 Kings 14 : 25.) The kingdom of Israel had been greatly reduced by the Arameans in the reigns of the immediate predecessors of Jeroboam, but the time for the final punishment of the people had not yet come, and deliverance was wrought through Jeroboam. But his successes led to even greater sin. The former help of Jehovah was forgotten. The obligation to serve God was ignored. The teaching of Elijah and Elisha had grown dim. There were schools of prophets, but they were inefficient to stop the rapid course of apostasy. The doom of Israel was not far away. It was at such a time that the teaching of the mission of Jonah was given. The book of Jonah cannot be rightly understood without considering the condition of Israel at the time.

2. The Purpose of the Book

We have in this book the history of acts of Jonah, rather than a record of the words of Jonah. The book gives Jonah's mission rather than Jonah's prophecies. Yet the book is wholly a prophecy. It was intended to teach the Israelites that God demanded repentance from sin, and that in his great mercy he would forgive if they repented.

Jonah was commanded to go to Nineveh, and predict its early overthrow. Aside from the idolatry that prevailed in Nineveh usually, we do not know what special sin led to this special threat. It may have been worse idolatry, greater immorality, or the intention to advance against Israel to destroy it. The particular occasion of the prophet's mission, so far as Nineveh is concerned, is not given, and it is immaterial.

Jonah's mission to this heathen city was not meant for Nineveh, so much as it was for Israel. The announcement of the prophet that the great city was to be overthrown was made without condition, yet a condition must have been implied, for when the city repented in sackcloth, the calamity was thereby averted. The warning then was to secure repentance, and the repentance brought forgiveness. By this Israel was to be impressively taught that the mercy of Jehovah was great enough to save from destruction even this wicked, heathen city, Israel's greatest foe.

A further purpose of the book of Jonah, though this is not so obvious, may have been to teach that Jehovah was not only sovereign over all peoples, but was concerned about their religious condition, as well

as that of Israel. The people of Israel was not chosen for its sake alone, but that through it the nations of the earth might be blessed, and though the highest form of such blessing would be secured through the Messiah, before he should come the blessing of God's mercy and love might be theirs. The other prophets, as Isaiah, do teach that the Gentiles were to be united with the Jews as one people of God to serve him.

3. Chief Points to Be Noted

Other prophets delivered messages about the outside nations, but they were not sent to preach to them. The reason that Jonah at first refused to go was because he expected the people of Nineveh would be forgiven by God, and that he did not wish. They were Israel's enemies, and Jonah wished them destroyed. He probably would have gone gladly if he had expected his threat would have been fulfilled.

Even the sailors were made to know Jehovah through the presence of Jonah, and their prayer was heard.

The fish that God prepared to swallow up Jonah was of importance, but we should not regard the fish as the chief thing in the book. The great teaching of the book should not be obscured by a flippancy that makes it all an occasion for a joke.

The Ninevites may already have known of the God of the Israelites, and thus were the more ready to heed his prophet's warning. Their repentance was evidently sincere, though it may not have been lasting.

Jonah would gladly have seen the destruction of Nineveh but grieved for the gourd.

X

MICAH

Parallel reading : The same as noted for Isaiah.

1. Date and Historical Occasion

MICAH prophesied in the kingdom of Judah, and belonged to the same period as Isaiah. The conditions that led to the work of Isaiah produced also the messages of Micah. Uzziah, who is named as the first king in Isaiah's career, is not mentioned in the title of the book of Micah, but it is not probable that Isaiah had been engaged in his work very long when Micah entered upon his work. The wickedness of the people, idolatry, oppression, crime of every sort, the failure of the king, all these led Micah also to condemn and threaten. The character of his work was thus determined by the conditions of his time.

2. The Chief Thought of the Book

The controlling ideas in the book of Micah are very similar to those found in Isaiah. There is the condemnation of the people for their sins, the threat that punishment will come upon them, with the promise of the restoration and reestablishment of God's people. The rich ones of the nation are condemned for oppressing the poor; the judges and priests, who should have been leaders in good, are condemned because they have

led in wickedness; the false prophets are threatened because they have led the people into error instead of into right, they promised plenty and security when there was punishment at hand, they professed to speak for God when he had given them no message.

Along with these threats there are bright promises in Micah. There is scarcely any exhortation. It would seem that the prophet saw no hope that the people would turn from their sins, but would go on to the destruction that was before them. But beyond the fall he saw that the kingdom would rise again. His Messianic ideas are not given with such fulness as in Isaiah, but they are at times very clear. He, too, foretells of the coming of the heathen to the service of Jehovah.

In the future that he sees there would be no more idolatry, no more corruption, no apostasy from Jehovah. God's people would be in the light, and the enemy in the darkness.

Micah teaches that God demands right living, rather than sacrifices. Forms of worship are condemned, not because they are wrong, but because they are not enough.

3. The General Style of Micah's Writing

The prophecies of Micah are not so simple as some of the others, Joel, or Amos, but they are more easy to understand than much that we find in Hosea. It is likely that much in the book is made up of abstracts of the original messages delivered orally to the people.

There are instances of what is called paronomasia, giving a thought suggested by the sound of a name. A remarkable instance of this occurs in ch. i. This is

not, however, punning. Isaiah makes some of his thoughts very impressive by the same means. The connection of thought is abrupt in some places, and often there is a sudden change from threat to promise, the two being found mingled, as in Isaiah. A number of cases of references to what Isaiah had been prophesying occur, expressions being used that would be difficult to understand without help from the other prophet. (See 5 : 3; 7 : 11; cf. Isa. 7 : 14; 5 : 5.)

There are allusions to the past history of the Israelites, showing what God had done for them, and references to the laws that had been given. These are not so numerous, however, as they are in Hosea and Amos.

4. Divisions of the Book

The contents of this book are not divided into very clear divisions, yet the following groups may be recognized :

Ch. 1-3. In these chapters there is especially threat against Samaria as well as Judah, description of the devastation of the latter, ch. 1, condemnation of the greedy, and the false prophets, who shall perish, and the rulers who oppress for gain, with the prediction of the utter overthrow of Zion, ch. 2, 3.

Chs. 4 and 5. This division is full of promise. The outcast shall be regathered; enemies shall be overcome, and God's people shall trust in him.

Chs. 6 and 7. Here we find charges of sin, especially oppression and idolatry, and a statement of what God required of his people. The latter part is a repetition of the promised restoration and triumph over enemies.

5. The Course of Thought

Ch. 1 begins with the announcement of the coming of Jehovah to punish the people, with a special threat against Samaria, which had not yet fallen. But the devastation is to extend into Judah. The progress of this is described along with the naming of the cities of Judah affected.

In ch. 2 the rulers who oppress are threatened; their land shall be taken from them; they are to be exiled from Palestine, which shall not be their land of rest, for they have evicted the women from their homes. But a promise is added to this division. (Ch. 2 : 12, 13.)

Ch. 3 begins with the condemnation of the rulers who afflict the poor. Then the prophets who deliver messages only that they may be supported by the people, and who lead the people astray, are assured that they shall enter into darkness, and be put to confusion. On the other hand, Micah is strong and bold to speak the truth. He condemns the leaders, and predicts that their holy city shall be like a field that is plowed.

In the beginning of ch. 4 there is a passage parallel with the one in ch. 2 of Isaiah, a remarkable promise of the worship of Jehovah by all the nations of the earth. This is closely connected with the close of ch. 3, giving the destruction of Zion. Not only shall it be the city of God's chosen people again, but the holy city of all peoples. Meantime desolation shall come, and Zion shall lament, and shall go to Babylon, but afterwards she shall be restored, and shall conquer her enemies.

In ch. 5 there is the specific prediction of the birth-

place of the coming Messiah, Ruler and Defender of God's people, who shall be both a blessing and a power among the nations of the earth. When the people have been restored they will no longer trust in anything but Jehovah. All that has been a source of sin and apostasy will be cut off.

Ch. 6 opens with a form of controversy between God and his people, who are condemned because they have forsaken him, while he has done so much for them. Then ver. 6-12 show what is really required of the people: not sacrifices, but justice and righteousness, instead of the corruption that still prevails. Hence the land shall be made a desolation. They are following in the sins of Israel.

In the first part of ch. 7 the picture of the social condition of Judah is a sad one. There is not one good man left; all are earnestly engaged in wickedness; no one can be trusted. The case seems hopeless. The prophet then looks forward to the time when the punishment shall have passed; when Zion's enemy shall be put to shame; when the hedge about God's vineyard should be built up again, and the decree of its destruction should be afar off, ver. 11; God's people shall come back from captivity, and their enemies shall be subdued. In that day the ancient promises of God will be fulfilled.

XI

NAHUM

Parallel reading: 2 Chronicles 32, 33; Isaiah 10 : 5-27.

1. Date and Occasion

THERE is nothing in the title of Nahum to indicate the time of the prophecy, but the contents of the book help to fix the date within narrow limits. The reference (3 : 8) to No-Amon of Egypt (Thebes), which was overthrown by the Assyrians 664 B. C., would indicate that the fall of that city had already taken place, perhaps recently. Nahum prophesied then after that date. He foretells the fall of Nineveh, which occurred 606 B. C., and thus his prophecy was before that date. Since he was a prophet, and not a historian, we need not suppose that what he describes was already beginning when he wrote. He was in Judah, not at Nineveh, and was not an eye-witness to the invasion of Nineveh which he portrays.

His prediction of Nineveh's fall did not require an actual oppression of Judah by Assyria at the time of his prophecy. Assyria had been an enemy long enough, and her cruel oppression had been burdensome enough, to give a sufficient occasion for the threat of her destruction that Nahum makes.

The conjecture that the first chapter of this book was

not written by Nahum, but belongs to the post-exilic period, lacks certainty at least. Its thought is as appropriate to the time of Nahum as to any later time. Confidence in the hope of the overthrow of the enemies of Judah did not originate late. The book may be studied, so far as its teaching is concerned, as a unit.

Two centuries before the time of Nahum Assyria was a mighty power in the east, and subdued in repeated campaigns the countries lying to the west of her own territory, including Israel in the days of Ahab and Jehu. Then the power of Assyria declined, but rose again (745) under the reign of Tiglath-pileser III. This king overthrew Damascus, and made Judah tributary. (732 B. C.) This was the first time that there had been a direct contact between Assyria and Judah, and except for a part of the reign of Hezekiah, who sought independence of this foreign power, Judah remained subject to Assyria till the dominance of the latter ceased with the death of her great king Ashurbanipal. (625 B. C.)

During this time of Assyria's sway, and while she was yet strong, Nahum tells of her fall.

2. The Theme

All of this prophecy is about the fall of Nineveh. Nahum has no message of condemnation for Judah, nor message of promise, except in the assurance of the destruction of Judah's enemy, which furnishes ground for the one direct word of comfort, ch. I : 13, 15.

The prophecy has in its beginning a summary of the teaching that belonged to the destruction that God would bring upon Nineveh. The first chapter

asserts the might of Jehovah against those who rise up against him, declaring that he will cut them off forever. In form the threat is terrific.

The description of the destruction of Nineveh is exceedingly vivid. The language of this prophecy is recognized as surpassing in sublimity and fire, in intensity of force and picturesqueness. The reader will gain much in ability to realize the meaning of the prophet's words by adopting the present tense instead of the future throughout most of chs. 2 and 3.

The prediction of the fall of the Assyrians by Nahum does not stand alone. Isaiah had declared that they should be destroyed after God had used them to punish his people. (Isa. 10 : 5-27.) Hosea and Amos foretold the captivity of Israel by Assyria, and predicted the return of God's people from exile, which would imply the fall of the Assyrian power.

The reason for this destruction is given by Nahum. It was not that Nineveh had been the seat of idolatry, nor a cruel power destroying the nations merely. Nineveh was condemned because of her hostility to Jehovah. She had imagined evil against Jehovah, 1 : 11. This is the usual ground of condemnation of the heathen found in the prophets.

3. The Course of Thought

Chapter 1 is a psalm setting forth the general thought that Jehovah punishes his enemies, and is a stronghold for those who put their trust in him. He is so almighty that none should hope to withstand him. They who think evil against him shall be like thorns and stubble in the fire. The enemy had put

a yoke upon God's people, but it should be broken, and Judah shall resume her service to Jehovah in peace.

Ch. 2 gives the description of the siege of Nineveh and the reason for it, ver. 1, 2; the tumult inside of the city, ver. 3-5; the fall of the city, ver. 6, 7; the flight of her many inhabitants, ver. 8; the looting of the city, ver. 9, 10; Nineveh, though she had torn her prey like a lion, should perish, ver. 11-13.

In ch. 3, after pronouncing woe upon the city because it was full of bloody plunder, ver. 1, the prophet returns to a most graphic description of the conflict, ver. 2, 3. Then the shame and degradation of Nineveh is threatened because of her idolatrous power, ver. 4-6.

She will have none to help her, and will be as defenseless, and as surely destroyed, as the city of No was in Egypt, ver. 7-10. The fortresses of Nineveh will not protect, those hiding in them will be shaken out as easily as figs from a tree; her men will be weak, the enemy will enter, ver. 11-13. She may prepare for the siege, ver. 14, but they will be destroyed, ver. 15. Those in Nineveh may be as many as swarms of locusts, they will be devoured as leaves are devoured by locusts, ver. 15-17.

The leaders of Assyria lie scattered, sleeping in death; the calamity upon the city is beyond remedy, and all that hear of her fall will clap their hands for joy, because they have all suffered from her, ver. 18, 19.

XII

HABAKKUK

Parallel reading: 2 Kings 21 to 25; 2 Chronicles 33 to 36; Isaiah 10: 5-27.

1. Date and Historical Occasion

HABAKKUK prophesied probably about 605 B. C. In the former part of that century the reign of Manasseh had been excessively wicked. Reforms had been instituted by Josiah, but the people were not turned back to Jehovah in faithfulness. They continued in sin. Idolatry was prevalent. After the death of Josiah (608), the condition of Judah grew more hopeless. The king Jehoiakim led his people into deeper wickedness. The apostasy of the chosen people was more complete than ever before.

The Assyrian power had come to an end practically with the death of the great king Ashurbanipal. Nineveh, the Assyrian capital fell. (606.) The Babylonians had been an important power in the east for centuries. They had opposed the sway of the Assyrians, and had been conquered by them many times during the last period of Assyria's greatness. (745-625.) After they had destroyed Nineveh, the Babylonians succeeded the Assyrians as masters of all Asia, including Palestine. The Egyptian power was checked, and their army driven back to their own land. Judah,

subject to Egypt after Necho's victory, now was to become subject to Babylon.

Just before the advance of the Babylonians to grasp dominion over Palestine, Habakkuk was troubled because God did not punish his people for their wickedness. He was perplexed because the sins of Judah seemed a matter of indifference to Jehovah. His prophecy contains this thought and the answer to it.

2. The Chief Thought

As already indicated, there is first the complaint of the prophet that sin is allowed to go unpunished. God answers him that the people shall be punished by the Babylonians. The terribleness of this foe is described, and the certainty of punishment by them asserted.

This threat gives the prophet further trouble. How can it be that God will allow these heathen to triumph over his people, since they are worse than the Jews. It cannot be just that the more wicked shall be victorious over the less wicked, and utterly destroy them.

The answer to this is, the punishment will be with discrimination. The just shall live by his faithfulness, or faith, and the Babylonians themselves shall be destroyed because of their wickedness.

All this part of the prophecy is given in the form of a dialogue between the prophet and his God. Chapter 3 is a psalm of praise to Jehovah for all his wonderful interventions on behalf of his people in the past, when he had displayed his majesty and terrible power. The mighty power of God makes even the prophet tremble, but he closes his psalm with a declaration of the

fact that whatever comes he has the utmost confidence in God who is his strength and Saviour.

The general truth of this prophecy, that God would use the outside heathen to punish his people, and afterwards destroy these heathen, is found also in the passage cited in Isaiah, ch. 10 : 5-27. The fact that the heathen power was accomplishing the will of Jehovah did not relieve them from the guilt that resulted from an act that their own wickedness prompted them to do. A distinction must be recognized between God's purpose in an act and the motive of the agent. (Cf. Acts 2 : 23; 4 : 27, 28.)

3. The Course of Thought

The prophet asks how long he must continue to cry to God about violence that he sees about him without getting an answer. Everywhere wrong prevails, and there is no judgment, 1 : 1-4.

God answers that he is about to work a wonderful thing, till now incredible: he will raise up the cruel, swift, dreadful Chaldeans, and they shall swoop down upon Judah like an eagle, 1 : 5-11.

In view of this threat, the prophet appeals to the justice of God. How can he see the wicked devour those more righteous than himself? He further recalls the cruel progress of the Chaldeans as they plunder the nations at will. He waits for God's answer, 1 : 12 to 2 : 1.

The word that is returned to the prophet he is to write upon tablets, that it might be clearly seen that God had foretold the destruction when it should come upon them, 2 : 2, 3.

The most significant truth of the prophecy is given in 2 : 4 : The just would not be destroyed. Two readings of this have been urged as correct: that of the common version, "the just shall live by his faith," and "the just by his faithfulness shall live," i. e., those who remain faithful to God, and are thereby just, shall not perish in the destruction by the wicked Chaldeans. Paul uses the words in the former sense (Rom. 1 : 17), the original Hebrew favors the latter.

Beginning with 2 : 5, there follows a description of the devastation wrought by the Chaldeans, as they conquered and plundered all nations. Successive woes are pronounced upon them for their selfish wickedness, with a threat that they themselves shall be destroyed. Idols cannot deliver them, ver. 5-20.

The whole of ch. 3 is a psalm growing out of the revelation which God had made to the prophet.

In ver. 2 there is the prayer that God would carry on his work in his people, that he would show mercy, and not wrath only.

Then from ver. 3 to ver. 15 there is a magnificent description of God's manifestation of his power on behalf of his people during the past history of Israel from the time that he brought them from Egypt. There is something like this in the Sixty-eighth psalm.

This thought makes Habakkuk tremble, but he expresses his supreme confidence in the midst of any calamity that might come. His trust is in the God whose might is terrifying to the wicked, but comforting to those who fear him.

XII

ZEPHANIAH

Parallel reading: 2 Kings 22 to 25; 2 Chronicles 33 to 36.

1. Date and Occasion

ZEPHANIAH prophesied in the reign of Josiah, who was on the throne of Judah from 639 to 608 B. C. Manasseh, the grandfather of Josiah, ruled for fifty-five years, and his reign was the most wicked of any of Judah's kings. He was taken captive to Babylon, and after being held for a time was allowed to return to his home. He humbled himself before Jehovah, but it does not seem that he accomplished any considerable reforms. At any rate his son Amon led the people in the worst forms of idolatry.

Josiah was one of the best kings of Judah, and he attempted to correct the evil practises of his people, but the nation had become so sunken in sin, they had so long rebelled against Jehovah, that the punishment, long before threatened against them, could not be averted by what goodness there was in Josiah's reign. Judah's fall was not only sure, it was near.

The exact date of Zephaniah's prophecy cannot be determined. It was probably in the early part of Josiah's reign. Nineveh was not yet destroyed. It would seem that the reforms of Josiah were not yet

begun. The book of the law was not yet recovered from the rubbish of the temple rooms. (2 Chron. 34 : 15.) This prophecy would thus come after that of Nahum, and before that of Habakkuk. In purpose it is not the same as either of these two, though it was the outgrowth of the same general conditions.

2. The Chief Thought

The book of Zephaniah is brief, but it has been described as a compendium of all prophecy. There are in it threats of most severe punishment for sin, not only upon the Jews, but upon all the nations; and there is the strongest assurance of the restoration of God's people, and of the favor of God to be shown to those of other nations who shall serve him.

The thought of punishment is centered in the declaration that God had prepared a sacrifice, meaning here death for sin. It is the "day of Jehovah," a day of darkness, as it was described in Joel 2 : 2, which Zephaniah quotes. The punishment will fall upon Judah, Jerusalem being made desolate. Any that attempt to hide from the calamity will be searched out with lanterns. None of the wicked will escape, though the righteous may be hid from the anger.

But the threat includes the outside nations as well as Judah. In this part of the prophecy a distinction is made between the people of God and their enemies, but there is little of promise to Judah in this threat against the nations. Jerusalem is then severely condemned because in her intense wickedness she did not heed the warning given in the punishment of the heathen.

But the prophecy is not all threat. There is also bright promise. Even the nations shall be converted to Jehovah as a result of their chastisement, and shall serve him. But especially his chosen shall be restored from all the nations whither they shall be scattered. They shall enjoy to the full the blessing of God's presence, and they themselves shall be a holy people. Zephaniah's exhortation to Zion to rejoice is as earnest and as full of gladness as any that we find in Isaiah.

It is thought by some that the calamity that the prophet foretells as coming upon all the nations was the invasion of the Scythians. This view is taken mainly because these terrible hordes did sweep over this part of the world about the time of the prophecy of Zephaniah, and that he did not know of any other power that could so punish. The prophet was not, however, guessing, nor telling what any other could have told as well, he was uttering what was revealed to him by the Spirit of God.

3. The Divisions of the Book

The divisions of this prophecy are quite clear and distinct from each other. They are as follows:

Ch. 1 consists of a threat of punishment that is to come upon Judah. The whole land is to be utterly consumed, all the inhabitants removed.

Ch. 2 : 1 to 3 : 7 contains a second division of the prophecy. It begins with an exhortation to repent and escape the wrath of God, which is to be manifested against the wicked nations lying about Judah, whose destruction would be a warning to God's people that they would incur the wrath of God themselves, since

they had sinned although so much light had been given them, and they had been so favored of God.

Ch. 3 : 8-20. This division is in marked contrast with the preceding. The main thought is the restoration of God's people. There is also the prediction that the heathen nations will turn to Jehovah after they have been punished. This, however, is barely touched upon. Special emphasis is put upon the glorious condition of God's people as they are brought back from their dispersion. Jehovah will dwell among them.

4. The Course of Thought in These Divisions

In ch. 1 the thought is not difficult to follow. The threat is made that all the wicked are to be cut off from the land of Palestine. The sins committed by the people are named, and under the figure of a sacrifice the death of the sinners is foretold. The destruction is to be great, the goods of the people shall be carried off, and their houses destroyed. Here again we have the term "day of Jehovah," and the description of it seems to be quoted from Joel. The wicked inhabitants shall not buy themselves free by their gold.

The second division begins with an exhortation to gather themselves that they may escape the awful judgment of Jehovah. This is to include all the sinful nations. Here the thought is something like that of Amos. All sinners are to be punished.

Philistia is to be destroyed, and her land occupied by the remnant of the house of Judah.

Moab shall suffer for her reproaching God's people. Cush shall perish.

A special threat is made against Assyria. Her

capital, Nineveh, shall be a place for the flocks of the nomads, and the wild birds shall lodge in her ruins.

In the first seven verses of ch. 3, which belong to this second division, Jerusalem is specially rebuked for her sinning when so favored by God. Her princes, priests, and prophets have been leaders in the people's sin against Jehovah. Their chastisement had not turned them back to their God.

The third division, ch. 3 : 8-20, contains the thought of the restoration of God's people. In the beginning, however, there is the promise of the fact that the heathen will call upon Jehovah. The thought is not dwelt on. The prophet proceeds to the description of the coming back of the scattered people from all nations. The condition of the people when thus restored is described as holy, they will be faithful to God. He will rejoice over them, and they shall be safe from all harm. Instead of Israel being a reproach among the nations, they shall be praised.

XIV

HAGGAI

Parallel reading: Ezra 1 to 6; Zechariah 1 to 8.

1. Date and Historical Occasion

THIS prophet gives the precise date of the prophecies that he delivered. Not only the time in general, but the year and month, and even day of the month. He prophesied in the second year of the reign of Darius, king of Persia. (520 B. C.)

He is one of two prophets belonging to the period after the return of the Jews from the Babylonian exile, the post-exilic period. Cyrus had issued his decree permitting the Jews who wished to do so to return to their own land to build their temple. This was in 536. They began the work the next year (535), but were hindered in it by their neighbors, so that the work ceased altogether. But after Darius became king of Persia, to which power the Jews were tributary, under the influence of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah the temple work was resumed, and was finished in the sixth year of Darius.

The Jews who had come back to their land were not numerous, and for the most part they belonged to the cities and villages scattered throughout Judea. Their original homes were not in Jerusalem. They were poor. They were oppressed by their jealous neighbors.

These conditions account for the fact that they at length not only became discouraged about being able to finish the temple, but became indifferent to the work. They must have acquired some property, for they were able to build houses for themselves, as Haggai says. They did not regard their possessions sufficient to build the temple, however.

It was at such a time, and under such conditions that Haggai prophesied. The people were few; they were oppressed and hindered by enemies; they were poor; they had become discouraged, and they had become indifferent.

The entire work of these two prophets was to meet these conditions.

2. The Theme of the Prophecy

The purpose of the prophet was to arouse the people to the obligation of building the temple, rebuking them for their neglect, and assuring them of success. Evidence of their sin is found in the fact that their crops had failed as a punishment from God. The word of the prophet came to them just after the time of the harvest in the fall. It is probable that their recent crops were poor.

They are assured that they will be blessed in all their possessions if they will enter with zeal upon the work for the Lord. They are also told that means to finish the temple will be furnished by the nations around them.

The prophecy is thus very definite and special. It contains thoughts connected with the more general truths taught by the former prophets. It does not

really add to those truths. The development of prophetic thought had in reality reached its climax in the prophecies of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

3. The Different Messages of Haggai

The first message of the prophet was spoken especially to Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest on the first day of September, 520 B. C. The people are condemned because they think they cannot build the house of God, that the time for that has not yet come, though they can build fine houses for themselves. They are reminded that they have suffered in their crops. There had been drought on the land. They are urged to go to work on the temple.

The people were roused to the work on the twenty-fourth day of the same month.

On the twentieth day of October the prophet gave another message. This also was addressed to the two leaders, though all the people were meant. They are reminded that the prospects of the present building are small compared with the old temple that had been destroyed. But they are assured that the latter glory of the house will be greater than the former, because God will shake all the nations, and they will bring their desirable things, which belong to Jehovah, to make the house glorious. This special promise is to be kept in mind in the study of Zechariah.

On the twenty-fourth day of December, in the winter, the rainy season, perhaps when the work had begun to slacken, the prophet speaks again. He cites a well-known ceremonial law to the effect that anything unclean defiles what it touches, in order to teach them

that their own sin has been the cause of the calamities that have come upon them, and that hitherto they have not heeded the teaching of these calamities. They are now assured that from this very day, when they go to work on the temple, God will bless them.

On the same day the prophet also declared that the enemies would be overthrown.

XV

ZECHARIAH

Parallel reading: The same as for Haggai.

1. Composition of the Book

THERE are two very distinct parts of this book: chs. 1 to 8, and chs. 9 to 14. The difference between the two in style and character of contents is very marked. Neither of these peculiarities would be sufficient, however, taken alone, to decide in favor of diverse authorship. The expression found in ch. 11 : 13 is quoted in Matthew 27 : 9 as having been spoken by Jeremiah. The text in Matthew is accepted as correct. These words do not occur in the present book of Jeremiah. It is remarkable that they are not ascribed to Zechariah, if he was known to be the author of the part of this prophecy in which they occur. Some believe that the book as we have it is a unit; some, that the latter part was by another prophet after the exile, and some, that it belongs to the pre-exilic period. It may have belonged originally to the prophecies of Jeremiah, as would be indicated by the quotation in Matthew, or it may have been written by another Zechariah, otherwise unknown.

Besides the great difference in style, the chief difference between the two parts of the book is in the setting of the thought. Everything that indicates the condi-

tion of the people is in accord with the conditions that obtained before the exile, and the threats of dispersion and the promises of restoration are just such as are found in the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah, and they are of such a character that they would be inappropriate in the days after the Jews had already returned to their land when they had already suffered the captivity threatened.

Without entering fully upon the evidences for the different views already mentioned, in the study of the book here it will be assumed that the second part was not written by Zechariah, but belongs to the pre-exilic times.

2. Date and Historical Occasion

The occasion of this prophet was practically the same as that of Haggai, except that he prophesied later than Haggai. He began his work two months after the first message of Haggai, namely, in the eighth month of Darius's reign, received most of what we have in his book in the eleventh month of the same year, and a further message for the people in the fourth year of Darius. (518 B. C.)

After the work had been resumed, as Haggai had urged, the enemies of the Jews again attempted to prevent them from building the temple. They demanded to know the authority for the work, and when told that it was granted by decree of Cyrus, these enemies sent letters to Darius telling him what these Jews were doing, intimating that damage would result to the king if they continued, and suggested that search be made to ascertain the truth of the claim of the Jews.

The messages from the prophet were probably given after this letter had been sent and before the answer was received. The repeated encouragement that Zechariah gives seems to belong to such a condition.

3. The Theme of the Prophecy

Confining our consideration to the first eight chapters of the book, all the prophecies of Zechariah were intended for the encouragement of the Jews in their work of rebuilding the temple. Haggai had induced them to begin this work. A few days before Zechariah first prophesied, Haggai had assured his people that Jehovah would so shake the nations that they would bring of their wealth to make the temple glorious. The first brief message of Zechariah was intended to warn the people against following the example of their fathers, who had refused to heed the words of the prophets that had spoken to them. Then the visions that Zechariah saw in the eleventh month were wholly intended for encouragement. They seem especially to have been meant to meet objections that would naturally suggest themselves to the Jews, and that would lead them to doubt their ability to complete the temple building.

4. The Meaning of the Different Messages

As already indicated, the first prophecy was a warning to the Jews not to disobey the words of the prophets now, as their fathers had disobeyed the words spoken by the former prophets. It was true that the fathers died and the prophets died, but their dying did not annul the warning given them, the words of the

prophets did not fail, and their threat came upon the fathers before they did die.

The visions that follow seem to have been on the one occasion. All of them belong to the night of the twenty-fourth of February. They are in some respects rather obscure, and have been thought difficult to understand. They are, however, very interesting and very important. Only the meaning of each in general will here be attempted.

Four months before Haggai had promised that the nations would be shaken, and their possessions be brought to aid the Jews. In this first vision of Zechariah, the horsemen report that the nations are not disturbed, all are quiet. Then God is asked how long before the promise will be fulfilled. The answer is that Jehovah is displeased with the nations that are at ease, he will show his jealousy for Jerusalem, the house shall be built. More, not only shall Jerusalem be built, but the cities of Judah shall also be built again because of the prosperity that shall come upon the people of God.

The visions of the horns, representing the powers that scattered the Jews, and of the carpenters, or smiths, that were to overpower the horns, are properly one message. The enemies of the Jews were actively hostile, but their hostility would not prevail.

The Jews who had returned were so few, and particularly those whose homes were in Jerusalem, that there seemed small prospect of being able to accomplish the work. The next vision, ch. 2, is to meet this objection, and to remove such ground of discouragement. Not only shall there be inhabitants enough to fill Jerusa-

lem, but they will overflow the city, so that walls cannot contain them. Those who had not yet returned from Babylonia are called to come home, with the promise that those who had spoiled them should themselves be spoiled. But more even is promised; instead of the people of God being few, many nations would join them, and they would thus become a great host, with Jehovah dwelling among them.

But the Jews had sinned, they had become defiled. Would Jehovah be willing, in reality, so to favor them that they could do this work of temple building? The next vision is to meet this difficulty. (Ch. 3.)

The high priest, Joshua, here is representative of the entire people. He stands clothed with garments that are defiled, emblem of sin. But the garments are removed, and holy garments are put upon him, showing that God removes the iniquity. Special privileges will be granted to them if they keep the charge given them. Joshua and the other priests are declared to be types of One who should come, called Branch. Later, it is declared that he shall build the temple. The work given Joshua to do is under the care of Jehovah, his eyes are upon it, and he will adorn it in its completeness.

The next vision, ch. 4, is to show that the real power by which the work should be accomplished, was not the wealth they might have, nor the ability of the leaders or the people, but the Spirit of God. The lampstand with its oil might not easily indicate this thought, but the interpretation is given by the interpreting angel. The essential thing was the oil for burning. This was abundant, and its supply would be inex-

haustible, as shown by the olive trees, all the time growing the oil, and constantly pouring it forth. The translation "anointed ones" in ver. 14, is not warranted by the Hebrew, nor in accord with the context.

In ch. 5 the two visions, the flying roll and the ephah, seem to be but parts of one, expressing the thought of the removal of wickedness. Although the promise had been given that God would show favor to the people, would forgive their sins, and give them power for their work, they were not to suppose that he was indifferent to wickedness. The flying roll going through the land showed that he would search out all sin, and would punish it. Sinners were not to be left undisturbed in the holy land. The further assurance that the land should be holy is indicated by the ephah in which sin was to be placed, and which was to be carried off to Shinar, which was thought of as the home of wickedness, or the place the people were removed to when they were exiled for their sins.

The last vision, ch. 6 : 1-8, presents again the picture of horses and of chariots. This was to teach the oppressed Jews that their enemies, though now showing opposition to them in their work, should be overcome, and be punished by the power of Jehovah. The chariots mean, at least, conflict and victory.

At another time, which is not definitely given, the prophet was directed to take silver and gold of those who had just arrived from the exiles, and make a crown for the head of Joshua. By this act two offices are represented as inhering in one person: that of priest and that of king. Then the One whose name was "Branch" is again promised, and it is declared that

he will build the temple. Since it had been promised that Zerubbabel should himself finish this stone temple, this further prediction can only refer to the spiritual temple that the Messiah would build. When all these predictions should be fulfilled, it would be known that Zechariah was sent by Jehovah with these messages.

Two years later Zechariah delivered another message. Some men came to the priest and prophets to ask if they were to go on with the annual fasts, of which there were four: one for the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem; one for its capture; one commemorating its burning, and one the death of the governor, Gedaliah. It is not known how long these had been observed.

In the answer they are shown that the fasts were due to their own sin. The calamities that they were commemorating by these fasts came as punishments because they did not heed the warnings of the former prophets. It is to be observed that the words in 7 : 9, 10 are quoted from the former prophets. Then the assurance is given that Jehovah has turned with favor to the people, and with repeated emphasis it is declared that blessings shall be bestowed upon God's chosen people. They are urged to be true, and are encouraged to be strong. The fasts shall be changed to feasts.

5. The General Thought in the Rest of the Book, Ch. 9 to 14

It is not difficult to see what the chief theme of these chapters is, but it is difficult to determine the connection of the thought in some places. The general thought is the overthrow of the world powers, and the establishing of the kingdom of God.

It will be noticed by the reader that the different aspects of this general theme are not presented in one place only, but found in different passages. Some phase of the whole subject is partly given in one connection, then amplified in a later passage.

It will be an advantage to recognize at the outset of an attempt to study this prophecy that there are certain prominent ideas that govern the entire passage, and that these are not placed in view of their chronological relations, as they were historically realized.

In general the succession of principal thoughts may be stated as follows:

(1) Punishment shall come upon the heathen powers, 9 : 1-7.

(2) But Jehovah's King will come to Zion, ver. 8-10.

(3) Israel shall be redeemed from captivity, and conquer her enemies, ver. 11-17.

(4) Because of sin punishment came upon God's people, but they should be redeemed, brought back from their exile, and made strong in their land, ch. 10.

(5) The shepherds of Israel had failed in their task, and were punished; God appoints another, whom the people will not appreciate, but will spurn, so that further evil shall come upon the people, ch. 11.

(6) The nations that come against Jerusalem shall be destroyed, and the people of God shall be protected, ch. 12 : 1-9.

(7) Israel shall lament its rejection of the Saviour, ver. 10-14.

(8) Idolatry and false prophets shall be cut off from the land, 13 : 1-6.

(9) The Shepherd, Messiah, shall be smitten, the people scattered, but gathered again, ver. 7-9.

(10) Jerusalem shall be attacked, but God's people delivered, 14 : 1-5.

(11) Jehovah shall rule in Zion, and there shall be peace, ver. 6-11.

(12) The nations attacking Jerusalem shall be defeated, ver. 12-15.

(13) The remnant among the nations shall worship Jehovah, ver. 16-19.

(14) All then shall be characterized by holiness, ver. 20, 21.

XVI

MALACHI

Parallel reading: Ezra 7-10; Nehemiah.

1. Date and Occasion

WHILE the time of this prophet is not given in the book, it is quite certain that he belonged to about the time of Nehemiah, probably after the reforms undertaken by Nehemiah. Malachi condemns the faults that Nehemiah sought to correct. As he is not mentioned in the book of Nehemiah, his work may have been undertaken a short time after Nehemiah. The Jews were taught by their captivity the evils of idolatry, and did not fall into that sin again after they returned from exile, but they did become indifferent to the commands of God that separated them from the other peoples. They were in danger of losing sight of the fact that they were a special people of God, holding a special relation to him, for a special purpose. They had intermarried with the heathen when Malachi was called to rebuke them for this sin.

The prophets before the exile had predicted, not only the punishment that would come upon the people by captivity, but also their restoration. They had described the glory that should belong to God's people after they should be restored to their land. They had declared that Israel should not only be free from the

power of other nations, but that they should rule over the heathen and be served by them. God's people were to be prosperous, triumphant, glorified.

The Jews dwelling in Judea in the days of Malachi had not seen the fulfilment of these promises. They were a mere province of Persia, paying tribute to this heathen power. They were not even independent, far less predominant. They were despised and oppressed by their neighbors, and they were poor.

The greater part of the Jews thus lost faith in the promises of God, and reached the conclusion that there was no advantage in serving God. Those who did not serve him fared as well as those who did.

2. The Work of Malachi

This prophet had to rebuke the priests, the religious leaders of the people, who by their actions were bringing contempt upon all the religious services. They ignored the distinction between things holy and things unholy, and had become weary of the whole service of Jehovah.

Malachi also had to rebuke those who had divorced their Jewish wives in order to marry wives from the heathen nations. He had to rebuke the people for their sins against Jehovah, their oppression of the weak, their failure to support the temple service, and their ignoring the necessity of right living.

He assures the discouraged, the indifferent, and the sinful that the Messenger of the covenant shall come, but come for judgment, and the difference between the righteous and the wicked will then be acknowledged by those who had said there was no difference.

3. The Thought of the Chief Divisions of the Prophecy

Much of this prophecy is put in the form of a dialogue between the people and God. Charges are made against them, and they answer by asking for the evidence of the sin.

(1) The evidence of God's love for his people, denied by the Jews, is given by the contrast between God's dealings with Esau and Jacob, although they were brothers, and might be expected to be treated alike, ch. 1 : 1-5.

(2) God has not been honored as a father by his people; the priests have treated the altar with contempt, offering diseased animals, ver. 6-14.

(3) The priests are to be punished in order that God's covenant with Levi might be confirmed. It was intended that the priests should teach the people the law, to keep them from sin. These priests had misled the people through their interpretation of the law, ch. 2 : 1-9.

(4) They were brothers, yet had acted treacherously by putting away their Jewish wives, and marrying heathen wives, ver. 10-16.

(5) They are saying God approves of evil, since he does not come to judge the wicked, ver. 17. But the prophet declares that God will come suddenly to judge, and the wicked shall be punished, ch. 2 : 1-6.

(6) It is only God's covenant faithfulness that has saved Israel from destruction, for they have been sinning from the first, and now they are robbing God in withholding the support of his ministers, ver. 6-12.

(7) They say the wicked are blessed, and it does not pay to serve God. But in the coming “day of Jehovah,” when the wicked shall be punished and those who fear God be blessed, it will be seen that there is a difference between serving God and sinning against him, ch. 3 : 13 to 4 : 3.

(8) They are to remember the law given by Moses, and to look for the “day of Jehovah,” which shall be preceded by the coming of the prophet Elijah to turn the hearts of God’s people back to him.



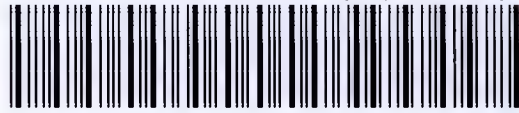
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