

EXPLORE THE BOOK

*A Basic and Broadly Interpretative Course
of Bible Study from Genesis to Revelation*

J. SIDLOW BAXTER

VOLUME FOUR

EZEKIEL TO MALACHI

CONTENTS OF VOLUME FOUR

	PAGE
THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL	7
Studies 78 to 81	
THE BOOK OF DANIEL	47
Studies 82 to 85	
HOSEA, JOEL, AMOS	87
Studies 86 to 90	
OBADIAH, JONAH, MICAH	135
Studies 91 to 96	
NAHUM, HABAKKUK, ZEPHANIAH	195
Studies 97 to 99	
HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH, MALACHI	225
Studies 100 to 103	

**THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET
EZEKIEL (I)**

Lesson Number 78

NOTE.—For this study read the whole Book of Ezekiel through once, but not attempting to read it hurriedly at one sitting. Read it with the chapters grouped as follows:

First, chapters i. to iii., pondering the opening vision and the call of the prophet;

Second, chapters iv. to xxiv., noting that they all refer to Jerusalem;

Third, chapters xxv. to xxxix., noting that they mainly refer to the future and the destinies of various Gentile peoples;

Fourth, chapters xl. to xlviii., which are quite apart, and are wholly occupied with the vision of the final temple and city.

The sum of it (God's sovereignty) lies in this proposition, namely, that the great God, blessed for ever, hath an absolute power and right of dominion over His creatures, to dispose and determine of them as seemeth Him good.

—*Elisha Coles, "A Practical Discourse of God's Sovereignty"*

THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL (I)

IN OUR course of studies we have noted that twelve of the prophetic books are pre-exilic, and five post-exilic. The five post-exilic are, Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. All the others belong to the period *preceding* the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile of the Jews, except, of course, that Jeremiah, the last of the pre-exilic prophets, actually lived to witness that tragic event, and wrote his "Lamentations" as a sad memorial to it.

With the prophet Ezekiel we make a new departure. His book, like that of Daniel which follows it, was written in the period after the Babylonian exile of the Jews had set in. Both Ezekiel and Daniel, however, were carried captive to Babylon some years before the final siege and sack of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.—for there were two earlier and smaller deportations of Jewish captives to Babylon, as we see from 2 Kings xxiv. 8-16; Jeremiah xxiv. 1, and Daniel i. 1-4. These were the first-fruits of that harvest for captivity which the Babylonians eventually reaped even to the gleanings.

Ezekiel Himself

Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, was a priest as well as a prophet (i. 3). He was one of ten thousand captives taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar at the time when Zedekiah, Judah's last king, commenced his miserable reign of eleven years at Jerusalem. This deportation is reported in 2 Kings xxiv. 11-18. Since it coincided with the accession of Zedekiah it must have been eleven years before the final overthrow of Jerusalem; for it was in the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign that the overthrow occurred. We know that Ezekiel must have been among that ten thousand, because he himself tells us, in chapter xl. 1, that "the fourteenth year after the city was smitten" was the twenty-fifth of his own captivity in Babylon—which shows that he had been in Babylon for eleven years before the fall of Jerusalem.

Perhaps, instead of saying that Ezekiel and his fellow-captives were in Babylon, we ought to use the wider term and say that they were in Babylonia, lest it should be imagined that they were actually in the *city* of Babylon. Ezekiel tells us exactly where he was located in his exile, and just when he commenced his prophesying there. His exilic home was at Tel-abib (iii. 15) on the banks of the river Chebar (i. 1). The name, Tel-abib, means "hill of corn ears," and perhaps indicates the fertility of the district. The river Chebar is said to be now known as the *Kabour*. It flowed into the Euphrates north of Babylon city, and was also called *Nar-kabari*, that is, the great canal. Of the Jewish exiles Dr. Joseph Angus says: "These captives were distributed into different settlements throughout Babylonia, forming small communities with a certain organisation and freedom to worship, each in their 'little sanctuary.'" One such colony had been planted at Tel-abib on the Chebar, consisting, as some think, of better-class Jews. Among these the most notable figure was the priest-prophet Ezekiel, whom they evidently respected, but whose words they resisted for the most part, clinging to the false hope of an early return to the land of their fathers.

The Ministry of Ezekiel

Ezekiel tells us that he commenced his prophesying in the fifth year after Jehoiachin's deposition, which, of course, was also the fifth year after Zedekiah's accession (i. 2). This was also the fifth year of Ezekiel's captivity in Babylonia; and it is important to note here that wherever Ezekiel gives the date of his visions or prophecies (which he does thirteen times) he reckons from that outstanding, tragic year of his life when his exile started in Babylonia. He himself makes this clear in chapters xxxiii. 21 and xl. 1. The *latest* date which Ezekiel gives us for any of his prophesyings is chapter xxix. 17—"And it came to pass in the seven and twentieth year . . ." which gives a stretch of twenty-two years from the opening vision in chapter i. If our reading of chapter i. 1 is right, Ezekiel was thirty years of age when he commenced his prophetic ministry to the exiles; which means that he was carried to Babylon when he was twenty-five.

Since Ezekiel began his prophesying in the fifth year after his arrival in Babylon (i. 2), he was exercising his ministry to the

exiles for six years before Jerusalem fell. That is why, in the first twenty-four chapters, there is so much about coming judgment on Jerusalem (for none of the first twenty-four chapters is dated later than the ninth year, whereas it was in the *eleventh* year that Jerusalem fell).

Ezekiel's ministry among the exiles was a very difficult one. A brief consideration of the circumstances will show why. Ominous blows had lately fallen on Jerusalem. Two deportations of Jews to Babylon had already deprived it of the flower of its nobility. Yet instead of reading in these things Jehovah's ultimatum to them to mend their ways or else perish, the idol-mad, vice-intoxicated populace had steeped themselves the more deeply in superstition and immorality. This we saw in our study of Jeremiah.

After the deportation of the ten thousand in which Ezekiel was included, God gave to Jeremiah the sign-message of the good and the evil figs (Jer. xxiv.), the good figs representing those who had been carried away from Jerusalem, and the bad figs, which were *very* bad, those who remained. Yet so senselessly had the people of Jerusalem misconstrued the meaning of that deportation as to flatter themselves that while their now exiled kinsmen were probably being justly enough punished for their sins, they themselves, the spared remainder in the city, were heaven's favourites, to whom the land was given for a possession (see Ezek. xi. 15 and xxxiii. 24).

Other than dreading an imminent expulsion from the land, they persuaded themselves that the Babylonian armies would not return, and that Jehovah's city was inviolate. Undoubtedly this popular delusion was considerably due to the false prophets who dealt their deadly dope in the name of Jehovah (Jer. xxvii. 9; xxviii. 1-11, etc.). It was in vain that Jeremiah told them that their city's fate was sealed (Jer. xxi. 7; xxiv. 8; xxxii. 3-5; xxxiv. 2, 3).

The same mood apparently asserted itself with equal obstinacy among the exiled Jews in Babylonia, among whom Ezekiel laboured. While there would doubtless be some kindred spirits to Ezekiel, who recognised Jehovah's judgments in the calamities that were occurring, and mourned over Zion with contrite hearts (see psalm cxxxvii.), yet the majority clung to their idolatries

and wrong ways (xiv. 4, etc.; xxxiii. 32; see also ii. 4; iii. 7-9). These exiles, also, were permeated by the delusive idea that their captivity would soon be ended, and that Jehovah could never allow Jerusalem, His chosen city, to be ruined. There were false prophets among them, as there were at far-away Jerusalem, who were all the while inculcating this (xiii. 16, 19). It was to counter the influence of these deceivers that Jeremiah wrote his letter to the Jewish exiles in Babylonia (Jer. xxix.), exhorting them to settle down quietly there and seek the good of that land. Note how Jeremiah hits out at the false prophets among the exiles. Read his letter again. Maybe the exiles would have accepted Jeremiah's counsel the more readily but for the persistence of these impostor-prophets, one of whom, Shemaiah the Nehelamite, actually sent a reply to Jeremiah's counsels, suggesting that the priest Zephaniah should imprison Jeremiah as a madman (Jer. xxix. 24-8).

It is certainly clear that there was need for such a prophet as Ezekiel among the exiles, and it is equally clear that his task was a very difficult one. His first task was to disabuse them of their false hope, which required much courage. He was also to interpret to his exiled people the stern logic of their past history. But the rainbow is seen again in the cloud; for Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, had a glorious picture to paint of the after-days, and a consummating vision in which he saw a reunited people, a re-erected temple, and a reorganised worship, and a regenerated Israel.

Probably after the fall of Jerusalem there would be a readier ear to Ezekiel's message. The only other points which we need mention here about him are that he was a married man (xxiv. 16-18), that he evidently had his own house at Tel-abib (iii. 24; viii. 1), that his wife's death, in the ninth or tenth year of their captivity, came as a grievous blow to him (xxiv. 16, 17), and that according to Jewish tradition he was eventually slain by a fellow-exile whose idolatries he had rebuked.

The opening vision and commission of Ezekiel (i-iii) have special relevance for Christian workers. Note the end of the vision, "I saw", "I fell", "I heard". That is ever how prophets are made. But immediately he is "on his face", the Spirit sets him "on his feet" (ii. 2). Let us read, mark, learn!

The "Book" of Ezekiel

Although this Book of Ezekiel is a large one, it presents no obstacles to a clear general analysis. It follows a clear order. Let us glance through it, and note its main features.

First, it is perfectly clear that the opening three chapters belong together. In them we have *the initial vision and Divine commission of the prophet*. Next, it will be seen that all the chapters from iv. to xxiv. are concerned with *God's judgments upon Jerusalem and the covenant people*; and all the dates which Ezekiel affixes to these chapters fall before the overthrow of Jerusalem (i. 2; viii. 1; xx. 1; xxiv. 1). Next, it will be seen that chapters xxv. to xxxix. are all occupied with *the future destinies of the nations*—first of the Gentile nations (xxv.–xxxii.) and then of Israel (xxxiii.–xxxix.). Finally, in chapters xl. to xlviii., we have a wonderful vision symbolically portraying the ideal temple and worship of the ultimate future.

We do not have to look deeply to find the *key idea* and the *focal message* of Ezekiel. They confront us on almost every page. With slight variations, that expression, "They shall know that I am Jehovah," occurs no less than seventy times. It is used twenty-nine times in connection with Jehovah's punishment of Jerusalem; twenty-four times in connection with Jehovah's governmental judgments on the Gentile nations; and seventeen times in connection with the coming restoration and final blessing of the elect nation. To see this is to see the heart of the book unveiled. The elect people, and all other peoples, are to know by indubitable demonstration that Jehovah is the one true God, the sovereign Ruler of nations and history; and they are to know it by three revelations of His sovereign power—first, by the punishment of Jerusalem and the captivity of the chosen people, which came true exactly as foretold; second, by the judgments prophesied on the Gentile nations of Ezekiel's day, which also have come true exactly as foretold; and third, by the preservation and ultimate restoration of the covenant people, which had a partial fulfilment in the return of the "Remnant" under Ezra and Nehemiah, and which is still being fulfilled in the marvellous preservation of Israel, and which is even now hastening to its millennial consummation. This, then, is Ezekiel—"THEY SHALL KNOW THAT I AM JEHOVAH."

Let us mark well these three main movements in this book of Ezekiel—

1. THE PRESENT JUDGMENTS ON JERUSALEM
(iv.-xxiv).
2. THE FUTURE DESTINIES OF THE NATIONS
(xxv.-xxxix).
3. THE FINAL TEMPLE, PEOPLE, AND CITY
(xl.-xlviii).

And now let us pick out the *subdivisions*. Take the first movement (iv. to xxiv.). Here it will be seen that chapters iv. to vii. consist of similes and messages of the imminent doom.

It is equally obvious that a new section starts with chapter viii., for chapters viii. to xi. describe a *vision*—a carefully dated vision—of the Temple and Jerusalem defiled by the idolatries and sins of the Jewish people, its special point and climax being that the glory of Jehovah now leaves the Temple and the city (x. 18; xi. 23).

Then, from chapter xii. to xxiv. we have a further stretch of similes and prophecies of the judgments which were even now beginning. Note that chapter xxiv., which ends this first of the three main movements in Ezekiel, and which brings us exactly half way through the book, coincides with the very day on which Nebuchadnezzar's armies commenced the fateful siege of the Jewish capital. See 2 Kings xxv. 1 with Ezekiel xxiv. 1, 2. On the very day that Jerusalem was invested, God revealed the fact of it to Ezekiel, away in Babylonia. In this twenty-fourth chapter, also, Ezekiel's wife dies, the "desire of his eyes," and she is to be unmourned, as a tragic type of Jerusalem. Thus ends the first movement of the book.

Chapters xxv-xxxix

Take now the second movement (xxv.—xxxix.). Here we have Jehovah's purposes with the nations. Here national destinies are written in advance. First we have the coming judgments on Gentile powers—Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia (xxv.); Tyrus and Zidon (xxvi.-xxviii.); Egypt (xxix.-xxxii.). But at chapter xxxiii. there is a break. Ezekiel turns again to his own

nation: "Again the word of the Lord came unto me, saying: Son of man, speak to *the children of thy people*. . . ." From here to the end of chapter xxxix. we are dealing with the future destiny of Israel. Jerusalem has now fallen. In this very chapter, "one that has escaped out of Jerusalem" comes to Ezekiel with the word, "The city is smitten!" (see verse 21, which connects back with xxiv. 26). The word of Jeremiah and Ezekiel has come true! The false prophets are now exposed! There will now be a different mood and outlook among the Jewish exiles! In consonance with this, Ezekiel is now *recommissioned*, in this thirty-third chapter, as Jehovah's watchman to Israel (verse 7). Note the special word to those who, in the light of what had happened, would turn from their wickedness (verse 11, etc.). Then, in chapter xxxiv., there begins the message that after judgment there was to be a glorious destiny for Israel.

Chapter xxxv., the judgment on Mount Seir, may seem, at a glance, to cut across this high theme; but in reality it is certainly meant to fit in here by way of sharp contrast. Mount Seir is the metonymic name for *Edom*, the twin nation to Israel (see our study on Obadiah). The Edomites had descended from Esau, Jacob's twin-brother, yet they had been from the very start Israel's bitterest foe, with a strange, fierce, implacable, spiteful, gloating hatred. One of the preludes to Israel's final blessing should be the final putting out of wicked Edom. We find a similar singling out of Edom in Lamentations iv. 22. Chapters xxxvi. and xxxvii. are a wonderful anticipation of the national reunion and spiritual renewal of God's earthly people. The culminating age-end assault of Gog and Magog is foredoomed in chapters xxxviii. and xxxix., and the thirty-ninth chapter ends with *all nations recognising Jehovah as the true God, through His marvellous doings with Israel*. Thus ends the second movement of the book.

The last nine chapters

As for the third main part of the book; it is clear that this vision of the ideal temple, worship, land, and city, which covers no less than the last nine chapters of the book, stands by itself. It is carefully dated—the fourteenth year after the fall of Jerusalem (xl. 1), and its subdivisions scarcely need pointing out. We may now, therefore, set out our findings thus—

THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

"They shall know that I am Jehovah"

OPENING VISION AND CALL OF EZEKIEL (i.-iii.).

1. THE PRESENT JUDGMENTS ON JERUSALEM

(iv.-xxiv.).

SIMILES AND PROPHECIES OF IMMINENT DOOM (iv.-vii.).

VISION OF TEMPLE AND CITY: GLORY DEPARTS (viii.-xi.).

FURTHER TYPES AND MESSAGES OF JUDGMENT (xii.-xxiv.).

2. THE FUTURE DESTINIES OF THE NATIONS

(xxv.-xxxix.).

PROSPECTIVE JUDGMENTS ON GENTILE POWERS

(xxv.-xxxii.).

AFTER PRESENT JUDGMENTS ISRAEL RESTORED

(xxxiii.-xxxvii.).

GOG AND MAGOG DESTROYED: ISRAEL EXALTED

(xxxviii.-xxxix.).

3. THE FINAL TEMPLE, WORSHIP, AND CITY

(xl.-xlviii.).

THE RE-ERECTED TEMPLE, AND NEW GLORY

(xl. 1-xliii. 12).

THE RENEWED WORSHIP, AND HOLY RIVER

(xliii. 13-xlvii. 12).

THE REDIVIDED LAND, AND CITY OF GOD

(xlvii. 13-xlviii. 35).

The Book of Ezekiel lends itself to a much more detailed analysis, of course, than the one here submitted; but this is all that is needed for our present purpose. It is good to fix well in mind the main, threefold structure, with the key idea and focal message—"They shall know that I am Jehovah".

THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL (2)

Lesson Number 79

NOTE.—For this study read Ezekiel, chapters i. to iii., especially lingering over the vision in chapter i. Read also chapters iv. to xxiv. again.

That there is such a power (i.e. the Divine sovereignty), and that this power belongs to God, no other reason needs be assigned but that "He is God, and there is none beside Him". There can be no more, because (1) There can be but one Infinite; for such a being fills heaven and earth; and so no place or room for another. (2) There can be but one Omnipotent; for He that is such hath all others under His feet; besides, where one can do all, more would be impertinent. (3) There can be but one Supreme; supreme power may reside in many (as in mixed monarchies and commonwealths), but as lawmakers and supreme they are but one. (4) There can be but one First Cause, from which all beings else derive their original; and that is this blessed One we are speaking of: "Of whom and for whom are all things" (1 Cor. viii. 6). And if He be the Author of all, He needs must have a sovereign right and power to determine all, both as to their being, order, efficacy, and end.

Elisha Coles, "A Discourse of God's Sovereignty."

THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL (2)

THE OPENING VISION

EZEKIEL'S opening vision is one of the most remarkable in the Bible; and so needful is it for us to grasp its meaning that we devote the whole of this present study to it. It is described mainly in chapter i. Its contents are threefold. So also is its purpose. As to its threefold contents, there is a background, and there is a centre-group, and there is a super-climax. If we understand these rightly we shall know the threefold purpose.

The Background.

First, then, see the background in this vision. The prophet sees a "whirlwind" and a "great cloud" and a "fire infolding itself," coming "out of the north" (verse 4). That expression, "a fire infolding itself," is literally "a fire *catching itself*." The flames flashed round and round the whirling cloud with such lightning swiftness that each seemed to catch hold of the flash before it. The picture is that of some terrific, whirling thunder-cloud, enclosed in a lurid surround of flashing fire. But the prophet also tells us that "out of the *midst*" of this whirling globe of cloud and fire there was "as the colour of amber." The Hebrew word here translated "amber" is peculiar to Ezekiel, and is now recognised as meaning some kind of luminous metal. The prophet's meaning is that there was a brilliant centre-glow to this fire-swathed storm-cloud. From this the living figures of the vision presently emerged; but first let us get the meaning of this background.

What is the significance of this tempest and storm-cloud and fire? There can be only one answer: these are the symbols of *judgment*. This is corroborated by the fact that they came "out of the north," for it was from Babylon, via the north, that judgment was coming on Jerusalem (see Jer. i. 14, 15; iv. 6; vi. 1). This is further corroborated by the fact that at the end of the vision a "hand" gave Ezekiel a "roll of a book" which was

found to contain "lamentations and mourning and woe" (iii. 9, 10). The approach from "the north" does not lose its force through Ezekiel's being in Babylonia, not Jerusalem, at the time; for in an inward sense he was transported far enough from Babylonia; and we are plainly told that afterward "the Spirit" lifted him "away," *back* to the exiles in Babylonia (iii. 14). The standpoint, as in Ezekiel's other visions, is Jerusalem; and the purpose behind the symbols is to reveal the approach of judgment.

The Centre-group.

Out from the fiery heart of this whirling storm-cloud Ezekiel sees "four living creatures" (verse 5), each with four faces and four wings and four hands (verses 6, 8). It should be realised that these four are actual living beings. They are the "cherubim"—Ezekiel himself calls them so in chapter x. That is, they are the living beings who appear in Genesis, guarding the gate of Eden, and who reappear in the Apocalypse as the mysterious guardians of the ineffable throne in heaven (Rev. iv., etc). Yet it must be just as clearly realised that the *presentation* of them here is merely symbolic. Spirit-beings do not actually have "faces" or "wings" or "hands." Symbols are used to express as nearly as possible to our human minds the nature and functions of these wonderful heavenly beings. Ezekiel himself is careful to say that it was only the "likeness" of these four living ones which he saw (verse 5). So very careful is he on this point that he uses the word "likeness" fifteen times. What then do the "likenesses" of these four living ones convey to us?

First, each had four faces—the face of a lion, of an ox, of a man, of an eagle. The fourfold meaning here is obvious—strength, service, intelligence, heavenliness. Here, in symbol, is strength at its greatest, service at its meekest, intelligence at its fullest, and spirituality the most soaring.

These beings also had four wings and four hands each—a wing and a hand on each of their four sides, these together symbolising fulness of capacity for service (verses 6, 8).

Next, "they went every one straight forward: whither the Spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went" (verse 12). Here is symbolised their undeviating prosecution of the Divine will.

Next, their appearance was "like burning coals of fire, like lightnings" (verse 13)—a symbolic expression of their utter holiness. And again, they "ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning" (verse 14), which expresses their utter swiftness of action.

Thus, in these cherubim, we have strength, service, intelligence, spirituality, at their highest; fulness of capacity for service; undeviating prosecution of the Divine will; absolute holiness; and uttermost swiftness of action.

But now, at verse 15, a strange new marvel presents itself. Four awesome wheels appear "by" (that is, *beside*) these four living beings. That these wheels were four in number is stated in verse 16. One wheel was beside each of the four living beings, as we see in verse 16 (also in x. 9). The size and sweep of these wheels was vast. They reached down to the earth (verse 15), yet they reached up to heaven. Verse 18 says: "As for their rings (rims) they were so high that they were dreadful." Mark well, then, that these four wheels connect these heavenly beings with the earth.

Perhaps the most curious thing about these immense wheels is that each wheel was two in one. Verse 16 says that their appearance was "as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel." Many readers misunderstand the meaning here. They picture a large wheel with a smaller one in the middle of it, revolving in the same direction. This is not Ezekiel's meaning. What he means is made clear by a striking little word which he speaks both of the wheels and the living creatures. He says: "They turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward" (verses 9, 12, 17). Now how was it that the four living beings turned not when they went? It was because, having four faces, they each faced north, south, east, west, simultaneously, and therefore needed not to turn in any direction. Nor did they need to turn when they flew, for each had four wings, one on each of their four sides, so that they simply needed to use the appropriate pair of wings for any of the four directions, without any necessity to turn. And, similarly, the *wheels* needed not to turn, for they were two wheels in one, the one being through the other, that is, *crosswise* to each other, the one revolving north-south and the other east-west, so that there was no need to turn for any direction. Such a wheel, of course, would be impossible actually to construct; but we are here seeing *symbol*.

These wheels, which thus whirled with lightning-like rapidity in every direction, without need of turning, had their vast rims "full of eyes" (verse 18). These countless eyes looked simultaneously in every direction from the crosswise rims. They saw everything. Nothing could be hid from them. This, undoubtedly, is the symbol of *omniscience*.

Finally, these awesome wheels were filled with the life of the living beings themselves. "The spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels" (verse 20). Because of this these wheels expressed with absolute exactitude the will and movement of the four living beings (verse 21).

Try now to catch the full picture of these cherubim with their wheels, and the meaning will be unmistakable. Ezekiel, remember, had just seen the symbols of a coming judgment. The Babylonians were soon to overrun Judæa and carry the nation into exile. In these cherubim and their wheels Ezekiel was meant to learn that the judgments which were about to happen on earth were but the expression of what was happening in the invisible realm. The events which take place on this earth should never be viewed apart from that invisible realm. Fundamentally there is a spiritual and Divine meaning in all that is permitted. Ezekiel was meant to learn this particularly in connection with the overthrow of Jerusalem. We ourselves should learn it afresh in connection with the big developments of our own era. The purpose, then, in this centre-group of Ezekiel's vision is to show that *behind the events which take place on earth are the operations of supernatural powers in heaven*.

See how significantly the *wheels* show this. They rest down on earth, yet they reach up to heaven. They run to and fro down here, yet they move by a power from above, for "the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels"! Those vast, awesome wheels are *the wheels of the Divine government*, the wheels of so-called "Providence," with an especial reference here, to the exercise of providential *judgment*. Those wheels of the Divine government run with resistless, lightning-like swiftness in all directions over all the earth. They never need to turn, for they face every way, and they are everywhere, and they are full of eyes which look north, south, east, west, simultaneously, and see everything, everywhere, every minute.

And now, just as the wheels connect the events of earth with the powers of heaven, see how the four living creatures *above* the wheels connect up with God Himself. These four living creatures above the wheels express most strikingly, in symbolic form, *the life of God*. As we have seen, the four faces of each expressed the fourfold idea of strength, service, intelligence, and spirituality at their highest, with the added suggestion of inaccessibility and mystery, in the symbol of the eagle. Now each of these four living ones could only have each of his four faces looking one way (verses 10, 12); but when they appeared to Ezekiel in square formation, they were evidently so placed, each at one corner of the square, that the face of a man looked every way, the face of a lion every way, the face of an ox every way, and the face of an eagle every way. Thus, not only did the myriad eyes of the four double wheels look in every direction, but the sixteen faces of the living beings, in four fours, also looked in every direction; and as the four awesome wheels expressed the omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence of God, so the faces of the living beings expressed the moral and intellectual nature of God—for we must remember that as the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels, so the Spirit of Jehovah Himself was in the living creatures (verse 12). Thus, then, these wheels connect the events of earth with the cherubim in heaven; and the cherubim in turn connect them with God.

Both Ezekiel and John make it clear that these four living ones somehow live nearest of all God's creatures to the throne of God Himself, and most nearly express His life. It is not surprising, therefore, that when the very Son of God became incarnate there should be seen a correspondence between Him and these four symbol-clad figures of Ezekiel's vision. It is seen in the distinctive emphasis of the four Gospel writers. In Matthew it is the lion; in Mark, the ox; in Luke, the man; in John, the eagle.

The Super-climax.

This brings us to the super-climax of Ezekiel's vision. It is in truth a "super" climax, for Ezekiel now sees above the cherubim a superstructure of almost blinding glory. He suddenly hears a voice from the firmament over the heads of the cherubim (verse 25), and on looking up he sees "the likeness of a throne, as the

appearance of a sapphire stone." On the throne is a fire-enveloped Figure having "the likeness as the appearance of a man." Mark again Ezekiel's cautious language. It is "the *likeness* as the *appearance* of a man" upon "the *likeness* of a throne." It is not the Divine Being Himself whom Ezekiel sees, but certain appearances to make vivid to him the character and attributes of Him whom "no man hath seen nor can see."

As the *general* form of the cherubim, apart from divergent peculiarities, was that "of a man" (verse 5), so here, again, the general impression is that of "the appearance of a man" (the same basis being retained, presumably, because of there being no higher symbol of intelligence that would be understandable to the human mind); but that which is added here (unlike the description of the cherubim) is vague, being incapable of description. The Figure is wreathed in fire. There is a centre-glow as of luminous or molten metal ("amber"), and a "brightness round about." The symbols are expressive of awful holiness and unapproachable glory. Ezekiel at once recognises in it "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Jehovah," and falls in prostrate adoration.

The *purpose* in this super-climax is as clear as that in the other parts of the vision. If the cherubim and their wheels express the fact that behind the events of earth are the operations of heaven, this super-climax of the throne expresses the fact that *both behind all events on earth and above all supernatural powers in heaven is the sovereign throne and will and purpose of the infinite Jehovah Himself.*

Ezekiel hears and sees, and falls on his face. But even that is not all. He has caught sight of something, after everything else, which he can never forget. He has seen a *rainbow* round about that throne (verse 28), which crowns all the awful glory with a gentle beauty. It is the token of a Divine covenant. It is the symbol of the Divine faithfulness. It is the pledge of a final clear shining after the dark thunder-clouds of judgment have passed away. It says that amid wrath to the full there will be love to the end. Even the awful holiness and ineffable glory of that supreme throne are over-arched by grace! Thank God, that rainbow is always there! Man's sighs shall yet become songs; and where sin has abounded, grace shall ultimately triumph in a redeemed human society which is "holiness unto the Lord."

The Threefold Purpose.

So, then, in this opening vision there is a threefold purpose. First, in the background of storm and cloud and fire the purpose is to show the approach of judgment. Second, in the centre-group of cherubim and wheels the purpose is to show that behind the events of earth are the operations of heaven. Third, in the super-climax of the throne and rainbow the purpose is to show that supreme over all is Jehovah Himself, that His sovereign will overrules all, that in wrath He remembers mercy, and that in the end judgment issues in the triumph of grace and righteousness.

When the tragedy of Jerusalem's ruin came, Ezekiel was not to let his faith go to pieces, thinking that Jehovah, after all, had proved unable to preserve His own chosen city, that the reins had been snatched from His grasp, and that the gods of the heathen were mighty. He was to know that before ever the judgment fell it was foreknown and actually predetermined, that behind it was the operation of supernatural power, and that beyond it there would be an outcome of final blessing.

What this vision meant to Ezekiel, and how clearly he grasped its threefold purpose, is seen all through his prophecies. We cannot but be struck by the fact that this man who was in even more hopeless circumstances than Jeremiah, inasmuch as he was actually in exile, was full of hope and jubilant conviction as to the eventual restoration of Israel. Though he never dissolved in tears as did Jeremiah, yet his vision of the ultimate triumph of Jehovah's purpose through His people was even clearer. In fact he saw right through to the glory of that final temple which is yet to be built, and the wonder of that city of God which shall one day be named, "Jehovah-Shammah"—"The Lord is there."

We, too, need to catch that vision in days like these. Science has put staggering new powers and weapons into man's hands. Wickedness finds much bigger and far more terrifying forms of expression than ever before. Things move on such a vast scale, and with such frightening contingencies, and at the beck of such organised anti-God forces, that the international situation easily becomes profoundly disturbing. The reins of providence seem to hang loosely. Evil forces in large areas of the earth seem to have it pretty much their own way. It is easy for our eyes to become

so held by the startling evolution of human history today that we lose our vision of that glory-flashing throne high over all, and our sense of the Divine sovereignty.

Yes, we need to see that throne again today. We need to see it with clarified inward eyes. And we need to see again, above that throne, the overarching rainbow which speaks of the Divine faithfulness. The presence of that lovely rainbow there gives to the four symbolic seraphim a significance which we have not hitherto mentioned, but which we ought to note here. Each of those seraphs had the face of a lion, and the face of an ox, and the face of a man, and the face of an eagle. It has been aptly observed that the lion represents all the untamed beasts. The ox represents the tamed and serviceable animals. The man represents the human race. The eagle represents the birds of the heavens. The rainbow at once reminds us of God's covenant with Noah, and through Noah with all the human race and the lower animals who occupy the earth along with man. Ezekiel's vision shows that covenant as still sealing and crowning the Divine government of the earth. God remembers His covenant with man and with all the creatures, even when His judgments must fall upon the earth and strange things must be permitted. Thank God that rainbow is still there, as the present age careers onward through its closing decades to its culminating convulsions! We need not lose heart. We need not lose faith. That rainbow still arches the throne of omnipotent sovereignty; and even the night of the "great tribulation" shall be but a black-robed herald of the glorious Millennium which is on its way!

THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL (3)

Lesson Number 80

NOTE.—For this study read again chapters xl. to xlviii., twice over.

The apostate angels, or wicked spirits, though the testimony we have from these is not from love or good will, yet is as great an evidence of God's sovereignty as any other, in that, being enemies to God, proud and imperious, they are yet overawed and compelled to submit. And hence it was that the devil dared not answer again when the fatal sentence was pronounced upon him for seducing our first parents.

Elisha Coles, "A Discourse of God's Sovereignty"

THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL (3)

THE TRIO OF VISIONS

EZEKIEL has been called "the Patmos-seer of the Old Testament." As to the exiled John on the island of Patmos, so to the exiled Ezekiel by the river Chebar, extraordinary *visions* were given. The first of these, which we have already examined, is described mainly in chapter i. A second and much longer one is described in chapters viii. to xi. A third, which is much longer still, is described in chapters xl. to xlviii. To get the point of these three main visions is to comprehend the total message of the book.

The First Vision (i.-iii.).

We devoted our preceding lesson to this first vision. We went into its symbolism, and therefore need not do so again in the second vision; for the same symbolic presentation of cherubim and glory reappears, with only minor divergences. We have seen the central purpose of the first vision. In general it was to show that behind all events of earth are the operations of supernatural powers, and that above all is the will of God Himself. More particularly, it was to show Ezekiel that behind the judgment coming on *Jerusalem* was the sovereign activity of Jehovah.

The Second Vision (viii.-xi.).

This second vision came "in the sixth year" (viii. 1), that is, five years before the overthrow of Jerusalem. In it Ezekiel was transported to Jerusalem (viii. 3). The vision moves in four stages. First, in chapter viii. we see Judah's profanation of the temple. Second, in chapter ix. we see Jehovah's judgment on the people. Third, in chapter x., the "glory" of Jehovah leaves the temple. Fourth, in chapter xi., the "glory" also leaves the city.

In chapter viii. Ezekiel is shown the profanation of the temple. At the north gate of the inner court he sees an "image of jealousy

which provoketh to jealousy" (verse 3). This was an idol set up in the very precincts of Jehovah's house. Yet Israel's God had said: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image . . . for I, Jehovah, am a jealous God" (Exod. xx. 4; and see Deut. xxxii. 16, 21). Mark the contrast here: immediately after pointing out the "image of jealousy," Ezekiel exclaims, "And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there!" (verse 4). Oh, the provocation—a false god reared *there*! Judah's guilt was measured by the contrast between this ugly idol and that heavenly shekinah.

But Ezekiel is now shown an *inferno* of idolatries. He is let into the secret chamber of a clandestine theriomorphic cult, in which seventy Jewish elders offer incense to beast-gods (verses 7-12). Next, at the north gate of the outer court he is shown "women weeping for Tammuz" (verses 13-15), the "Adonis" of Greek mythology. The annual feast of Tammuz consisted of a weeping by the women, for his death, followed by a rejoicing over his return, and was accompanied by phallic abominations. Next, Ezekiel is shown twenty-five men standing between the altar of sacrifice and the door-porch of the holy place; but instead of worshipping toward the holy place of Jehovah, they have turned their backs on it, and face eastward, worshipping the sun (verse 16). These twenty-five men, being in the court of the priests, are presumably the high priest and the heads of the twenty-four courses.

Thus, in these different parts of the temple, Ezekiel sees the general image-worship of the *people*, the secret animal-worship of the *elders*, the sex-corruption of the *women*, and the shameless apostasy of the *priesthood*. All classes are involved in the debasing infidelity. Corruption in religion always brings general moral breakdown; so we are not surprised to read in verse 17, "They have filled the land with violence."

Chapter ix. now follows with a symbolic picture of *judgment* on the wicked populace. Seven men are dispatched, one to spare the godly minority, six to slay the rest. This slaying, note, is the command of Jehovah Himself (verses 5-7). Then comes chapter x., with its significant ceremony of the departure of the Divine presence from the *temple*. In verse 4 the "glory" moves from the cherub over the ark in the Holy of Holies, to the threshold of the house. In verses 18 and 19 it leaves the temple

altogether. Finally, in chapter xi. the "glory" departs from the *city* also. The doom of the now God-forsaken city is sealed.

The main import of all this is unmistakable. If the *first* vision means to show that the power behind the coming judgment is that of God Himself, the purpose of this second vision is to show that the *reason* for the coming judgment is the guilt of Judah. The first vision says that the judgment is from *God*. The second vision says that the judgment is for *sin*. The first vision explains the *fact* of the judgment. The second vision explains the *cause* of it.

The Third Vision (xl.-xlviii.).

We turn to Ezekiel's third vision. Here he sees a temple and city of the future in which the glory of God shall abide for ever. In some senses it is the most remarkable passage of the book; but the interpretation of it is a matter of dispute. Let us see if we can briefly resolve our own views about it.

First, Ezekiel's description here is not that of the *former* temple, which Solomon built, and which was now destroyed. Equally clearly, it is not the *later* temple, erected by the "Remnant," after the Exile. Nor does the still later temple which Herod built at Jerusalem fulfil the requirements. All will agree thus far. So, then, as there has been no Jewish temple at Jerusalem since the destruction of Herod's in A.D. 70, and as Ezekiel's description certainly cannot be "spiritualised" into meaning the present Christian Church, his temple and city must be *still future*.

Yet, even so, the question remains: Is Ezekiel's description to be taken *literally* or only *symbolically*? We reject off-hand the theory of certain moderns, that this new temple and worship and city were simply a product of Ezekiel's own mind, devised as a pattern for the reorganising of Israel after the Exile; for Ezekiel's own word is that what he describes was shown him by supernatural agency (xl. 1, 2). Are we, then, to interpret literally or symbolically?

Well, first, we believe it to be a sound principle of exegesis in general that unless there is some serious objection to the literal interpretation of a passage, this should be given first preference. Are there, then, serious objections to our taking Ezekiel's description literally? There are. Certain of its main features are such that a literal fulfilment of them is surely unthinkable.

Take the size of the *temple* and of the *sacred area* going with it. The "outer court" of the temple is 500 reeds long by 500 wide (xlii. 15-20; xlv. 2); and as the reed is about ten feet, this court is one mile long by one mile wide, which means that this temple covers a space as large as the whole city enclosed by the walls of old Jerusalem. Certainly, *this* temple could not possibly be contained on Mount Zion, inside Jerusalem. But when we pass from the temple to the sacred area, or "oblation" of land, going with it, we find this to be 25,000 reeds long by 25,000 wide (xlviii. 20), that is, forty-seven miles north to south, and the same east to west, covering an area between six and seven times that of modern London! Of this an area forty-seven miles by nearly nineteen is reserved for the priesthood alone (xlv. 3, 4; xlviii. 10), and an area the same size for the Levites (xlv. 5; xlviii. 13). There is also a third area, in which, although small compared with the whole "oblation," is a "city" with a circuit of 20,000 reeds, or nearly thirty-eight miles (xlv. 6; xlviii. 15-19), whereas Josephus reckoned the circuit of Jerusalem in his day at only *four* miles! Now is it thinkable that there is to be a literal counterpart to this temple which itself is as large as the whole of Jerusalem, and in a sacred area of over two thousand two hundred square miles?

Moreover, this sacred area is *physically impossible*—unless the river Jordan be moved further east! The boundaries of the land are the Mediterranean on the west and the Jordan on the east (xlvii. 18); and this great square of forty-seven miles by forty-seven cannot be put between the two, for the distance between them in places is scarcely forty miles. Even if we bend the great square to the slope of the coast we cannot get it in—the less so because on each side of the square, in Ezekiel's vision, is an *additional* area called "the portion for the prince" (xlv. 7; xlviii. 21, 22). Admittedly, God could move the Jordan; but is it thinkable that we are meant to infer this?

There is the further difficulty that although this great area is forty-seven miles by forty-seven, it *does not include the site of Jerusalem*; so that this "city" which Ezekiel sees is not Jerusalem. If, then, we are to take this vision literally, what of all those other prophecies which speak of Jerusalem as the glorified centre of the coming new order?

Ezekiel's vision also places the new temple 500 reeds (some nine and a half miles) *away north from the "city,"* in fact, fourteen and a quarter miles from the *centre* of it. Now the connection between the temple and Jerusalem is so deeply laid, both in the Scriptures and in the thought of the Jews, that to interpret literally a vision which separates them without giving the slightest reason seems again unthinkable. As C. J. Ellicott says, "A temple in any other locality than Mount Moriah would hardly be the temple of Jewish hope." Hard as we find it to picture Ezekiel's mile-square temple spread over the variety of hill and valley which the country presents, we find it even harder to think of the new city as miles away from Jerusalem, and the new temple still another fourteen miles north, and, in fact, well on the way to Samaria.

Another problem in the way of a literal interpretation is found in the waters which Ezekiel saw flowing from beneath the eastern threshold of the temple (xlvi. 1-12). To quote C. J. Ellicott again, "These waters run to the 'east country' and go down 'to the sea,' which can only be the Dead Sea: but such a course would be physically impossible without changes in the surface of the earth, since the temple of the vision is on the west of the watershed of the country. They had, moreover, the effect of 'healing' the waters of the sea, an effect which could not be produced naturally without providing an outlet from the sea: no supply of fresh water could remove the saltiness while this water was all disposed of by evaporation; and Ezekiel (in xlvi. 11) excludes the idea of an outlet. But above all, the character of the waters themselves is impossible without a perpetual miracle. Setting aside the difficulty of a spring of this magnitude upon the top of 'a very high mountain' (xl. 2) in this locality, at the distance of 1,000 cubits from their source the waters have greatly increased in volume; and so with each successive 1,000 cubits, until at the end of 4,000 cubits (about a mile and a half) they have become a river no longer fordable, or, in other words, comparable to the Jordan. Such an increase, without accessory streams, is clearly not natural. But, beyond this, the description of the waters themselves clearly marks them as ideal. They are life-giving and healing; trees of perennial foliage and fruit grow upon their banks, the leaves being for 'medicine,' and the fruit, although for food, never wasting."

Even if we admit the physical possibility of all these things, there is another kind of difficulty, which in some ways is still greater. In this temple of Ezekiel's vision the system of *animal sacrifices* is re-instituted (xliii. 13-27, etc.). Is it thinkable that after the one perfect sacrifice of Christ there should be, in the yet future temple, a reversion to these? Does not such an idea insult the New Testament? Did not that perfect sacrifice do away for ever with the merely typical and temporary system of the Old Testament? Those who would literally interpret Ezekiel's vision are certainly taxed here. One writer suggests that these sacrifices will be reinstated in a *commemorative* capacity, just as the Lord's Supper is now observed in a commemorative capacity; but he forgets that even the Lord's Supper is only a temporary commemoration until the Lord Himself returns. And can we think that when the simple, beautiful commemoration with the bread and wine has ceased, the animal sacrifices of the Mosaic economy will be set going again as a commemoration of Calvary? Is *that* the kind of commemoration God wants in the consummation? Can we really think that when the glorified Lord is Himself visibly reigning on earth such a system of artificial commemoration could be needed or perpetuated? Surely not!

But if the passage is *not* to be interpreted literally, what then? Well, as a principle of sound exegesis, it should be borne in mind that we are here dealing, not with direct prophecy, but with *vision*. This very fact should put us on our guard. Our reading of this vision must be guided by the two earlier visions. In the vision of the cherubim we saw that although the cherubim are actual beings, the presentation of them was highly symbolic. In other words, what we have is *central, literal fact surrounded and expressed by symbolism*. Again and again we find this in Scripture. Even so, with this final vision of Ezekiel's, there is a core of real fact, surrounded and expressed by symbols. The millennial temple and city will be concrete realities. The symbols used of them in this vision are meant to express figuratively their principal features.

The main meanings of the striking symbols are clear. The vastness of the dimensions in the vision indicate the *transcendent greatness* of the final temple and city. The various cube measurements symbolise their *Divine perfection*. In the description of the sacrificial ritual we see the *absolute purity* of the final worship.

The marvellous waters gushing from the sanctuary foretell *fulness of life*, and *worldwide blessing*. The returning of the Divine "glory," never to depart again (xliii. 1-7), tells of *sin forever removed* and of *righteousness finally triumphant*; while the putting of Jehovah's throne "in the midst for ever" (xliii. 7) expresses the *ever-enduring glory* of the consummation.

These, then, are the main ideas symbolised concerning the temple and worship and city of the coming age—transcendent greatness, Divine perfection, absolute purity, fulness of life, worldwide blessing, sin forever removed, righteousness finally triumphant, and Jehovah Himself in the midst, reigning in never-ending glory.

The Three Visions Together

And now, finally, see the three visions together. All three were necessary to give Ezekiel the full view of things. The central idea of the first vision is that of God *overruling*. The central idea of the second vision is that of God *intervening*. The central idea of the third vision is that of God *consummating*. In the first God overrules in sovereign *government*. In the second God intervenes in righteous *judgment*. In the third God consummates in gracious *restoration*. In the first we see glory *transcending*. In the second we see glory *departing*. In the third we see glory *returning*. In the first vision Ezekiel must see the throne of Jehovah high over the wheels of government. In the second he must see the activity of Jehovah behind the stroke of judgment. In the third he must see the victory of Jehovah in the ultimate realisation of the ideal. In other words, Ezekiel was to see, in these three visions, the purpose of Jehovah *above* all, and *behind* all, and *beyond* all.

This triple truth Ezekiel grasped and understood. He lived and wrought in the light and power of it. We, too, need to live and work in the light and power of this vision, or we shall faint at the discouragements of the times. Servant of Jesus, stand with Ezekiel again: get the sound of the wings and the chariot wheels in your ears again: see again the man with the inkhorn sealing the godly remnant: and look on to the temple and city which are yet to be. This is the triune vision which turns fear to hope, and sighs to songs. May it be ever before our eyes!

Jehovah hath spoken it, and it shall surely come to pass.

THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL (4)

Lesson Number 81

NOTE.—For this final study in Ezekiel read again chapters xxv. to xxxix. Note specially the passages on Gog and Magog, and on Israel's coming restoration.

Thy Spirit animates eternal years,
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates and rears.
Though earth and man were gone,
And suns and universes ceased to be,
And Thou wert left alone,
Every existence would exist in Thee.

Emily Brontë.

THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL (4)

EVERY page of Ezekiel gleams with attraction for the keen student of the Bible. From the opening vision of the Divine glory to the final vision of the future temple there is not a dull paragraph. Three *modes* of prophetic activity are conspicuously before us—visions, sign-sermons, and direct predictions. We have given two full lessons to Ezekiel's visions, because of their bearing on the message of the book as a whole; but if we are to keep within the intended limits of these present studies, our consideration of Ezekiel's sign-sermons and direct predictions must be severely brief.

Ezekiel's Sign-sermons

I wonder if we have appreciated the force of these. As Jehovah's witness among a "most rebellious" people, Ezekiel was directed to perform various symbolical or typical *actions* before them, at different times, all portraying, in one aspect or another, the impending judgment on Judah. Certain of these involved him in keen personal discomfort, and would be as irksome to him as they now seem strange to ourselves: but there is a peculiar significance in them which few, perhaps, have noticed.

This significance will become clearer if we look back to our analysis of the book. The first of the three main movements covers chapters iv. to xxiv., and is wholly occupied with the overhanging doom of Jerusalem. Now in these chapters there are no less than ten of these sign-actions, whereas in all the remaining chapters (xxv.–xlvi.) there is only one (xxxvii. 16). Why is this? The answer is found in three paragraphs which tell us that Ezekiel was to be in a certain sense *dumb* until the fall of Jerusalem. First, in chapter iii. 26, 27, right at the beginning of Ezekiel's ministry, God says to him: "I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, and thou shalt be dumb." Next, in chapter xxiv. 27, four and a half years later, God says to him: "In that day (when Jerusalem falls) shall thy mouth be opened

. . . thou shalt be no more dumb." Third, in chapter xxxiii. 21, 22, we read: "One that had escaped out of Jerusalem came unto me saying: The city is smitten . . . and my mouth was opened, and I was no more dumb."

Does this seem a bit mystifying? It is not so in reality. The point of it is just this, that to a people whose ears were largely closed God was largely dumb. God had filled Ezekiel's heart with a great and wonderful message which, although it included the alarm of approaching judgment, looked on to the days beyond, and lusted them with gracious promises of Divine forgiveness and restoration; but his obdurate fellow-exiles were so wedded to their evil ways as to be utterly unfit to hear such a message. They remained in this state until Jerusalem had actually been laid low. Then they saw that the word of prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel was truly the word of Jehovah. Yet even before Jerusalem fell, witness for Jehovah *must* be borne to them, "whether they will hear or whether they will forbear" (ii. 5, 7, etc.), even though it was restricted to a declaration of retribution against their sin. It was in this sense that Ezekiel was a "watchman" to the house of Israel (iii. 17). God will not have even the most "stiffhearted" and "rebellious" laid low by final judgment without a witness and a warning being uttered to them right up to the midnight knell.

So deaf, however, to the spoken word of God, had these old-time Jews become, through their disobedience, that even the warning of judgment must be conveyed to them in the form of these *sign-actions*, with the purpose of at least arousing curiosity and causing enquiry; and also with the further purpose, possibly, of lessening somewhat the guilt which would more and more have accrued from their repeatedly hearing and rejecting a forthright declaration from God. That these sign-actions *did* cause enquiry we know from verses such as xii. 9 and xxiv. 19.

But beyond a doubt there was also this yet further purpose in these sign-sermons: God was thereby indicating His withdrawal from any further reasoning or pleading with them. Such was their obduracy that a point had now been reached where God would not speak to them directly any more (xiv. 3). Since they had treated the declared word of God as cheap, God would now be dumb (though He would still faithfully warn them), and they should now be left to puzzle out His intentions from

strange sign-actions. Thus, by his sign-sermons, Ezekiel is a last tragic witness for God, to "a crooked and perverse generation."

Taking a last glance at the three texts which speak of Ezekiel's dumbness, we note that from the first of them (iii. 26) to the second (xxiv. 27) his dumbness was only *partial*; for in chapter iii. 27 God adds, "But when I speak with thee I will open thy mouth, and thou shalt say . . ." But from the second text (xxiv. 27) to the third (xxxiii. 21, 22) the dumbness is *total*; for in the intervening chapters (xxv. to xxxii.) Ezekiel has not one word for his own people, but addresses the Gentile nations only (for according to Ezekiel's own time-marks, these prophecies on the Gentiles come in the period before the fall of Jerusalem, except for the added section of the prophecy against Egypt: see xxix. 17). Ezekiel's *last* sign-sermon to his own people, before his total dumbness for about a year and a half, was the culminating, tragic sign of his own wife's death (xxiv. 15-27).

We may learn much from these sign-sermons. We must be prepared to witness in any way God chooses, and even among those who disdain our message. We must be willing to yield up our dearest possession for the sake of bringing saving truth home to the hearts of men, even as Ezekiel was submissively prepared to part with his wife, who was "the desire of his eyes." Note that Ezekiel was instructed not to express his heart-break in any of the conventional modes of mourning, nor even in tears and crying (xxiv. 16, 17). He was to have his personal sorrow swallowed up in the bigger bereavement, namely, the ruin of Jerusalem and of his nation. So we, also, must bravely sink personal sorrows and grievances in the larger, desperate calamity of the perishing multitudes all around us, who are heading to a Christless eternity. Moreover, as Ezekiel spoke by sign-actions, and as he himself became a sign (xxiv. 24), so there must be the sign of Christ over every part of our life—over our home life and business life and social life, and over our reactions to all the experiences of life. God help us to be Ezekiels to our day and generation!

As for going into Ezekiel's sign-actions one by one here, that is quite beyond our present scope. Some of them are extremely interesting. Those who would appreciate their details and their

aptness will do well to linger over them with some good modern verse-by-verse commentary. So far as this present study is concerned, we must reluctantly leave them.

Ezekiel's Direct Predictions

Here, again, we open the gate on a wide and wonderful field. Some of the most remarkable predictions in the Old Testament, both concerning Israel and the Gentile nations, are found in Ezekiel. We can only pick out two or three brief references here to illustrate this.

Take the prophecy on *Tyre* (xxvi.-xxviii.). Tyre was the greatest maritime commercial centre of the ancient world, and one of the most impregnable fortresses. Her continuity seemed secure above that of all other places. But one little strip of Ezekiel's doom-song about her runs—"Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will bring upon Tyrus Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon . . . he shall break down thy towers . . . he shall enter into thy gates . . . thy strong garrisons shall go down to the ground . . ." (xxvi. 7-11); and all this came true, even though it took a siege of no less than thirteen years before Nebuchadnezzar overcame the mighty city.

This, however, by no means exhausted Ezekiel's prophecy. It was but one incident in it, meant to be a sign and guarantee that the remainder would surely come true. In verse 4 God says: "I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock." This is repeated in verse 14. Also, according to verse 5, Tyre, despite her world-embracing commerce and her proud affluence, was to become merely "a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea." This, too, is repeated in verse 14, with the fateful addition, "Thou shalt be built no more."

Nearly two hundred and fifty years slipped away, and still there seemed no sign of these words being fulfilled. After their experience with Nebuchadnezzar, the Tyrians had resolved never to expose themselves to a like defeat again. The bulk of their treasure they removed to the island half a mile from the mainland. Thus they had a liquid bulwark round them which was far more to them than the stoutest walls of man's building. With this, and her great fleet, the new Tyre was secure above all places; But, after two and a half centuries, the hour struck, and Ezekiel's

words came true to the letter. Alexander the Great turned on Tyre. He looked across that half mile of water, and actually determined to lay a solid causeway through it. He pulled down the walls, towers, palaces, and other buildings of the older Tyre on the mainland, and laid them through the water, thus fulfilling Ezekiel's strange words—"They shall lay thy stones and thy timber and thy dust in the midst of the water" (xxvi. 12). Such was the need of material for this huge effort and amazing assault that the debris and the very dust seem to have been "scraped" away for use, till the site was indeed "like the top of a rock." Thus was Tyre scraped bare; and it has never been rebuilt to this day. It has been a place "for the spreading of nets" by fisher-folk, and still is.

Take now the equally arresting utterance against *Egypt*, that land of ancient might and marvel and mystery (xxix.-xxxii.). The doom here meted out in advance must have seemed so unlikely at the time of the prophecy that no unaided human mind could possibly have foreseen it. In chapter xxix., verses 8 to 12, we find the prediction of a forty years' desolation. This is followed, in verses 13 to 15, by these words:

"Yet thus saith the Lord God: At the end of forty years will I gather the Egyptians from the people whither they were scattered. And I will bring again the captivity of Egypt, and will cause them to return into the land of their habitation; and they shall be there a base kingdom. It shall be the basest of the kingdoms; neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations: for I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations."

It will be seen that at verse 17 a further short prophecy is appended, which Ezekiel wrote some seventeen years later (compare verses 1 and 17). This later addition tells of an apparently impending attack on Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar, after his successful siege of Tyre (verses 17-20). Now since this addendum of Ezekiel is dated "the seven and twentieth year," we are at the sixteenth year after the fall of Jerusalem; that is, we are at 571 or 570 B.C. and it was in 570 B.C. that Pharaoh-Hophra of Egypt came to his end. There seems doubt as to the exact circumstances of his death, but it is clear that it was at the hands of enemies—as was predicted, also, by Jeremiah (see Jer. xlv. 30),

who seems to connect it with Nebuchadnezzar. The historian Josephus actually tells us that Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt and "slew the king that then reigned"; though his date does not seem to correspond with Ezekiel's. It may be that further light is still to come on this, and also as to whether Nebuchadnezzar's invasion brought on the forty years' desolation. But as to the *larger* prophecy regarding Egypt's subsequent history down to the present—and of which the more immediate prophecy about Nebuchadnezzar was evidently meant to be a dread guarantee—there can be no doubt, but only marvelling.

Although other great peoples like the Assyrians and the Babylonians were to become extinct, the Egyptians were to *continue*—and they continue to this day. They were also to continue as a *kingdom*—and they are still a kingdom. Yet they were to be the *basest* of kingdoms—and this they surely continue to be. Their Khedive is dependent on outsiders. Their kingdom is under mandate. Their taxes are levied and controlled by foreigners. They are just a kingdom, and no more. The fulfilment of the word through Ezekiel lives on for all the world to see.

But how stirring are Ezekiel's predictions concerning his own people, *Israel*! Who can read, without emotion, such passages as chapters xxxv. 11-16, 22-31; xxxvi. 8-12, 22-38; xxxvii. 1-28; xxxix. 21-9? How apt and gripping is that vision of the valley and the dry bones, in chapter xxxvii.! Ezekiel's people had known both reverses and revivings in the past; but now that all twelve tribes were scattered in exile, and the temple was no more, and Jerusalem was laid in ruins, it would seem a mocking of the people's misery to preach a returning of prosperity. Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones and their miraculous reanimation takes full cognizance of Israel's extremity, but reveals Jehovah as the God of the impossible.

We need to remember, of course, that this is *vision*, not direct prophecy. We must watch against unwarranted literalism in interpreting this symbol of resurrection from the dead. Nobody would dream of saying that the two "sticks," in verses 16 to 19, were literally Judah and Israel. They are symbols. Even so, in this vision of the dry bones we must not take the bones as meaning literally the bones of Israel's dead. We must carefully keep to the interpretation which God Himself gives. Verse 11

says: "These bones are the whole house of Israel: behold they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost." Thus, the bones represent the exiled people, not the actually dead. The vision is a symbolic picture of *national restoration*, not of individual resurrection. The physical resurrection of individuals is taught elsewhere in Scripture. The point we make here is simply that this is not what is symbolised in Ezekiel's vision. The wonderful prospect here is the re-emerging of all Israel's tribes from the graves of their captivity, in *national* resuscitation. Verse 14 says they are to be placed in their own land again—which again shows that it is the scattered exiles, and not the actually deceased, who are thought of here; for the bulk of Israel's actual dead were buried *in the land*, and would not need to be regathered to it, if a resurrection of bodies were here thought of! Verse 19 speaks of *reunion* as well as renewal. The two kingdoms shall be one again, as symbolised by the two sticks which became one. Verse 24 foretells the reign of the coming Messiah-King David over the restored kingdom. Verse 26 predicts a "covenant of peace" which shall continue perpetually, and tells of Jehovah's sanctuary being set up in the midst again, nevermore to depart! It is a marvellous prophecy. It yet awaits fulfilment; but as the predictions concerning Tyre and Egypt and other nations have come true, and as other predictions concerning the nation Israel have already come true, so surely will these glowing passages concerning Israel's ultimate destiny.

Here we must leave Ezekiel. His message will live on with us. Jerusalem has failed, and lies weeping in the dust; but Jerusalem's God drives on through the ages to the predestined consummation. He will not rest until the *new* Jerusalem becomes the queen city of a new order, inscribed with *JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH*—"The Lord is there." The ravages of sin are still round us; but we have heard the chariot-wheels of God: we have seen a rainbow round about the throne: we have caught the vision of a temple and city which are yet to be. He has opened our eyes to His magnificent purpose, and we "rejoice in hope of the glory of God"!

Oh, blessed hope! with this elate,
Let not our hearts be desolate;
But, strong in faith, in patience wait
Until *HE* come!

A TEST PAPER ON EZEKIEL

1. When was Ezekiel carried to Babylonia? How old was he then? And how long was it before the overthrow of Jerusalem?
2. What is the event from which Ezekiel reckons all his datings?
3. Mention a factor which made Ezekiel's earlier ministry among the exiles more difficult.
4. What are the three main movements or chapter-groupings of the book?
5. Could you briefly interpret the opening vision (i.) and give its main purpose?
6. What was the substance of Ezekiel's second vision (viii.-xi.), i.e. of the corrupt temple and city?
7. Give reasons for thinking that parts of the great temple-vision (xl.-xlviii.) cannot be *literally* fulfilled.
8. Give the main symbolic meanings in the temple vision.
9. Give three significant reasons why "sign" actions were used instead of direct speech, in chapters iii.-xxiv.
10. Mention some of the nations concerning which Ezekiel prophesies in chapters xxv.-xxxii. And show briefly how some particular one of them had a remarkable fulfilment.

THE BOOK OF DANIEL (1)

Lesson Number 82

NOTE.—For this study read the Book of Daniel through once, preferably at one sitting. Note the remarkable presence of the supernatural throughout, and pay special attention to chapter xi.

Owing to the unhappy fact that Modernist Biblical criticism has made the Book of Daniel one of its chief points of attack against the older view of the Bible as a directly and supernaturally inspired revelation of God, we have felt obliged, in the first three of these Daniel studies, to give most of the space to reconsidering the *pros* and (supposed) *cons*, for and against the genuineness and supernaturalness of the book. This, however, proves to be of much profit, for it brings different points and passages into prominence which definitely help us in our understanding and appreciation of the book.

J.S.B.

THE BOOK OF DANIEL (I)

FOR SHEER interest this Book of Daniel surely stands first among the writings of the prophets. It is full of supernatural marvel, both in the events which it records and in the visions which it describes. But its interest is eclipsed by its importance; for it preserves to us not only unique links in the chain of history, but also vital keys to the interpretation of prophecy. Alas, scholars of some modern schools, for these very reasons, have made it such a focus of criticism that before we can settle to a constructive study of it we are almost obliged to reassure ourselves as to its genuineness.

THE CONTENTIONS OF THE CRITICS

To our sceptical critics the book is merely one of the *pseudepigrapha*, or Jewish writings of the first and second centuries B.C., issued under a spurious name. It was written about 164 B.C., to hearten loyal Jews amid their trials in the time of the Maccabees. This means that it was written three and a half centuries after the time which it pretends. Its miracles are imaginations. Its predictions are simply history pretended to be foretold three hundred and fifty years earlier.

Now the critics may eulogise the noble intentions and literary merits and high ethics of the book, but their verbal drapery does not deceive us. The blunt truth is that either this book was written when it purports to have been written, and is therefore inspired of God, or else, if it was not written until the date assigned to it by the critics, it is a forgery. Which of the two is it?

The Prominence of the Supernatural

The first contention against its genuineness is *the prominence of the supernatural* in it. The more thorough-going modernist critics believe neither in miracle nor prophecy. The following words of Noldeke are sufficiently representative: "The Book of Daniel is not authentic . . . the majority of the facts recorded

in the book belong to the category of fable, and could not have happened." Now when supposed Bible-scholars take this outright rationalistic position, that miracles just could not have happened, reasonable argument is scarcely possible. Who are *they* to decide what the Almighty could not or would not do? The whole subject of miracles is brought up, not just those in Daniel; and obviously we cannot re-argue that, every time we come across some new instance of the supernatural. If miracles just could not have happened, we may as well throw our Bible away: its pages are lies; the four Gospels are wrong; the foundations of Christianity are false. Thank God, we know better! The miracles of Scripture rest on a secure basis; and none is surer than that which seals all the rest, namely, the resurrection of Christ. To those whose minds are not warped by modernist scholastic infidelity, the miracles in Daniel will be no barrier to credibility, providing the book is proved sound in other respects.

As a matter of fact, however, there is a *special reason* why the supernatural is so prominent in Daniel. Israel was now in captivity. Jerusalem was ruined. Even the temple—that last hope—was gone. Jehovah, after all, had proved unequal to the gods of the Babylonians! Bel-Merodach had conquered Jehovah! That is what the Babylonians exultantly supposed. That is what the Jews were tempted to believe. There seemed no possibility now of national restoration. What though Jeremiah had given it as Jehovah's word that there should be a return after seventy years? Had not Jehovah's promises to David and Solomon now proved false?

Now the miracles in this Book of Daniel were a *sign from God*, both to Israel and the Gentiles. When the earthly sovereignty was transferred from Israel to Nebuchadnezzar, God raised up this notable man, Daniel, to represent Him at the Babylonian courts, so that through his lips, and by these supernatural attestations, He might teach Nebuchadnezzar, and impress upon the Gentile world-empires, through Nebuchadnezzar their head, the delegated nature of their authority, and their accountability to the one true God, even the God of Israel. Thus, when the testimony to Jehovah ceased at Jerusalem, God raised up this supernatural witness to Himself at the heart of the Gentile world-empire. The chosen people were to know that Jehovah's eye was watching, and His hand still guiding the course of things on

earth, that He was as near to His people in exile as He had been to them in their own land, and just as able to deliver them from Babylon as when, of old, He had brought their fathers out of Egypt. The prominence of the supernatural, then, in Daniel, is at once understandable. In fact it is such as might be expected at such a critical juncture.

The *actuality* of these extraordinary miracles is witnessed to by their impact upon the Jews. During the exile a profound transformation took place in the religious conceptions of the Hebrew people, one of the most astounding in the history of any nation. The Jews went into that exile helpless addicts to idolatry. Their idolatrous proclivities had cursed them for nearly five hundred years, and had at last become such a demoralising infatuation as to cause their expulsion from Canaan. Yet they emerged from that brief interval of the Exile what they have remained to this day—the most rigidly monotheistic people in the world. Our modern critics have striven in vain to account for this. It certainly cannot be attributed to Babylonian influence, for Babylon was a hotbed of idolatry. Nor can it be attributed to the Persians, for Cyrus and his successors were all idolaters. How then did it happen?

Well, if we admit the authenticity of Daniel the explanation is clear; for this greatest revolution in Israel's history took place *in the very interval covered by this Book of Daniel*. We know from the contemporary prophet, Ezekiel, that Daniel, even in his earlier years at Babylon, had become famed. How could it be otherwise with such miracles as those recorded in chapters ii. and iii.? And certainly Nebuchadnezzar's proclamation to the whole empire (iv.), in acknowledgment of Israel's God, must have had a simply indescribable effect on the Jews. How they would ponder Daniel's supernaturally attested prediction of the world-empires which were to follow Babylon! How they would now turn again to Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the duration of their exile, and to that earlier prophecy of Isaiah's in which the very name of their coming deliverer was foretold (Isa. xlv.)! With what eagerness would they now look for the fulfilment of these! And what would be their feelings when the fame of Cyrus the Persian began to spread?—when Babylon fell?—when the new emperor, Cyrus, who had been actually forenamed by Isaiah two hundred years earlier, gave his edict for the rebuilding of

the temple at Jerusalem, exactly as foretold? How could it be otherwise than that Jewish doubt should now be utterly silenced, and adoration of the one true God cure them for ever of their idolatry?

The "Greek" words in Daniel

A more concentrated attack, however, has been made against this book, in connection with the alleged "*Greek*" words in it. These words have been singled out as proof irrefragable of late authorship. Do they not show that by the time the book was written not only had Alexander subdued the East (about 330 B.C.), but that a considerable time must have elapsed even after that for these Greek terms thus to have embedded themselves in Hebrew speech? Could there be any proof more conclusive that the book was not written until about 160 B.C.?

But once again the "assured results" of our modern "higher critics" were doomed to humiliation. As these words were subjected to the keen scrutiny of other scholars, the results were such that, when Dr. Driver wrote more recently on Daniel, the list had dwindled to three words, these being the names of three musical instruments, with even one of these admitted not to be conclusive by itself! The other two are *pesanterin* and *sumphonyah*, which are supposed to be derived from the Greek *psalterion* and *symphonia*. Dr. Driver says it is "incredible" that these two can have "reached Babylon about 550 B.C." (which is about the time that the Book of Daniel purports to have been written).

The excavations of ancient Greek cities in Egypt now tell a very different tale! The late John Urquhart says: "The old contention that Greece carried nothing to Babylonia before the time of Alexander the Great is now too absurd for serious discussion . . . we discover the trace of a very busy commercial intercourse between Greece and Babylonia about a century before the time when Daniel was written . . . a brisk trade was then carried on in musical instruments." The seven-stringed harp invented by the Greek poet and musician, Terpander, in 650 B.C., is now found to have been in use in Babylonia less than twenty-five years after that date! We need say no more. It is now clear that Greek musical instruments, known by their Greek names, were at Babylon long enough before Daniel.

The Prophecy in Chapter Eleven

But a very different sort of attack has been made on the book, in connection with *the prophecy in chapter xi.* In this chapter critics have found what they claim is an irrefutable evidence of late authorship, in that part which refers (as all are agreed) to Antiochus Epiphanes (verses 21-45). Dr. Driver puts the case thus: "While down to the period of Antiochus' persecution the *actual* facts are described with surprising distinctness, after this point *the distinctness ceases*: the closing events of Antiochus' own life are, to all appearance, not described as they actually occurred." The transition to indistinctness here referred to comes at the end of verse 39. At that point, according to Professor Charles, we make "a transition from history to prophecy"! Now up to verse 39 we certainly do find fuller detail than in the few remaining verses of the chapter, and it may be true that our information concerning Antiochus' later years does not so clearly tally with verses 40 to 45; but to assert on this ground that verses 1 to 39 are "nothing more than past history put into the garb of prophecy," that verses 40 to 45 are simply "speculation on the part of the author as to what he thought likely to happen in the immediate future," and that this "seeming" prophecy, therefore, must have been written at that point of time (verse 40) where it "begins to fail of accomplishment"—this is surely Biblical criticism gone mad! May not the less detail in verses 40 to 45 be simply because there was less to give, since Antiochus was now nearing his end? May it not be that if we had more data about his later years we might get more light on these verses? Such questions immediately spring to mind: though fortunately, quite apart from them, there is a clear reply to the critics.

Chapter xi. does not stand alone. Chapters x. to xii. are all one vision and prophecy: and according to x. 14 the special purpose is to disclose what should happen to *Daniel's own nation* in the latter days. That is why Antiochus Epiphanes is given prominence. He was by no means one of the greatest of the old-time kings, but he figures in prophetic light because of his doings in connection with the covenant people and their land. It is this which determines what is put in and what is left out, both up to verse 39 and after it.

But let us agree that there *is* this comparative indistinctness from verse 40. There is a deep significance in this to which the critics are blind. In each case where Antiochus Epiphanes is featured in this Book of Daniel he is the prototype of "the man of sin" (2 Thess. ii. 3-10) who is even yet future (see viii. 9-14, 23-5). With this in mind, look again at verse 40. It distinctly tells us that from this point we overleap the centuries, to "the time of the end"; and we know that this means the "end time" which is *yet to be*, because the first three verses of chapter xii., which uninterruptedly continue the closing verses of chapter xi., make this plain beyond all doubt. So, then, this sinister figure of Antiochus, which here moves before us, casts a shadow which reaches right on to the final crisis of the present age. And if some of the traits do not seem to fit merely to the Antiochus of past history, it is because of this latent and further meaning in the words.

Moreover, to see in the alleged break at verse 40, as do the critics, the evidence of a spurious author whose pretended prophecies simply retell the past in prophetic garb, down to the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, is to do violence unpardonable to the rest of the book. Nothing in the book is plainer than that the four metals in Nebuchadnezzar's dream-image represent Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome (see our final Daniel study); but by making the forecasts reach down only to Antiochus, the critics must force the four metals into meaning four kingdoms which terminated then; and this cuts out Rome, which had not then risen to world power.

The Opening Verse

Perhaps, also, we ought to note, in passing, an objection based on the opening verse of the book, which says that Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem "in the *third* year" of Jehoiakim. This statement is said to be a blunder, and contrary to the other Scriptures, inasmuch as not only is there no reference elsewhere to any such siege then, but Jeremiah, in a prophecy dated the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim (xxv.), speaks as though the Babylonians had not even then come against Jerusalem.

Once again the answer is clear. Jeremiah xxv. 1 says that the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim's reign was the *first* year of Nebuchad-

nezzar's, which means that the *third* year of Jehoiakim's reign was the year *before* Nebuchadnezzar became king of Babylon. Now the Babylonian historian, Berosus, records that in this very year young Nebuchadnezzar led a military sweep against the west, including Palestine. He says: "When Nabolassar, father of Nabuchodonoser (Nebuchadnezzar), heard that the governor whom he had set over Egypt and over the parts of Celesyria and Phœnicia had revolted from him, he was not able to bear it any longer; but committing certain parts of his army to his son, Nabuchodonoser, who was then but young, he sent him against the rebel. Nabuchodonoser joined battle with him, and conquered him, and reduced the country under his dominion again. Now it so fell out, that his father, Nabolassar, fell into a distemper at this time, and died in the city of Babylon, after he had reigned twenty-nine years. But as he (Nebuchadnezzar) understood, in a little time, that his father Nabolassar was dead, he set the affairs of Egypt and the other countries in order, and committed *the captives he had taken from the Jews* and Phœnicians and Syrians, and of the nations belonging to Egypt, to some of his friends . . . while he went in haste . . . *over the desert* to Babylon."

Perhaps the critics will explain how Nebuchadnezzar had those Jewish captives if he had not invaded Judæa, and how he reached Egypt if not via Palestine! They have argued that all this took place in Jehoiakim's *fourth* year, so as to fit it with Jeremiah xlv. 2, which says that Nebuchadnezzar smote the Egyptians in *that* year, at Carchemish. The late Dr. Driver argued that it was after this *Carchemish* victory that Nebuchadnezzar hastened back to Babylon "over the desert." But he forgot that Nebuchadnezzar could not have returned to Babylon *over the desert* from Carchemish on the Euphrates! And as for the supposed silence of other Scriptures, the critics have strangely overlooked 2 Kings xxiv. 1, where we find a coming of Nebuchadnezzar to Jerusalem which *must* have been in the early years of Jehoiakim! So there we are! This first verse of the book is correct enough. The attacks on this Book of Daniel have resulted, not in confounding it, but in *confirming* it. Once again we are reminded of Paul's words in 2 Corinthians xiii. 8, "We can do nothing *against* the truth, but *for* the truth."

THE BOOK OF DANIEL (2)

Lesson Number 83

NOTE.—For this study read again the Book of Daniel through once, this time noting carefully all time-marks and geographical references which might bear on the genuineness of the book.

The Higher Criticism starts with the assumption that everything in Scripture needs to be confirmed by external evidence.

True criticism seeks to elucidate the truth: the higher criticism aims at establishing prejudged results.

The critic is a specialist; and specialists, though often necessary witnesses, are proverbially bad judges.

Sir Robert Anderson.

THE BOOK OF DANIEL (2)

THE Modernist case against this Book of Daniel has been a badly built vessel beating itself to pieces on the rocks of stubborn fact. We can leave the floating wreckage to tell its own ironic tale. To those who would follow out more fully the reply to the critics we recommend a reading of the late Sir Robert Anderson's devastating little book, *Daniel in the Critic's Den*. In this present study let us consider certain *positive* evidences for the genuineness of the book.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE REAL FACTS

First we cite the witness of *the prophet Ezekiel*. The genuineness and usually accepted date of the Book of Ezekiel have never been seriously questioned. In fact, De Wette's opinion, that Ezekiel wrote everything with his own hand, has been largely endorsed by scholars; and the latest date fixed on is the twenty-fifth year of the Captivity. All agree, therefore, that the whole of Ezekiel was written in Babylonia, and was contemporary with Nebuchadnezzar.

Now Ezekiel mentions Daniel three times. See chapters xiv. 14, 20; xxviii. 3. The two references in chapter xiv. were penned about the sixth or seventh year of Ezekiel's captivity (see viii. 1 and xx. 1, between which xiv. falls). At that time Daniel had been in Babylon about fifteen years, for he was carried there eight years before Ezekiel (compare Ezek. i. 2 with Dan. i. 1). So even if Daniel was only eighteen when carried captive, he must now have been about thirty-three. The probability is that he was more. Ezekiel's other mention of Daniel (xxviii. 3) was written about the *eleventh* year of Ezekiel's captivity (see xxvi. 1), at which time Daniel would be thirty-eight or more.

Here, then, in Ezekiel, we have contemporaneous testimony to a Daniel who, even at that time, was widely known, and was looked upon as such an outstanding saint and sage that he could

be coupled with Noah and Job. The words bear clear witness to Daniel's historicity, integrity, wisdom, and fame; and they were written just when Daniel had been at Babylon long enough to become thus famous. Such evidence as this will be almost enough by itself to convince any open mind. What then do our critics say? Unbelievable as it may seem, rather than accept it they try to explain it as referring to some other famous Daniel who flourished at an earlier time; yet with comic incongruity they have to admit that this other Daniel, despite his fame, has never been heard of outside these supposed references in Ezekiel! Truly, Ezekiel's mention of Daniel, besides giving witness to the true Daniel, forces the critics to expose their own casuistry.

First Book of Maccabees

It is a matter of general consent that among the books of the Apocrypha the First Book of the Maccabees has an excellence, veracity, and value above the rest. It was written about 110 B.C., and it bears clear witness to the Book of Daniel. In chapter ii. 51-61, the dying Mattathias recalls godly heroes of Israel's past history, exhorting his sons to similar loyalty. After mentioning seven such, he says,

"Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, by believing, were saved out of the flame.

Daniel, for his innocency, was delivered from the mouth of lions."

Who, with unbiased mind, can read this narrative, the integrity of which is generally conceded, without seeing that this mention of Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-nego, and Daniel, along with the other great worthies and incidents in Israel's history, indicates that the contents of our Book of Daniel were at that time known and accepted all over Jewry as being *equally true history* as that of the other accepted Jewish Scriptures?

To this witness from First Maccabees we would add that the *earliest* of the so-called "pseudepigraphs," the Book of Enoch, the nucleus of which dates back to about 200 B.C. or even earlier, gives evidences of the influence of the Book of Daniel; which fact means, of course, that the Book of Daniel must have been

in existence long enough *before* then, and, therefore, *far* earlier than the date assigned by our "new theology" experts. In fact, as J. E. H. Thomson says in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, all the apocalyptic writings of this period take Daniel as their model, thus proving, not only its prior existence, but its great influence and generally accepted authority even then.

Inclusion in the Canon

But now, an even more decisive witness to the genuineness of the book is *its inclusion in the Old Testament canon*. According to strong Jewish tradition, the canon of the Old Testament was largely settled by the men of the "Great Synagogue" which was called together in Nehemiah's time and continued periodically for over a hundred years, until it gave place to the Sanhedrim. The critics have cast opprobrium on this, however, so we will not press it. This is certain, however, that the canon of the Old Testament was settled before the time of the Maccabees.

Turning again to the Apocrypha, we find that Jesus Ben-Sira, in his introduction to the Book of Ecclesiasticus, speaks of "the Law, the Prophets, and the other books of our fathers," and again to "the Law itself, and the Prophets, and the rest of the books." This is precisely the threefold arrangement of the Old Testament to which our Lord Himself refers in Luke xxiv. 44: "All things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning Me." He calls the third part the "Psalms" simply because that book stood first in it, and sometimes gave its name to it. All must admit that "the other books" which Ben-Sira puts with the Law and the Prophets must mean that third part of the Old Testament, the part which became commonly known as "The Writings." His words surely cannot imply much less than *a recognised set* of Scriptures in *his* day.

At what date, then, did Ben-Sira write? He says it was soon after his entering Egypt, "in the eight and thirtieth year . . . when Euergates was king." That, say the scholars, was about 132 B.C. Now this Book of Ecclesiasticus is not the Hebrew original, but only Ben-Sira's Greek translation of it. The original work, as he tells us, was from the pen of *his grandfather*; and this, it is computed, must have been written not later than

200 B.C., and possibly was written as early as 240 B.C. What Ben-Sira tells us, then, is that the Hebrew Scriptures were *already* arranged into their threefold form *even in his grandfather's day*; which means that as far back as about 250 B.C., at least, there was this threefold division; and this certainly implies a recognised set of sacred books even at that time. Unhesitatingly, therefore, we may say with the always cautious Joseph Angus that "in the 250 years from Ezra to (the grandfather) Ben-Sirach (444-200 B.C.) a canon of sacred books was formed, practically identical with that of the Hebrew Scriptures." The one question that remains—and it is absolutely decisive—is: *Did this canon, or recognised set of sacred Jewish books, include the Book of Daniel?* If it did, then the loud argument against the book is laid low at a single blow.

Well, there is evidence that the book *was* included. To begin with, there are *three quotations* from it in this Book of Ecclesiasticus, which fact alone, to an impartial mind, will show that Daniel was one of the "other books" referred to in Ben-Sira's prologue. But, if the critics reject these quotations there is further evidence.

A remarkable testimony concerning the Jewish canon comes down to us from the pen of Josephus, the Jewish priest-historian, who, in such a matter, could make no mistake. It was written about A.D. 90. Note specially the parts we italicise.

"For we (Jews) have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing with and contradicting one another (as the Greeks have), but only *twenty-two books*, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly *believed to be Divine*; and of them, five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years; but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, *the prophets* who were after Moses wrote down what was done in their times, *in thirteen books*. The remaining four books contain hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life. It is true, our history hath been written *since* Artaxerxes (i.e. since the time of Nehemiah) very particularly, but *hath not been esteemed of the like authority with the former*

by our forefathers, because there *hath not been an exact succession of prophets since that time*: and how firmly we have given credit to *those* books of our own nation (i.e. those up to Nehemiah's time) is evident by what we do; for *during so many ages as have already passed*, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them; but it becomes natural to all Jews, immediately from their very birth, to esteem those books to contain Divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willingly to die for them."

So, then, those books which eventually constituted the Jewish canon were admitted only after long recognition as Divinely inspired. No book was admitted which was not believed to have been in existence in the time of Nehemiah; for the Sanhedrim held that inspiration ceased with the prophets, and that no "prophet" (i.e. no Divinely inspired teacher) had come since the time of Nehemiah. During "*so many ages*" as had "*already passed*" when Josephus wrote, since those twenty-two books had come to form the canon, nothing had been added and nothing deleted. That means, of course, that if the Book of Daniel was in that canon at all, then like the other books in the canon, it had been in for these "*so many ages*." That it actually *was* in is certain. In A.D. 32 we find our Lord Jesus Himself referring to the Book of Daniel in just the same deferential way that He refers to the other books of the Old Testament canon, as being just as truly inspired, and just as commonly accepted, as the other canonical Scriptures by those who heard Him (Matt. xxiv.). And the Book of Daniel was just as certainly in the twenty-two books of Josephus, in A.D. 90. And yet again it appears in the carefully ascertained list of the Jewish canonical books as left by Melito, bishop of Sardis, about another ninety years after Josephus.

And, remember, such was the zealous concern of the Jews to allow only the truly time-tested and inspired books into the canon, that, not only did they resolutely exclude books of great repute like Ecclesiasticus and First Maccabees, but they even challenged canonical books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and even Ezekiel: yet, as the late Dr. Edersheim says, "*The right of the Book of Daniel to canonicity was never called in question in the Ancient Synagogue.*"

Surely this evidence alone is conclusive. The Modernist fabrication, that the Book of Daniel is a spurious historical romance of as late as 164 B.C., covertly relating to the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes in the form of a prophecy pretendedly originating centuries earlier, and then somehow smuggled into the canon in the post-Maccabean years—this, we say, is preposterous.

Especially is this seen to be so when we reflect on the calibre of the Jewish leaders at that time. As Sir Robert Anderson has said, "The Sanhedrim of the second century B.C. was composed of men of the type of John Hyrcanus; men famed for their piety and learning; men who were heirs of all the proud traditions of the Jewish faith, and themselves the sons of successors of the heroes of the noble Maccabean revolt. And yet we are asked to believe that these men, with their extremely strict views of inspiration and their intense reverence for their sacred writings—that these men, the most scrupulous and conservative Church body that the world has ever known—used their authority to smuggle into the sacred canon a book which, *ex hypothesi*, was a forgery, a literary fraud, a religious novel of recent date. Such a figment is worthy of its pagan author, but it is wholly unworthy of Christian men in the position of English ecclesiastics and university professors."

Some of the critics may disown saying that the book was "smuggled" into the canon. They prefer to put it rather more mildly and say that the Jews were *deceived* by it. But this is equally unthinkable. The competence of the Jewish scholars to judge as to the genuineness of the book was as clear and sure as that of our modern hyper-critics is dubious. Sir Robert Anderson does not hesitate to say that if the critics are right, then these men of old, who were the Divinely appointed custodians of the Hebrew Scriptures (Rom. iii. 2), were either fools or knaves. If they were deceived by a literary forgery of their own time they were the former, he says. If they shared in a plot to get the fraud into the canon, they were the latter. "If the book was not genuine it was a forgery palmed off upon the Sanhedrim. And like all forgeries of that kind, the MS. must have been 'discovered' by its author. But the 'finding' of such a book at such a period of the national history would have been an event of unparalleled interest and importance. Where then is the record of it?"

The critics have also argued that although the book was received into the canon it was "relegated to the *Kethuvim*, side by side with such a book as Esther." We have already mentioned that the Hebrew Scriptures were in three parts—the Law (*Torah*), the Prophets (*Nevee'im*), and the Writings (*Kethuvim*). The suggestion is that the *Kethuvim* were considered inferior to the rest of the Scriptures. Now that is absurd, even though the Jews naturally had a most special regard for the Law. We only need to recall that books like the Psalms and the Chronicles and Ezra are found among the *Kethuvim*: and as for Esther, which is there, that book has been given special honour in Jewish esteem from early times. Moreover, it is obviously natural that those who later arranged the Hebrew Scriptures should think of putting the Book of Daniel just before Ezra and Nehemiah, for it belongs to that point of Israel's history. However, we need not bother to argue this any more, for Charles Boutflower, in his scholarly work on the Book of Daniel, has gathered unanswerable evidence to show that originally the book stood, not among the "Writings," as it later came to do, but *among the Prophets*! Josephus (A.D. 90) clearly has Daniel there. So has Melito, bishop of Sardis (A.D. 180), in his carefully ascertained list of the books in the Jewish canon.

So there we are: the evidence simply cannot be gainsaid that the Book of Daniel was in the Old Testament from the very time that the canon was completed—long enough before the time of Antiochus Epiphanes! The book, therefore, is unquestionably genuine, and an inspired part of the word of Divine truth. The Modernist theory is a broken pitcher that can hold no water!

THE BOOK OF DANIEL (3)

Lesson Number 84

NOTE.—For this study read the Book of Daniel once through again, this time noting the clear division of it into two clear parts, the historical and the prophetical. Note specially chapter iv., in which the key truth of the book is three times expressed, and chapter vii. in its references to the coming kingdom of the Son of Man.

After busying myself with the Old Testament in its original text for over forty-eight years, I can bear witness with fullest truth that whatever cleaves to the Old Testament of imperfection, yea, perhaps, of offence, in a word, of "the form of a servant", has from year to year for me ever the more shrivelled up into nothingness, with an ever deepening penetration into the overmastering phenomenon of prophecy.

Kautzsch.

THE BOOK OF DANIEL (3)

WE BELIEVE that the evidence already adduced will have been enough to convince any candid thinker that our Book of Daniel is genuine enough ; but there are other proofs also, which, although they can be set forth much more briefly than the foregoing, are, if possible, even more decisive.

Fulfilled Prediction

There is the witness of *fulfilled prediction*. Nothing more strongly proves the inspiration of the Bible than fulfilled prediction. Justin Martyr said, long ago, "To declare that a thing shall come to be, long before it is in being, and then to bring about the accomplishment of that very thing according to the same declaration, this or nothing is the work of God." To that we must all agree. Such fulfilled prediction is proof absolute of Divine inspiration. Therefore, if any one of the Daniel predictions can be shown to have had unmistakable fulfilment such as none but God could have foreknown or predetermined, then the inspiration and genuineness of the book are put absolutely beyond question.

Such proof—clear and incontestible—can certainly be given. We refer to chapter ix., to the prophecy of the "seventy weeks." Daniel is there informed that from the "commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem" down to the time when the Messiah should be "cut off" would be sixty-nine weeks, or sevens; that is, four hundred and eighty-three years. Obviously, then, this long period reaches right on to the A.D. era, to the year when our Lord Jesus, the Messiah, was "cut off," at Calvary. And it can be shown that this prophecy came true, not merely to the year, but to the very day, in A.D. 32 (see our next study).

What can our pseudepigraph theorists say about *this*?—for according to *their* theory the book was not written till about 164 B.C., to hearten loyal Jews in the evil days of Antiochus Epiphanes; its pretended predictions were penned *after* the events supposedly foretold; and, of course, they look *no further*

than the reign of this Antiochus. The late Dean Farrar, who put the Modernist case over in popular form to the British public, could only wriggle from the quandary with such remarks as, "To such purely mundane and secondary matters as close reckoning of dates, the Jewish writers show themselves manifestly indifferent." What a view of Bible inspiration! And what shameful misrepresentation of the real facts! No writers of old were more punctilious about exact datings and chronologies than those of the Bible.

But the critics have also tried to make the starting-point of the four hundred and eighty-three years the *destruction* of Jerusalem, so as to squeeze all but some sixty years (which apparently is neither here nor there to them) into the space between the destruction of Jerusalem and the death of Antiochus Epiphanes. Yet could anything be a more pitiful case of "handling the word of God deceitfully"?—for in clearest language the starting-point is the "commandment to *restore* and to *build* Jerusalem." We say no more about the wriggings of these men. This one true prophecy, which was fulfilled with unmistakable clearness in the death of our Lord, is enough in itself to verify the Book of Daniel to all who are willing to accept honest evidence.

The Witness of our Lord Himself

The books of the Bible stand or fall together. They are so truly a plurality in unity that the validity of the whole is bound up with the veracity of each. If "one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." Again and again we have seen that it is impossible to disparage any one part without involving some other. This is emphatically true in connection with this Book of Daniel. So closely has it entered into the warp and woof of the New Testament that, in the words of famous Isaac Newton, "To reject Daniel's prophecies would be to undermine the Christian religion." Paul's doctrine of the coming Antichrist obviously reflects Daniel vii. and xi. Still more are the visions of John in the Apocalypse bound up with those of Daniel.

But, most vital of all, the authority of Christ Himself is bound up with this Book of Daniel; for He has chosen to put the seal of a special recognition upon it. His self-given and oft-repeated title, "the Son of Man," as all agree, was taken from the pages

of Daniel. As plainly as can be, when He speaks of "Daniel" He means a real person, not the mere *nom de plume* of a comparatively recent fiction. He speaks, mark, of "Daniel the prophet," meaning one through whom Divine revelation was transmitted. Three times in His Olivet discourse (Matt. xxiv.) He quotes from Daniel. In verse 15 He refers to Daniel viii. 13; ix. 27; xi. 31; xii. 11, and gives His disciples the sign therefrom, when to leave Jerusalem. In verse 21 He describes the coming great tribulation on the basis of Daniel xii. 1. Then, in verse 30, He describes His own second advent in the words of Daniel vii. 13. Most august and solemn of all, in that terrific moment when the High Priest exclaimed, "I adjure thee, by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God," our Lord replied: "Thou hast said: moreover I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven"—words again taken from Daniel (vii. 13, 14).

But this passage, Daniel vii. 13, 14, really forms the groundwork of *all* our Lord's pronouncements concerning His second coming (see Matt. x. 23; xvi. 27, 28; xix. 28; xxiv. 30; xxv. 31). And in addition to this, as Charles Boutflower comments, "Our Lord's description of the resurrection, in John v. 28, 29, runs on the lines of Daniel xii. 2; while the next verse, Daniel xii. 3, is paraphrased by Him in Matthew xiii. 43, when describing the future glory in store for the righteous: 'Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.'"

Nor is the witness of Christ to Daniel found only in the Gospels. We simply have not space here to discuss the interweaving of Daniel's visions with those of John; yet we cannot but point out that the very title of the Apocalypse—"The revelation of *JESUS CHRIST*, which God gave unto *HIM*, to show unto His servants"—means that all the way through this wonderful book the ascended Christ is again setting His seal on the Book of Daniel!

Now this unmistakable witness of Christ to Daniel makes the issue clear. It is either Christ or the critics. It is either the "higher critics" or the *highest* Critic. To those of us who worship Him as God the Son, His word will be final. To hear it suggested that He played up to popular ignorance on such matters outs us to the core as being unspeakably dishonouring to Him. As with the Pentateuch and Jonah and Isaiah, so here again, with

Daniel, the word of Christ is the touchstone. On His authority we accept the book as being indeed the inspired word of God.

And Now—Daniel Himself

And now, with absolute confidence in this vital book, we pass on to a brief examination of its contents and message. First, however, we ought just to collect the main data concerning Daniel himself.

Our information concerning this heroic saint and seer is derivable almost wholly from the book which bears his name. In the opening verses of the first chapter we learn that he was one of a small band of Jewish captives carried off from Jerusalem by the young Babylonian conqueror, Nebuchadnezzar, in the third year of Jehoiakim's reign over Judah (2 Kings xxiii. 36, etc.). That would be about eight years before Ezekiel was similarly carried captive, and about nineteen years before the destruction of Jerusalem.

At the time of his deportation to Babylon, Daniel was still a youth. This is inferable, first, from verses 3 and 4, in which Nebuchadnezzar charges the master of his eunuchs to bring "certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; children in whom was no blemish, but well-favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans." C. J. Ellicott comments: "If the Babylonian customs were similar to the Persian, it is probable that the course of education would commence at an early age. So elaborate a system of science as the Babylonian, whether theological, astronomical, or magical, would naturally require an early training." We may reasonably suppose, therefore, that these Hebrew "children" who were to adorn the proud conqueror's courts were still youths.

Besides this, Daniel's youthfulness at the time of his expatriation seems implied by the length of time he lived in Babylon. See chapters i. 21; vi. 28 and x. 1. The last of these three verses tells us that Daniel was still there in "the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia." Now if, as we have seen, Daniel was carried to Babylon nineteen years before the fall of Jerusalem, he begins

there in 606 B.C.; and since the third year of Cyrus was 534 B.C., Daniel must have lived there for no less than seventy-two years. How much longer he lived we do not know; but it is plain that when he was taken to Babylon he must have been quite young, and when he died he must have been a great age.

The remarkable fact will also be seen from this that Daniel lived *right through the period of the seventy years' servitude*. He outlived the thirty-four years' reign of Nebuchadnezzar, and saw his son, Evil-merodach (=Amel-Marduk, "servant of Merodach") come to the throne for his brief reign of two years, to be followed by Neriglissar (=Nergal-shar-utsur, "Nergal protect the king"), Nebuchadnezzar's son-in-law, who reigned for about four years. Neriglissar's son, Labashi-Marduk, then reigned, for four months only, and was succeeded by a usurper, Nabonidus. Daniel witnessed all this, and then saw the sudden downfall of the Babylonian dominion. Nabonidus puts Belshazzar, his son, in command at the city of Babylon. Belshazzar makes his great feast, and the handwriting appears on the wall. That night Belshazzar is slain. Babylon is taken by the Persians, under Cyrus. The Babylonian empire is no more. The empire of Media-Persia takes its place. Cyrus makes his great proclamation for the return of the Jews to Jerusalem. Daniel is still in Babylon when the "Remnant" leaves for Jerusalem, led by Zerubbabel. Our last glimpse of him is in his old age, in "the third year of Cyrus." Thus Daniel links the pre-Exile and post-Exile periods together.

Going back again to the first chapter of the book, we gather that Daniel, besides being youthful at that time, was of goodly physique and handsome appearance (verse 4). It seems probable, too, that he was of royal descent (verse 3). But the thing which strikes us most of all, right from his youth to his old age, is his moral courage, or shall we call it his *unwavering godliness*? How can we but admire Daniel the youthful, refusing to defile himself with "the king's meat" and the "wine"? And how can we but admire Daniel the aged, going into the lions' den rather than forgo his life-long practice of daily prayer?—for he was then three score years and ten! Oh, this beloved Daniel is a grand character! He is one of the few men about whom God says only good. Thrice he is called "greatly beloved" (ix. 23; x. 11, 19). What John, the beloved disciple, was among the apostles in the New Testament, that was Daniel among the prophets of

the Old Testament. They had a like close place to the Divine heart. To both were great visions given. They were admitted, we may say, into the very arcana of the Deity. A deep and prayerful study of this man's peerless moral character will enrich any of us. He is an outstanding figure even as regards intellectual capacity and executive ability. We think of him as holding high administrative office with both the Babylonians and the Persians (ii. 48; vi. 1-3). Yet through all, his faith remains simple, his heart humble, his character unblemished, and his godliness supreme.

Naturally, we cannot but connect Daniel's early faith and godly resolve with the influence of the good king Josiah and the great prophet Jeremiah. It was in the third year of Jehoiakim, or just afterward, that he was carried to Babylon (i. 1). King Josiah had then been dead scarcely four years. If, then, Daniel was about eighteen to twenty when taken to Babylon, he must have been about fourteen to sixteen when Josiah died. Josiah's was a long reign of thirty-one years. Daniel was born about the middle of it, and, being of princely descent, grew up in closest connection with it. Now it was in Josiah's reign that the temple was repaired, and the worship reformed, and the Book of the Law re-discovered, and the great national Passover kept. The godly king gave a grand, royal lead which could have saved the nation if the people had really responded. Also, it was in the thirteenth year of Josiah that Jeremiah commenced his powerful public witness (Jer. xxv. 3), which was still continuing at Jerusalem when young Daniel was carried away. The influence of these two men was never lost on the future prime minister of Babylon. More than sixty years later we find Daniel pondering the words of Jeremiah concerning the seventy years' servitude (ix. 2). A godly example and influence are never without power over *someone*. There is almost always some young Daniel watching and listening. Here is a ministry which we can all exercise. We need not be kings or prophets. What a power can be wielded by the godly example of a father, a mother, a brother, a sister, a friend, a teacher, a business associate! Let us take *heed*—and, if we have become discouraged, let us also take *heart*. Nor must we miss that great truth which is both the centre and the crown of Daniel's personal history, namely, that *God honours those who honour Him* (1 Sam. ii. 30).

The "Book" of Daniel

There is really no need to set out an analysis of the *Book* of Daniel: the arrangement of it is so clear. Its twelve chapters fall into two equal parts, the first six chapters being *historical*, and the remaining six *prophetical*. The key thought and central purpose of the book are expressed in chapter iv.—three times over for emphasis (verses 17, 25, 32)—“THAT THE LIVING MAY KNOW THAT THE MOST HIGH RULETH IN THE KINGDOM OF MEN, AND GIVETH IT TO WHOMSOEVER HE WILL.” It is significant that this key utterance is made to come to us through the lips of the humbled Nebuchadnezzar, who was the golden “head” and first world-ruler of “the times of the Gentiles.” It is noteworthy, too, that this central purpose in Daniel parallels with that in Ezekiel, the *other* book of the captivity. Ezekiel’s stress is: “THEY (ISRAEL) SHALL KNOW THAT I AM JEHOVAH.” Daniel’s is: “THAT THE LIVING (ALL NATIONS) MAY KNOW THAT THE MOST HIGH RULETH.”

A striking feature of this Book of Daniel is that it is written *in two languages*. From chapter ii. 4 to the end of chapter vii. the language is Aramaic. Elsewhere it is Hebrew. Is there some special significance in this? We think there is. There is a correspondence unmistakable between Nebuchadnezzar’s dream-image in chapter ii. and the first of Daniel’s visions, in chapter vii. They both give in general outline the whole course of “the times of the Gentiles”; whereas the later visions foretell the future specially in relation to the covenant people. Accordingly, chapters ii. to vii. are in Aramaic, which was, at the time, the Gentile language of commerce and diplomacy over the whole known world. We may see, therefore, in this passing from the language of the Jew to the common language of the Gentiles, a significant symbol of what was actually then happening in history, by the sovereign act of God.

But there is even more in it than this. It is one more proof that the book was really written when it says it was. *Before* the time of Daniel the Jews did not understand *Aramaic* (see 2 Kings xviii. 26). *After* the time of Daniel they ceased to understand *Hebrew* (see Neh. viii. 8). But *in* the time of Daniel *they knew both languages*. If the book was written by a pretender, nearly

four hundred years later, wanting to console his fellow-countrymen, why did he lock half of it up in a language which they could no longer read? Or, if he wanted to lock it up in the Hebrew, to invest it with a sacred and ancient value, why did he go and put those middle chapters in the common tongue of his own day? Here is a pretty little puzzle for the late-daters to solve! Meanwhile, we ourselves are grateful to see in the phenomenon a further seal upon the book from the hand of God.

THE BOOK OF DANIEL (4)

Lesson Number 85

NOTE.—For this study read twice through chapters vii. to xii.

The reign of Nebuchadnezzar was chronicled by Berosus, "the Manetho of Chaldæa." His writings have mostly perished, but, as in the case of the Egyptian historian, Josephus, in his treatise *Against Apion*, has preserved a fragment which at least illustrates Nebuchadnezzar's boast, recorded in Daniel iv. 30, "Is not this great Babylon which I have built?" This is also the burden of the "East India House" inscription of the king, discovered among the ruins of Babylon in 1803.

The list of public works which the king had undertaken for the improvement of Babylon is amazing. They comprised more than twenty temples, with strengthened fortifications, the excavation of canals, vast embankments by the river, and the celebrated hanging gardens. Another inscription on two barrel cylinders in the British Museum gives a very similar account of the architectural works by which this great monarch enriched his metropolis and kingdom. All through Babylonia the discovery of bricks enstamped with Nebuchadnezzar's name attests his enterprise as well as his opulence and taste. . . . In the Book of Daniel the sequel of Nebuchadnezzar's boast was his attack of madness and his seclusion from public affairs. Neither Berosus nor any of the hitherto-discovered inscriptions refers directly to this fact, which need excite no surprise, as references to what was inglorious and humiliating were out of the line of such monumental records.

Angus's "Bible Handbook".

THE BOOK OF DANIEL (4)

THERE is gripping interest in the first six chapters of Daniel—the historical half of the book. Point by point they have been assailed by our modern critics; and more than equally have they been vindicated by sounder scholars. We wish we could give them fuller treatment than our present scheme allows; but in this, our final instalment on the book, we must turn to its *prophecies*.

The prophecies of Daniel are a vital key to Scripture prophecy as a whole; hence the importance of understanding them. In the Book of Daniel itself there are two prophecies which are basal to the others—that in connection with Nebuchadnezzar's dream-image in chapter ii., and that of the "seventy weeks" in chapter ix. The one is basal to prophecy concerning the *Gentile* nations, the other to prophecy concerning *Israel*.

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream-image

Never did a more epochal dream come to a man. Moreover, it was just as necessary that Nebuchadnezzar should *forget* it as that he should dream it. Had the king himself been able to relate the dream there might have been competing interpretations; but that it should become a sheer blank and then be recalled by the inspired Daniel was proof beyond question that both the dream and its interpretation were from the Most High.

What then of the interpretation? With Daniel's words before us and the record of history behind us, we surely see that the head of gold is *Babylon*, the breast and arms of silver *Media-Persia*, the lower trunk of brass *Greece*, the legs of iron *Rome*. We might have assumed that this would be at once accepted had not the Modernist school forced other meanings on the image; but as these alternative interpretations have been advanced, we refer to them here for the sake of verifying the true interpretation.

To their own humiliation, as we have seen, the critics have striven to make the Book of Daniel a mere *pseudepigraph* of about 164 B.C., in which the supposed predictions are simply

history retold down to that time. As Rome had not then risen to world-empire the four metals of Nebuchadnezzar's dream-image must somehow be made to mean four great kingdoms *before* Rome (as also Daniel's *other* prophecies must be similarly limited). But if Rome be excluded, how can the four metals be accounted for? Four expedients have been resorted to. *First*, the head of gold has been restricted to Nebuchadnezzar alone, with the later history of Babylon as the breast and arms of silver. Thus the abdomen of brass becomes Media-Persia, and the iron legs Greece. *Second*, the Media-Persian empire has been divided, so that the silver becomes the Medes and the brass the Persians, with the iron again Greece. *Third*, with the golden head as Babylon, and the silver chest and arms as Media-Persia, the brass trunk, instead of representing the Greek empire as a whole, has been restricted to Alexander the Great, with the legs of iron representing his successors. *Fourth* (despite Daniel's word to Nebuchadnezzar, "Thou art this head of gold"), the head of gold has been made to mean the Assyrian empire which preceded that of Babylon, so that the silver chest and arms now become Babylon, the brass trunk becomes Media-Persia, and the iron legs Greece.

Now it will be seen that three out of these four expedients agree that *Babylon* must not be divided into two; three agree that *Media-Persia* must not be divided into two; and three agree that *Greece* must not be divided into two. Thus, by the consensus of the critics themselves, the image begins with Nebuchadnezzar; Babylon is one metal, Media-Persia is one metal, Greece is one metal. What then about the fourth metal? The critics themselves have forced us to the conclusion that *it can only be Rome*. Moreover, the conflicting contentions and concessions of the critics tell us that they themselves are not satisfied with any one of their four expedients. Each one is open to grave objection, such as, for instance, the artificiality of representing the Medes and Persians as the second *and* third empires—as the silver *and* the brass. The Medes certainly never held what could be described as a world rule; and they were never masters of Judæa. But without needing to disprove these four makeshifts in turn, we believe it can be shown from other parts of Daniel that the four metals do indeed signify Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome.

In chapter viii. the two empires, Media-Persia and Greece, are each mentioned *by name*, and in such a way as absolutely forbids our making either of them into more than one of the metals. Daniel is shown "a ram which had two horns, but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last" (verse 3). The heavenly interpreter says: "The ram which thou sawest that had the two horns, they are the kings of Media and Persia" (verse 20). So *the one figure*, the ram, represents Medes and Persians as one kingdom, while yet the twofold character of that kingdom is preserved in the two horns, the smaller being the Medes, the later and higher one the Persians, who, later, under Cyrus and his successors, assumed the supremacy. The correspondence here with the silver breast and arms of the image will be seen at once, the two horns and the two arms in each case denoting the dual nature of Media-Persia, while yet the unity of that empire is preserved in the one ram and the one metal.

Equally clearly are we told the identity of the "he-goat" which destroys Media-Persia (verses 5-7). "The rough goat is the king of Grecia; and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king" (verse 21). In the vision, however, "the great horn" (Alexander the Great) was broken, and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven" (verse 8). This also is explained: "That (the great horn) being broken, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not with his power" (verse 22). Here, then, while the later divisions of the Greek empire are clearly anticipated, Alexander and his successors are represented as forming *one empire*, under this figure of the he-goat. Definitely, then, if Media-Persia is the silver breast and arms of the image, Greece must be the lower trunk of brass.

We can still further verify this. In chapter vii. the four kingdoms represented by the four metals are seen again, as four beasts of prey. Special attention is focused on the *fourth* beast. The correspondence between it and the fourth metal of the image cannot be missed—"strong exceedingly, and it had great *iron* teeth," etc. (verse 7). This fearsome beast has ten horns (the horn is the symbol of ruling-power), and among these a new horn arises which uproots three of the others, and has a "mouth speaking great things." Daniel says: "I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them, *until* the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given unto the

saints of the Most High, and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom" (verses 21, 22). The fourth kingdom, therefore, in its parts—the legs, the iron-clay feet, and the ten toes—is to continue "*until*" the coming of the Messiah's world-wide kingdom. This, certainly, can only be Rome.

Thus, if the iron represents Rome, the brass *must* represent Greece, which is figured in chapter viii. as *one* empire; and then the silver *must* be Media-Persia, which also is figured as one empire; and thus the golden head *must* be Babylon, in accord with Daniel's word to Nebuchadnezzar, "Thou art this head of gold."

And now, having learned from the word of God itself the meaning of the four metals, and knowing how wonderfully history has unfolded their prophetic significance, we survey that image with awe. We see in it the whole course of history delineated beforehand, from Daniel's day, two thousand five hundred years ago, to the end of the present age. If that is not evidence of Divine inspiration, nothing is.

Now there are two big facts revealed through that dream-image which relate momentously to ourselves in this twentieth century. First, the end of the present age is not to come by gradual betterment until some high point of excellence is reached, but *by a crisis, a crash, a sudden catastrophe*; for in the days represented by the ten toes a "Stone cut out without hands" (Christ in His Messianic kingdom, as shown in chapter vii.) smites the image and crushes it to powder (ii. 34, 35, 43-5). As William Newall has said, "All modern dreams of Millennium before Christ comes are heresies begotten of vain human self-confidence or of Satanic delusion direct." The world will be saying "Peace and safety" when "sudden destruction" smites the whole present system of things.

Second, *the end of the present age is now near*. The two legs representing Rome are true to historical fact; for, as is well known, the Roman empire split into two great halves—the eastern and western empires. *The division took place in A.D. 395*. Thus, from the accession of Nebuchadnezzar (606 B.C.) to the dividing of the Roman empire into the legs of iron (A.D. 395) is just one thousand years in popular chronology. We will risk no date-fixings! Yet we need not hesitate to say that in the light of this interpreted dream-image we must be today somewhere in the end-period

represented by the feet and the toes. Present-day developments corroborate this. Count the thrones which have given place to republics in recent years. See the portentous movements of "labour" today. The iron and the clay now go together as in the feet of that image. With such portents before our eyes, we who are Christ's may well "look up," knowing that "our redemption draweth nigh." And, seeing we know such things, "what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness"!

The "Seventy Weeks"

In Daniel ix. we find one of the most notable predictions in the Bible. In verses 24-7 Daniel is told that "seventy weeks (or sevens) are determined" on his people. From the going forth of the "commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem" to the time when the Messiah should be "cut off" would be "seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks," or sixty-nine weeks in all; that is 483 years. The seventieth week is treated as distinct. In it an evil ruler violates covenant with the Jews, and desecrates Jerusalem.

To understand this prediction we must ascertain when the "command to restore Jerusalem" was issued, so as to know the starting-point of the 483 years. We must also know whether the years are solar or lunar or lunisolar. Three decrees affecting Jerusalem are mentioned in Ezra—that of Cyrus in 536 B.C., that of Darius Hystaspis about 519 B.C., and that of Artaxerxes Longimanus about 458 B.C. (i. 1; vi. 3; vii. 11). None of these can be the decree foretold to Daniel, for all three relate only to the temple and worship. The one edict in history for the rebuilding of the city itself is that which was issued by Artaxerxes at the appeal of Nehemiah—"That thou wouldst send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, *THAT I MAY BUILD IT*" (Neh. ii. 5). Nehemiah himself gives the date—"the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (ii. 1). This, then, is the starting-point: Nisan, 445 B.C. Nisan is the first month of the Jewish year. The first of Nisan is New Year's Day. As Nehemiah names no other day, the prophetic period must be reckoned, according to common Jewish custom, from the New Year's Day. Now as the Jewish year was regulated by the Paschal moon, the date of any Nisan can be definitely calculated in relation to

our own Julian dating. In his book, *The Coming Prince*, Sir Robert Anderson has shown, with the corroboration of the Astronomer Royal, that Nehemiah's date was the 14th March, 445 B.C.

And now, what kind of *years* are we to reckon? We are not left in doubt. The interrelation of Daniel's visions and those of John is patent to all; and a comparison of the two will settle it that the prophetic year is a lunisolar year of 360 days. Both Daniel and John speak of "a time, and times, and half a time" (that is three and a half "times"); and both make it clear that three and a half "times" are three and a half *years* (Compare Dan. vii. 25; ix. 27; Rev. xii. 14; xiii. 5). But John goes further and splits up the three and a half years into *days* (compare Rev. xi. 2, 3; xii. 6, 14), showing us that the three and a half years equal 1,260 days. This settles it that the prophetic year is one of 360 days.

So then, from the edict to rebuild Jerusalem, down to the cutting off of the Messiah, was to be 483 years of 360 days each. Was the prophecy fulfilled? It was. Once only did our Lord offer Himself publicly and officially as Israel's Messiah. It was on that first, memorable "Palm Sunday." Sir Robert Anderson rightly emphasises the significance of this. "No student of the Gospels can fail to see that the Lord's last visit to Jerusalem was not only in fact but in intention the crisis of His ministry. From the time that the accredited leaders of the nation had rejected His Messianic claims, He had avoided all public recognition of those claims. But now His testimony had been fully given, and the purpose of His entry into the capital was to proclaim openly His Messiahship, and to receive His doom. Even His apostles themselves had again and again been charged that they should not make Him known; but now He accepted the acclamations of 'the whole multitude' of the disciples. And when the Pharisees protested He silenced them with the indignant rebuke, 'I tell you that if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.' These words can only mean that the Divinely appointed time had arrived for the public announcement of His Messiahship, and that the Divine purpose could not be thwarted." It was on this day that our Lord looked on Jerusalem and exclaimed: "If *thou* also hadst known, even *ON THIS DAY*, the things that belong to thy peace . . .!" (see R.V.). And we are expressly told that

this day was the fulfilment of Zechariah ix. 9 (Matt. xxi. 4, 5). Such concentrated emphasis on this day surely cannot be mistaken. This was the predicted day of His public offer to the nation; and which directly occasioned His being "cut off." Here, then, we find the *terminus* of the 483 years, emphasised too clearly to be misunderstood.

See now how *exactly* Daniel ix. was fulfilled. No date of history is made clearer than the commencement of our Lord's public ministry. Luke tells us that it was "the fifteenth year of Tiberius Cæsar" (iii. 1). Now the reign of Tiberius began 19th August, A.D. 14, so that the *fifteenth* year of his reign, when our Lord commenced His public ministry, was A.D. 29; and the first Passover of our Lord's ministry was in the month Nisan of that year. Three Passovers after this, in A.D. 32, our Lord was crucified. We give a final quotation from Sir Robert Anderson: "According to Jewish custom, our Lord went up to Jerusalem on the 8th Nisan (John xi. 55; xii. 1; and Josephus, *Wars*, book vi. chapter 5, paragraph 3), which, as we know, fell that year upon a Friday. And having spent the Sabbath at Bethany, He entered the Holy City the following day, as recorded in the Gospels. The Julian date of that 10th Nisan was Sunday the 6th April, A.D. 32." What then was the length of time between the decree to rebuild Jerusalem and this climactic public advent of Christ—between the 14th March, 445 B.C. and the 6th April, A.D. 32? Sir Robert tells us that it was EXACTLY 173,880 DAYS, THAT IS, 483 PROPHETIC YEARS OF 360 DAYS! Again, if this is not evidence of Divine inspiration, then nothing is.

What about that *seventieth* week? It is yet to be. Between the Messiah's being "cut off" and that seventieth week, the whole of the present "Church" age intervenes. As we have said before, the Church of the present dispensation is nowhere the subject of direct prediction in the Old Testament. It was the "secret" kept "hidden" during preceding ages (Eph. iii.). Again and again in the Old Testament we find both advents of Christ foretold in the same verse or passage, but with no light given as to the intervening of the present age between them (see Gen. xlix. 10; Isa. liii. 11, 12; Mic. v. 3; Isa. lxi. 1, 2, with Luke iv. 17-19; Zech. ix. 9, 10; Mal. iii. 1; 1 Pet. i. 10, 11).

We cannot here go further into Daniel's prophecies; but we hope that our brief study of these two basal passages may serve

as a useful beginning to some for further investigation. Meanwhile, with that seventieth week in view, we await the trumpet-blast from heaven, the voice of the archangel, the descent of the Lord, the opening of the graves, the resurrection of the saints, the possessing of the kingdom, and the glory that shall follow.

QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF DANIEL

1. What have the rationalistic critics said concerning the date and authorship of this book, and why?
2. Give a special reason for the large presence of the supernatural in the book, and say what impact the miraculous happenings had on the Jews.
3. What coincidental and yet very weighty witness does Ezekiel bear to the contemporary historicity of Daniel?
4. Can you mention three other witnesses to the genuineness of Daniel and his book? (One of these is a book of the Apochrypha.)
5. How do our Lord and the New Testament witness to the genuineness of Daniel and his prophecy?
6. When was Daniel carried to Babylon, and how do we know that he lived there at least seventy-two years?
7. What are the two main chapter-groups of the Book of Daniel?
8. What was Nebuchadnezzar's dream-image? What do you think its several parts represent, and why?
9. How does that image seem to show that the end of the present age must be near?
10. Could you show by certain dates and facts how the prophecy of the Seventy Weeks, up to the "cutting off of the Messiah," was fulfilled exactly?

THE PROPHET HOSEA (I)

Lesson Number 86

NOTE.—For this study read the Book of Hosea right through once or twice. For reasons mentioned later, the book should be read in a modern translation, or at least in the Revised Version, especially from chapter iv. onwards.

The original Scriptures were written in Hebrew, with some parts in Chaldee, and others in a peculiar dialect of Greek. Attempts were naturally made to make these originals available by translations into other vernacular tongues. But translation is necessarily imperfect. Languages are not uniform in vocabulary or significance, and exact equivalents are not always to be found. Hence arise difficulties of rendering which perplex the most learned linguist, and all that is practicable is to choose the best available words to reproduce the original. No inspiration can be claimed for such human reproductions, yet they are practically safe guides.

A. T. Pierson, D.D.

THE BOOK OF HOSEA (I)

HOSEA is the prophet of Israel's zero hour. The nation had sunk to a point of such corruption that a major stroke of Divine judgment could no longer be staved off. What the weeping Jeremiah was to Judah, the southern kingdom, nearly a century and a half later, that was the sob-choked Hosea to Israel, the northern kingdom. Poignantly, though unprevailing, he expostulated with his obdurate countrymen during those tragic decades which culminated in the utterly deserved yet none-the-less heart-rending catastrophe of the Assyrian invasion. Nay, more, just as Jeremiah saw his fellow-countrymen of the south actually plunged into the thick night of the Babylonian captivity, and broken-heartedly memorialised it in his "Lamentations," so, probably, did Hosea actually see the ten tribes of his beloved Israel dragged away from the land which they had shamefully defiled, into that exile and dispersal among the nations from which, even yet, they have not been regathered. Perhaps, indeed, he became a refugee in Judæa, bringing his prophetic writings with him, from which this "Book of Hosea" has come down to us.

Background

It is especially true with Hosea that if we would clearly understand the man and his message we must see him against the background of his times. The opening verse of the book says: "The word of the Lord that came to Hosea, the son of Beëri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel." Note the mention of *Hezekiah* here. That Hosea was still prophesying in the days when Hezekiah reigned in *Judah* settles it that our prophet lived on through the fifty years or so in Israel between the death of Jeroboam II and the Assyrian invasion; for that invasion took place while Hezekiah reigned in Judah (Isa. xxxvi.). It also indicates that the *beginning* of Hosea's prophesying must have been *near the end* of Jeroboam's reign.

Now this period, from Jeroboam II on to the captivity, was the awful "last lap" of iniquity in Israel's downward drive. We cannot read these pages of Hosea without seeing that things have become shockingly worse in his days even than they were in the days of his prophet-predecessor, Amos. With the death of Jeroboam II, and the murder of his son, the dynasty of Jehu expires (see 2 Kings x. 30, with xv. 8-12.) Jeroboam is the last king who reigns in Israel with any semblance of Divine appointment. The kings who follow seize the throne by murdering its occupant at the time. Shallum slays Zechariah after only half a year's reign; Manahem slays Shallum after a reign of only one month; Pekah kills Pekahiah, the son of Menahem; while Hoshea, the last of them, in turn slays Pekah.

It is an awful period. Loyalty to the throne is all but extinct; conspiracies are rife; there are outbreaks of anarchy; conditions are deplorable (iv. 1, 2; vii. 1, 7; viii. 4; ix. 15, etc.). Around the degraded and tottery throne the nation tosses in disorder. As the late George Adam Smith has said: "It is not only, as in Amos, the sins of the luxurious, of them that are at ease in Zion, which are exposed; but also literal bloodshed, highway robbery with murder, abetted by the priests. Amos looked out on foreign nations across a quiet Israel; his views of the world are wide and clear; but in the Book of Hosea the dust is up, and into what is happening beyond the frontier we get only glimpses. There is enough, however, to make visible another great change since the days of Jeroboam. Israel's self-reliance is gone. She is as fluttered as a startled bird; '*They call to Egypt; they go to Assyria*' (vii. 11). But everything is hopeless; kings cannot save; for Ephraim is seized by the pangs of a fatal crisis." (In Hosea, "Ephraim" is used as representing the whole of the ten-tribed nation, Israel.)

Things were even worse morally and spiritually than they were politically. Ever since the days of the *first* Jeroboam, when the ten tribes had disrupted from the house of David to form a separate kingdom, the worship of the golden calf at Bethel had been a snare to Israel. Although the Bethel calf (like that at Dan, in the north) was supposed at first to represent Jehovah, yet more and more the idol itself became the object of worship. This became an open door to other forms of idolatry; and the alliances which Israel's kings made with foreign powers brought in the immoral idolatries of Syria and Phoenicia. Thus the way was

paved for the course, cruel nature-worship associated with the names of Baal and Ashtaroth, with all the attendant abominations of child-sacrifices and revolting licentiousness.

Pick out some of the evils which Hosea laments or denounces—swearing and falsehood (iv. 1, 2); murder and bloodshed (iv. 2; v. 2; vi. 8); robber-gangs, and murder-gangs of priests (vi. 9; vii. 1); wide-prevailing adultery (iv. 2, 11; vii. 4); perversion, false-dealing, and oppression (x. 4; xii. 7); idolatry (iv. 12, 13; viii. 5; x. 1, 5; xiii. 2); drunkenness (iv. 11; vii. 5); utter heedlessness of God (iv. 4, 10; viii. 14). Such was the sorry state to which Israel had sunk! Things were all too disturbing even in the days of Amos; but since then there had been a veritable landslide of wickedness. The people were steeped in evil—idolatry, drunkenness, debauchery, perjury, violence, banditry, adultery. In fact, adultery was consecrated as a part of the religious rites connected with the idolatrous calf-worship (iv. 14). It was to these people, and at this time, that the sensitive-hearted Hosea lifted up his voice in the name of Jehovah!

Characteristics

One thing quickly becomes clear as we read this Book of Hosea; the first three chapters belong together, in distinction from all those that follow. They are *narrative*, whereas all the remainder are addresses. But besides this, these first three chapters are *symbolical* narrative. The prophet's wife, Gomer, and the three children, Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah, and Lo-ammi, and the tragedy of the prophet's married life, of which these chapters speak, are all symbolical of the relationship between Jehovah and Israel. The narrative is continuous. The style is fluent and easy.

But with chapters iv. to xiv. it is very different. There is neither narrative nor symbol; nor apparently are these chapters amenable to logical analysis. The modern scholar already quoted tells us that here we have "a stream of addresses and reflections, appeals, upbraidings, sarcasms, recollections of earlier history, denunciations and promises, which, with little logical connection and almost no pauses or periods, start impulsively from each other, and for a large part are expressed in elliptic and ejaculatory phrases. . . . The language is impulsive and abrupt beyond all

comparison. There is little rhythm in it, and almost no argument. Few metaphors are elaborated. Even the brief parallelism of Hebrew poetry seems too long for the quick spasms of the writer's heart."

Such seems to be the mind of Bible scholars in general about chapters iv. to xiv., so that usually this Book of Hosea is simply regarded, without further analysis, as having but the one division—that between the three symbolic chapters at the beginning, where we have the faithless wife and her faithful husband, and the remaining eleven chapters, where we have the faithless Israel and her faithful God. Yet although this is the usual view, and despite the passionate brokenness of Hosea's style here, I think we shall see shortly that if we have an observant eye to the prophet's phraseology, there is undoubtedly clear division and significant development in chapters iv. to xiv.

Symbolic Prologue

If we are going to be really captured by the pathos, the passion and the startling meaning of Hosea's message, we must first see the significance of the first three chapters, in which we have the symbolic story of Hosea's unfaithful wife and her children. The fact is, these three chapters should not be taken as a "division" in Hosea's treatise, but rather as a *prologue* to it. That is surely why they are put at the beginning, and not in the middle or at the end! The treatise proper begins at chapter iv. 1, with the words—

"HEAR THE WORD OF JEHOVAH, YE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL; FOR JEHOVAH HATH A CONTROVERSY WITH THE INHABITANTS OF THE LAND."

The symbolic narrative of Hosea's marriage tragedy, in the first three chapters, is prefixed because all that follows in "the Lord's controversy" is meant to be interpreted in the light of it.

What, then, is the special relevance of this prologue? It is this: *The prophet, through the heartbreak of his own marriage tragedy, had come to see Israel's sin against God in its deepest and most awful significance.* Hosea had loved, with a pure, deep, tender, sensitive love. He had honourably taken to himself the

woman of his choice, and entered into what he anticipated would be a union of life-long happiness. After the birth of the first child, however, painful suspicions were aroused in his mind as to Gomer's loyalty; and these were confirmed later by the discovery of adultery. The first child Jezreel is definitely said to have been born to Hosea (i. 3), but the others are not. The second child he does not own. He names the little girl *Lo-ruhamah*, which means Unloved, or she-that-never-knew-a-father's-love. The third child he disowns outright, calling it *Lo-ammi*, which means Not-my-people, or No-kin-of-mine.

We can imagine the conflict of emotion in Hosea's heart, the sense of shame in his desecrated home. He had forgiven his beloved but weak and disloyal Gomer once . . . twice. . . . He had pleaded and warned. But things had at length reached the point where separation was necessary. After this, so it would appear, Gomer had sold herself for money, and later drifted into slavery, from which, however, she was redeemed by the still compassionate Hosea (iii. 2), though there could be no thought of reunion without a process of discipline and chastening (iii. 3).

This story is told consecutively, and at each point the symbolism is explained and applied. Gomer is the nation, Israel. The children are the people of that nation. Hosea's sorrow, patience, compassion, and his final act of redeeming, chastening, and restoring Gomer are, in adumbration, the sorrow, patience, compassion, and love of God toward sinning Israel. The whole tragic story of Israel is here, in these first three chapters, yea, and the ultimate triumph of that day yet to be, when God shall say: "I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies" (ii. 19); "I will say to them which were not My people: Thou art My people; and they shall say: Thou art my God" (ii. 23).

It will be quite clear to any careful reader that the first verse of chapter ii. should really end chapter i. It will be equally clear that chapter ii. is the *application* of chapter i.; also that chapter iii. looks right on to the end of the present age, for its last words are: "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and His goodness *in the latter days*" (iii. 5). Yes, the whole story of Israel, past, present, and future, is here, in this symbolic prologue.

But the deepest and most awesome thing of all in these chapters is that through his own cruelly desecrated relationship with Gomer, Hosea came to understand the true meaning of Israel's sin: it was *spiritual adultery*, and even *harlotry*! The sin of adultery has been defined as that of "seeking satisfaction in unlawful relations." That is what Israel had done. Harlotry is even worse. It is the sin of "prostituting high possessions for the sake of hire and gain." That, too, is what Israel had done. As Hosea tells them, God had taken them to Himself in a special relationship, had loved them, carried them in His arms, taught them to walk, been Husband and home to them; and they had gone after other gods!—and had prostituted their high privileges to the lascivious indulgence of idolatry!

Such sin, then, is spiritual adultery! To see it in this light is to see it in its ugliest enormity, and at the same time to realise with a cutting keenness *the suffering which it causes to the heart of God*.

Now this is the thought which underlies all the remaining chapters in Hosea; and chapters iv. to xiv. should be read with this all-the-while in mind. The sin of a people with such high privilege and sacred relationship as Israel is the most heinous sin thinkable. Deeper down and worse than merely fleshly sins is that of *wilful infidelity to love*—even to that love which is "passing the love of women"!

Outraged but Persevering Love

Hosea is the prophet of *outraged but persevering love*. Here is the love that "suffers long and is kind." Here is the love that never lets us go, and never gives us up. Here is the love that many waters cannot quench—wounded, outraged, grieved, disappointed love, which, although it flames and flashes with white-hot indignation at sin, sobs out, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel?"

We have already referred to the brokenness of Hosea's style in chapters iv. to xiv. May we not detect in this brokenness of style a sensitive vibrance with the brokenness of the times, and an expression, too, of the brokenness of Hosea's own spirit over the sin and coming calamity of his people?

The difference between Amos and Hosea is strongly marked.

Perhaps we may be permitted to give one further quotation from George Adam Smith concerning this. "There could be no greater contrast (than Hosea) to that fixture of conscience which renders the Book of Amos so simple in argument, so firm in style. Amos is the prophet of law: he sees the Divine processes work themselves out, irrespective of the moods and intrigues of the people, with which, after all, he was little familiar. So each of his paragraphs moves steadily forward to a climax, and every climax is doom—the captivity of the people to Assyria. You can divide the book by these things; it has its periods, strophes and refrains. It marches like the hosts of the Lord of hosts. But Hosea had no such unhampered vision of great laws. He was too familiar with the rapid changes of his fickle people; and his affection for them was too anxious. His style has all the restlessness and irritableness of hunger about it—the hunger of love." Yes, Hosea is the prophet of the hungering, persevering love of God to men; and the prophet himself has entered into the great, suffering, yearning love of God through his own lonely grief over wayward Gomer.

This is an aspect of the Divine love upon which, perhaps, we do not dwell often enough. We think of God as angry, threatening, hostile, towards wicked-doers; and we are right in so thinking, for such must God necessarily be, as the moral Governor and Judge of the human race. Not only is it true that God *does not* and *will not* "clear the guilty"; He *cannot* if He is to remain consistent with His own holy nature. Yet there is another aspect. It is that which is represented in Hosea, and which reappears in the guise of father-to-son compassion in the parable of the prodigal son. God sustains four principal relationships to mankind—(1) Creator, (2) King, (3) Judge, (4) Father. Which of these four is it which supplies the fundamental motive and purpose in the bringing of the human race into being? Did God create merely to possess? Did God create merely to reign? Did God create merely to judge? No, the three relationships of Creator, King, Judge, do not supply the basic motive. It is the fatherhood which is ultimate. God created us for *fellowship* with Himself. This means that human sin hurts the great, loving heart of God. In its deeper aspect, sin does not merely break God's law, it breaks His heart. Calvary says so. Whether it be under Hosea's metaphor of the grieved and wounded husband, or our Lord's picture of the

sorrowing and compassionate father, the truth is there: *human sin hurts God!* "Lost souls" are a loss to the heart of God!

And we must add a further word—a warning against the veneration of supposedly sacred objects. All the trouble in that ten-tribed kingdom of long ago originated in the worship of the two golden calves which king Jeroboam installed at Dan and Bethel. By the time Hosea lived, those calves and the illicit cult which grew up around them had brought the nation to such a moral condition that Divine judgment could be staved off little longer. Those calf-worshippers of Hosea's day were in the same category as the Romanist image-venerators of our own day. They claimed that in worshipping the golden calves they were worshipping Jehovah in symbolic form; but in reality it was the idols and the idol system which held their worship. This opened up the way for full idolatry, causing sins of outrageous flagrance, and thus provoking the severest judgments of God. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1. John v. 21).

Organised Protestant Christianity today is marked by a decline in the teaching of evangelical doctrine, and a resurgence of ritualism. The breakdown in Biblical indoctrination is an outcome of that theological liberalism commonly styled "Modernism". The reversion to ritual is a clerical effort to fill the gap created by this breakdown, but it is a deceptive and futile substitute. It is the attempt to conceal inward death by outward show. It is like putting an elaborately dressed-up corpse in the place of a living organism. Those golden calves are back again! God save us from them! It is by doctrine—by the teaching of Bible truth as the very word of God, that men learn and live and nations prosper.

THE BOOK OF HOSEA (2)

Lesson Number 87

NOTE.—For this study read right through the book again, and chapters iv. to the end twice. The need for a more modern and clarifying translation will have now become clear in the reading of these chapters.

If we look at a sundial we may understand the use and import of the figures; yet can we not attain a knowledge of the time unless the sun shine upon it. So it is with the Word of God; we may understand the general meaning of the words, yet can we not receive its spiritual instruction unless we have the unction of the Holy One, whereby we may know all things.

Charles Simeon.

HOSEA

THE PROPHET OF PERSEVERING LOVE

PROLOGUE (i.-iii.)—The whole story in symbol.

ISRAEL'S SIN INTOLERABLE: GOD IS HOLY (iv.-vii.).

THE FIVEFOLD INDICTMENT (iv., v.).

ISRAEL'S UNREAL "RETURN" (vi.).

HEALING MADE IMPOSSIBLE (vii.).

ISRAEL SHALL BE PUNISHED: GOD IS JUST (viii.-x.).

THE TRUMPET OF JUDGMENT (viii. 1).

These chapters throughout are expressions of wrath to come.

ISRAEL SHALL BE RESTORED: GOD IS LOVE (xi.-xiv.).

DIVINE YEARNING (xi. 1, 4, 8, etc.).

YET ISRAEL MUST SUFFER (xii., etc.).

THE FINAL VICTORY OF LOVE (xiv.).

THE BOOK OF HOSEA (2)

WE COME now to the body of the book, chapters iv. to xiv. Here we must express sympathy with those who may have found these chapters discouragingly difficult to get hold of as they appear in the Authorised Version. Admittedly, the abruptness of Hosea's style in these chapters makes translation less easy; but the Authorised Version—much as we dislike to say an unkind word about our grand old "A.V."—so confuses the verb-tenses in some places and obscures the sequence in others that it is awkward, even with careful reading, to pick out the train of thought and the true breaks in it. The Revised Version makes improvements; but these chapters should be read in a thoroughly modern translation; for despite the emotional brokenness of the writing here, the progressive periods and logical breaks are present, as we shall soon find, and can be seen as the outline of hills can be seen through vapoury summer showers—until, in the last chapter, the rains and vapours clear away, and the landscape is bathed in clear shining.

What is more, when we really see the threefold progress in these chapters we are struck by the completeness and beauty of the message which together they express to mankind for all time.

Let us now pick our way through these chapters. The first thing which will be clear to us is that chapters iv. and v. obviously belong together as one progressive address of indictment. It will be good to set these two chapters out here, in part, so as to see more clearly the order and progress in the prophet's address.

JEHOVAH'S ADDRESS OF INDICTMENT

(a) To the whole nation

Chapters iv. and v.

Hear the word of Jehovah, ye children of Israel; for Jehovah hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth nor real love nor knowledge of God in the land.

2. *Swearing and falsehood and murder and thieving and adultery!—they break out, and blood strikes upon blood.*
3. *Therefore doth the land wither, and every dweller therein languisheth, even to the beast of the field and the fowl of the heaven; yea, even the fish of the sea are swept up.*

(b) To the Priesthood

4. *Yet let no man contend, let no man reprove, for thy people are contenders against Me, O priest.*
5. *Thou hast stumbled today, and the prophet shall stumble with thee tonight, and I will destroy thy mother (i.e. the nation).*
6. *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because thou hast rejected knowledge (O priest), I reject thee from being priest to Me; and as thou hast forgotten the Law of thy God, I also will forget thy children, etc.*

(c) An "aside" to Judah

15. *Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, let not Judah bring guilt on herself. And come not to Gilgal, and go not to Beth-Aven, nor swear, As Jehovah liveth!*
16. *Israel has gone wild like a wild heifer. How now can Jehovah feed them like a lamb in a broad meadow?*
17. *Ephraim is wedded to idols: leave him alone (O Judah!)*
18. *Their carouse over, they continue with harlotry: her rulers are fallen in love with shame!*
19. *A wind hath wrapt them up in her skirts, and they shall be put to shame by their sacrifices.*

(d) To Priests, People, and Princes

- Chapter v. 1. *Hear ye this, O priests, and hearken, ye house of Israel, and give ear, O house of the king; for on you is this sentence!—for ye have become a snare at Mizpeh, and a net spread out upon Tabor;*
2. *And the revolters are gone deep in corruption; but I shall be the scourge of them all.*
 3. *I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hid from Me; for now, O Ephraim, thou hast played the harlot, and Israel is defiled.*
 4. *Their doings will not let them return to their God, etc.*

(e) Judgment certain on Israel

8. *Blow the trumpet in Gibeah, the clarion in Ramah; shout the slogan, Beth-Aven—"After thee, Benjamin!"*

9. *Ephraim shall become a desolation in the day of rebuke! Among the tribes of Israel I have made known what is certain! etc.*

14. *For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will rend and go away; I will carry off, and there shall be none to deliver.*

15. *I will go and return to My place, till they feel their guilt and seek My face. In their trouble they will soon seek Me!*

Thus we see, in chapters iv. and v., an address marked by clear order and progress as well as deep emotion. But besides this, we shall now find that chapters vi. and vii. continue and develop this address, so that chapters iv., v., vi., and vii. all belong together. This will become clear if we watch the recurrent words and ideas. To begin with, in chapter v., the Lord twice speaks of withdrawing Himself from Israel:

"They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek Jehovah, but they shall not find Him: He hath withdrawn Himself from them" (v. 6).

"I will go and return to My place till they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face. In their affliction they will soon seek Me" (v. 15).

Chapters v. and vi. should be linked by the word "saying," thus: "In their affliction they will soon seek Me, saying: Come, and let us return unto the Lord. . . ." But the profession of returning to the Lord is superficial, as the Lord's immediate rejoinder shows—"O Ephraim, what can I make of thee? O Judah, what can I make of thee? for your goodness (or professed love) is like a morning cloud, and as the dew which soon passes away" (vi. 4). This thought of *returning* (hypocritically) recurs, connecting chapters vi. and vii.

"Come and let us return unto the Lord, for He hath torn, and He will heal us" (vi. 1).

"Yet for all this they have not returned unto the Lord their God" (vii. 10).

"They return, but not to Him that is on high" (vii. 16).

But now look at an even clearer link-word to show the connection of chapters iv. and v. with chapter vi. It is that word "knowledge"—

"The Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no . . . knowledge of God in the land" (iv. 1).

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because thou hast rejected knowledge I will also reject thee" (iv. 6).

"Come, and let us return unto the Lord . . . and let us know, let us follow on to know the Lord" (vi. 1-3).

"I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (vi. 6).

Just a further word. The second half of the last verse in chapter vi. reads: "When I returned the captivity of My people." The chapter break here is cruel; for these words obviously go with the opening words of chapter vii. Also, instead of the past tense, "returned," we should read, "When I would return"; so that chapter vii. now begins—

"When I would return the captivity of My people, when I would heal Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim reveals itself, and the wickedness of Samaria."

This thought, that God would fain have healed and delivered Israel, comes again in the thirteenth verse of this seventh chapter—"Though I would have redeemed them they spoke lies against Me."

Now these different words, which are like links and keys to these four chapters, do not thus recur in the later chapters; but they certainly bind chapters iv., v., vi., and vii. together, and at the same time interpret them for us. The progressive argument is as follows.

The knowledge of God was destroyed in the land (iv. 1, 6); and this was the tap-root of all manner of evils (iv., v.). Because

of Israel's impenitent persistence in these evils Jehovah purposes to exact retribution and to withdraw Himself from them (v. 6, 15). Whereupon Israel superficially "returns" to "know" Jehovah, taking it presumptuously for granted that "after a couple of days" there will be a reviving (vi. 1-3). But their professed return is merely ritualistic, and Jehovah protests, "I desire real love, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (vi. 6). Jehovah, however, still longs to spare and restore Israel, but when He would do so the determined wickedness of the nation prevents Him. The upshot of these chapters is that *Israel's sin has reached the point where it is intolerable.*

Chapters viii. to x.

The remaining chapters of Hosea can be dealt with simply and briefly. If, in the chapters just reviewed (iv.-vii.), we have the exposure of Israel's awful *sin*, it is equally clear that in the next three chapters (viii.-x.) we have the utterance of the awful *judgment* which is swiftly coming upon it. Chapter viii. begins, "*Set the trumpet to thy mouth!*"—that is, sound the alarm of impending calamity. Thereafter, every verse, or every other verse, in these three chapters is a vehement expression of wrath to come. Run the eye quickly again through these chapters, and see that this is so.

"The eagle is down upon the house of Jehovah!" (viii. 1). "Israel shall cry . . . but the enemy shall pursue him" (verses 2, 3). "Thy calf, O Samaria, He hath cast off. . . . Mine anger is kindled" (verse 5). "The calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces. . . . They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind" (verses 6, 7). "The bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, strangers shall swallow it up" (verse 7). "Israel is swallowed up. Now shall they be among the Gentiles as a vessel wherein is no pleasure" (verse 8). "Now will He—Jehovah—remember their iniquity, and visit their sins" (verse 13). "I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour the palaces thereof" (verse 14). So is it all the way through these chapters. The verses are like one unbroken scourge of curses. The centre verses of the three chapters focus the whole of their contents—"The days of visitation are come; the days of recompense are come; Israel shall know it. . . . He (Jehovah) will remember

their iniquity; He will visit their sins" (ix. 7-9). Thus, our second finding in chapters iv. to xiv. is that chapters viii. to x. are occupied with *judgment on Israel's sin*.

Chapters xi. to xiv.

Finally, in chapters xi. to xiv., we find a noticeably different emphasis or tone from the preceding chapters. Dr. R. G. Moulton calls these chapters "The Yearning of God." The yearning is that of *love*. See the opening words—"When Israel was a child, then I *loved* him . . ." See verse 4—"I drew them with cords of a man, with the bands of *love* . . ." See verses 8, 9, 10, 11—"How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? . . . Mine heart is turned within Me, My repentings are kindled together . . ." See also xii. 6, 9, 10; xiii. 14; xiv. 6. Note also in these chapters the recurrence of *plaintive retrospect* (xi. 1-4, 8, 9; xii. 3-6; xiii. 4-6). And note that although the inevitability of judgment is reiterated, as in xi. 5, 6; xiii. 3, 7, 8, 13, yet the note is now that of sorrowing regret that it must be so, as is shown in each case by the verses immediately following the above references.

But most of all here is the final triumph of love, culminating in the last chapter. It is a grand and beautiful climax. Judgment is finished. Sin is forsaken. Backsliding is healed. Love reigns. See verse 8, which is really the closing verse, for verse 9 is a brief epilogue. Ephraim says: "What have I to do any more with idols?" Jehovah responds: "I have answered and will regard him." Ephraim again says: "I am like a green fir tree"; and Jehovah again responds: "From Me is thy fruit found."

Thus we have a striking, triple message in these chapters of Hosea, as is shown in the simple analysis which we have prefixed to this present study (see page 98).

THE PROPHET JOEL (I)

Lesson Number 88

NOTE.—For this study read the prophecy of Joel through twice.

The Bible is indeed a deep book, when depth is required, that is by a deep people; but it is not intended particularly for profound persons. And, therefore the first, and generally the main and leading idea of the Bible is on its surface, written in the plainest possible Greek, Hebrew, or English, needing . . . nothing but what we all might give—attention.

John Ruskin, "Modern Painters."

THE BOOK OF JOEL (I)

BOTH in style and subject this Book of Joel is arresting. For vividness of description and picturesqueness of diction Joel is scarcely equalled. His pen-pictures of the plague-stricken land, the invading locust-army, and the final gathering of all nations to the valley of judgment, are miniature masterpieces of graphic vigour.

Joel, whose name means "Jehovah is God," calls himself "the son of Pethuel" (i. 1). Beyond this we are told nothing about him. His book makes it tolerably certain, however, that he exercised his prophetic ministry in or near Jerusalem. It is the inhabitants of that city whom he addresses (ii. 23). It is Jerusalem which he sees in danger (ii. 9). It is in Zion that the "alarm" is to be sounded (ii. 1, 15). It is in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem that deliverance shall be in the after-days (ii. 32). It is the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem which is then to be ended (iii. 1); and it is Judah and Jerusalem which shall "dwell for ever" (iii. 20). The ten-tribed northern kingdom is not once mentioned.

Early or Late?

As for the *date* when Joel wrote this message, scholars are far from unanimous. He has usually been regarded as one of the earliest, if not actually the very first, of the writing prophets: but certain moderns contend, paradoxically enough, that he was probably the very latest of them. We have inspected the arguments on both sides; and it has not taken us too long to conclude that the earlier view is the true one. It is not needful to our present study to discuss this fully here, though we may mention that one strong indication of the earlier date assigned to the book is that the only enemies of Judah mentioned in it are the Phoenicians, Philistines, Edomites, and Egyptians. Now while these were vexatious enough enemies, what were they compared with the awful Assyrian and Babylonian world-powers which rose later, and crushed the Palestinian nations, leading

both Israel and Judah into captivity? Surely it is almost incredible that if Joel prophesied *after* the onsets of these mighty powers he should leave them unmentioned, the more so if, as is asserted, he wrote after the Babylonian exile itself had occurred!

Notwithstanding this, Sir George Adam Smith's book on the Minor Prophets categorically asserts that the *post*-exilic date of Joel is "proved" by chapter iii. 2, which says that the heathen have scattered Israel among the nations and parted their land. But Sir George should have been more careful to take this text in its context. It is the Phoenicians and the Philistines who are here in mind (see verse 4), and it is *these* who are said to have plundered the land and sold the Israelites to other peoples and removed them far from their own land (see verses 5 to 7)—long enough before the Exile! And if corroboration be required for this, one only need turn to Amos (whom Sir George admits to be pre-exilic) chapter i. 6, 9, to find the same predatory assaults of the Philistines and the same Phoenician traffic in Israelite captives referred to. And if an actual historical instance of this carrying away of Judah's sons from their own land be asked, we have it in 2 Chronicles xxi. 17, where we are told that the Philistines broke in and carried away all the king's sons except one—the youngest. Needless to add, perhaps, these would not be the only persons carried off in that particular raid.

But even if Joel iii. 2 *did* refer to the Exile, as Sir George has asserted, it would not prove that Joel wrote *after* that event, for this verse comes (as Sir George himself admits) in the *predictive* part of Joel's little treatise; and therefore there is no reason at all why Joel should not have written of the Exile before ever it happened, just as other prophets speak of events long in advance. As a matter of fact, in Joel iii. 2 and its context we have an instance of something that is found again and again in the prophetic writings, namely, the prophecy is so worded that while there is a primary reference to an historical happening with which the prophet's contemporaries were familiar, there is a further and larger fulfilment envisaged away in futurity. Some of the other "modern" arguments for a *post*-exilic Joel are more like those of young schoolboys than degreed scholars. We shall here ignore them, and are confirmed in the older view that Joel prophesied in the latter half of the ninth century B.C.

Contents and Analysis

Let us now go through the book and analyse it, and thus seek to know its central message.

First, we must re-read chapter i. Here we have a moving description of the desolation in the land, resulting from successive locust ravages (verse 4). The thing to settle here is: Are we to understand that the desolation which Joel here describes was actually present when he wrote, or (as frequently happens in the prophetic writings) was he using the present tense for the sake of vividness to picture something that was yet coming? My own first impression was that he was using the graphic present to depict, as though it were already there, a calamity yet to break on the nation, just as Isaiah, hundreds of years before our Lord's incarnation, used the present tense concerning Him, in the words, "Unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given." My impression seemed confirmed by verse 15, where Joel slips into a momentary use of the future tense—"Alas—for the day! for the day of Jehovah is *at hand*, and as a destruction from the Almighty *shall it come*." Most writers on Joel, however, take it that the desolation described by him in chapter i. was actually present; and I think we must take that view ourselves after careful reading. The question seems settled, in fact, by chapter ii. 25, where the Lord says: "And I will restore to you the years that the locust *hath eaten*, the cankerworm and the caterpillar and the palmerworm, My great army which I *sent* among you." This verse makes it absolutely clear that the land was already stricken by the locust scourge. So, then, as our first item in the analysis of this book, we write down that chapter i. describes a desolation already present, with (in verse 15) an alarm of some still further and greater calamity impending.

Chapter ii.

If we now read on through chapter ii., we shall find that the first eleven verses in it are a most gripping and awesome picture of this still further and greater trouble which was about to break on the nation. This is too clear to need comment. The chapter begins: "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion; and sound an alarm in My holy mountain!" An alarm is not sounded for what is already past, but to warn of that which is imminent. Thus, the verse

continues: "Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of Jehovah *cometh*, for it is *nigh at hand*." Then follows the description of the strange, dread army which was to overrun the land. It is enough to strike fear into any heart. This visitation, whatever its nature, was to be so grave and extraordinary that it could be described by no less an expression than "the day of Jehovah"—an expression which comes not only in verse 1, but again in verse 11, where we read, "The day of Jehovah is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?"

At verse 12 there is a break too clear to miss. It is marked, in our Authorised Version, by the word "Therefore"; and from this twelfth verse down to verse 17 there is an imploring *appeal* to the nation to repent before the dread stroke falls. The appeal begins: "Therefore also now, saith Jehovah, turn ye unto Me with all your heart. . . ." Instead of the word "therefore," the Revised Version has, "Yet even now"; and this is preferable, for it emphasises that this is an *eleventh-hour* appeal. In the mercy of God there is always this eleventh-hour chance before a major stroke of judgment falls. We see this illustrated in the history of both Israel and Judah. It happens again and again in the lives of individuals. Modern European history exemplifies it, too, if we have eyes to discern the hand of God in things.

And now, at verse 18, there comes a further break. There is a gracious *promise*—a promise of salvation if the eleventh-hour appeal is heeded. This promise runs from this eighteenth verse to verse 27. Most writers on Joel suppose that the appeal was heeded, and that therefore these verses (18–27) describe what actually happened. That, however, is a gratuitous "reading between the lines" what is not there, all because verse 18 is in the past tense—"Then did Jehovah become jealous for His land, and took pity upon His people." But none of the verses which follow verse 18 is in the past tense; and this eighteenth verse is put in the past simply as a way of vivid emphasis as the prophet introduces the gracious promise, or because, for encouragement's sake, he momentarily visualises the Divine response, if the people repent, as though it had already happened. Again and again we have the past tense used in this way in the prophetic writings. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, for instance, gives its wonderful picture of the suffering Saviour practically wholly in the past tense.

An Annex (ii. 28-iii. 21).

Finally, from chapter ii. 28 to iii. 21, where Joel's little book ends, we have a section which plainly stands by itself, for it is all *predictive* of what will happen in the after-days; and this is the only part of Joel's writing which is predictive of the days beyond the prophet's own time. The apostle Peter, in his discourse on the day of Pentecost, definitely relates Joel ii. 28, and what follows it, to "the last days" (Acts ii. 15-21). At this point, therefore, we are reassuringly guided in our analysis and interpretation of Joel by a clear New Testament pronouncement. So, then, from Joel ii. 28 to the end of the book we have a predictive *annex* concerning the after-days. And thus we may now set out our analysis as follows.

THE BOOK OF JOEL

"THE DAY OF JEHOVAH COMETH!"

AN ALARM—INVASION BY PLAGUE! (i. 1-ii. 11).

THE PRESENT DESOLATION (i. 1-20).

THE YET FURTHER THREAT (ii. 1-11).

AN APPEAL—ELEVENTH-HOUR HOPE! (ii. 12-27).

APPEAL: "TURN YE TO ME" (ii. 12-17).

PROMISE: "I WILL RESTORE" (ii. 18-27).

AN ANNEX—ON THE AFTER-DAYS (ii. 28-iii. 21).

EPOCHS OF THE END-TIME (ii. 28-iii. 16).

ULTIMATE GLORY OF ZION (iii. 17-iii. 21).

But there is one point in our analysis which may seem to require further verification. Our first heading is "Invasion by Plague"; yet are we *sure* that the invading host in chapter ii. is a locust plague, and not an army of *men*? This is important. Three answers have been given.

First, there are those who expound this passage as *apocalyptic*, that is, as referring wholly to the dread "day of the Lord" at the end of the present age. This explanation of the passage is

called "apocalyptic," of course, from the Greek word, *apocalupsis*, which means an unveiling or revelation (and which is the title of the last book in our Bible because that book is an unveiling of the future). An example of the apocalyptic interpretation of this Joel passage is found in the Scofield Bible, which heads it: "THE DAY OF THE LORD: THE INVADING HOST FROM THE NORTH PREPARATORY TO ARMAGEDDON." The footnote adds: "In Joel ii. the literal locusts are left behind, and the future day of Jehovah fills the scene." "The whole picture is of the end-time of this present age."

But we cannot accept this theory; for besides other exegetical difficulties there is one fact outstandingly which decides against it. Can we really believe that the prophet, although purporting to address and arouse his own generation, was not really addressing them at all, but a future generation nearly three millenniums away? Such an artificiality as that would be unworthy of the inspired Word. Surely, as clearly as language could make it, Joel here addresses his own contemporaries, and sounds an alarm of some calamity which was imminent then and there. He certainly *intends* them to think this. If we read the passage with a really open mind we cannot escape this. Whatever *latent* significances may lie in his words, their genuine first sense has to do with Joel's own time; and we do not serve the best interests of our Bible when, with zeal for seeing prophetic meanings, we exalt the apocalyptic at the expense of the historical integrity of Scripture.

But there is also the *allegorical* explanation. According to this, Joel was describing a coming crisis simply under the *figure* of a locust plague. There had recently been actual locust ravages in the land (as chapter i. shows); and now the prophet imagines an even worse locust plague, and uses it as a figure of the fateful coming crisis which he calls "the day of Jehovah." In line with this, it is argued that while the description has its *ground* in a locust plague, the language is too ominous to be limited by it. These locusts of chapter ii. are really the "*nations*" of chapter iii. Certain features in the description, it is said, imply a *human* army. The invaders are said to be "a great *people* and a strong" (verse 2). They assault cities and terrify the people (verses 6, 7). They are to be destroyed in a way which is inapplicable to locusts (verse 20). The priests are urged to pray that the "*nations*"

may not "rule over" Israel (verse 17). The scourge is from the *north* (verse 20), whereas locusts usually swarm Palestine from the south. All these things, it is argued, indicate something more than a locust plague. As to which event is here "allegorised," opinions vary. The later invasions by the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and Romans, of course, have been hit on; and there are those who would also include a final apocalyptic reference to Armageddon.

But the allegorical theory will not do. The idea that the description exceeds that of a locust plague breaks down on fuller knowledge, as we shall see. So does the idea that certain details are not applicable to locusts; for they invade towns just as Joel says, while Joel's further word about their stealing into houses "like a thief" certainly fits locusts more than a military assault! Moreover, Joel's account of the damage inflicted on the land is agricultural rather than military (verse 3), and there is not even a hint of that which goes with a *military* invasion—massacre and plunder. But the allegorical theory is finally disproved by verses 4 to 7 where Joel says the invaders are *like* horsemen, and sound *like* chariots, and scale the wall *like* men of war. It has been aptly observed that Joel would never have compared a *real* army with itself.

Yet even more than this, both the apocalyptic and allegorical theories are surely proved wrong by a comparison of verses 11 and 25; for in the one the invaders are called *Jehovah's* army, and in the other Jehovah Himself says: "I will restore unto you the years that *the locust* hath eaten, the cankerworm and the caterpillar and the palmerworm, *My great army* which I sent among you." Could language make it plainer, that the threatened *further* calamity, in chapter ii. 1-11, was to be of the same kind—though in even severer degree—as that which had already taken place (as described in chapter i.)?

No; Joel's locusts were neither "apocalyptic" nor "allegorical." In our next lesson we shall see that he meant locusts quite literally, and that the visitation was to be such that he could even call it by that awesome name, "The day of Jehovah." Meanwhile, let us get our analysis well fixed in our minds:—(1) An *alarm*, invasion by plague! (2) An *appeal*, eleventh-hour hope! (3) An *annex*, on the after-days.

THE BOOK OF JOEL (2)

Lesson Number 89

NOTE.—For this study read the prophecy of Joel through again twice.

I always do, and always will exhort you that at home you accustom yourselves to a daily reading of the Scriptures.

St. Chrysostom.

We have done almost everything that is possible with the Hebrew and Greek writings. . . . There is just one thing left to do with the Bible; simply to read it.

Professor Richard Moulton.

THE BOOK OF JOEL (2)

Invasion by Locusts!

"BLOW YE the trumpet!" "Sound an alarm!" "The day of Jehovah cometh!" "It is nigh at hand!" If these words have honest meaning, then they mean that some extraordinary crisis was imminent at the very time when the prophet wrote. *Following* these words there is the description of a terrifying, desolating, resistless invasion-host which was to come up over all the land (ii. 2-11); and, as already pointed out, a comparison of verse 11 with verse 25 shows conclusively that this threatened disaster was an invasion by *locusts*.

Those who hold that the prophet's language here is too awesome to be used of an actual plague of locusts have fallen back either on the *apocalyptic* explanation, which refers the passage exclusively to the end of the present age, or on the *allegorical* explanation, which says that the passage describes those *human* enemies of the covenant people which were later to invade their land. But, as we saw in our last study, neither of these explanations will bear careful examination.

We shall now furnish some external proofs of the fact that the true interpretation is, indeed, that which takes the passage *literally*, as referring to real locusts. Read the passage carefully, once again, noting the seeming peculiarities, from that unusual expression in verse 2, about "the morning spread upon the mountains," down to verses 10 and 11, where we read even of the earth quaking and the heavens trembling. Then read the following accounts from competent witnesses. It will be found that Joel's description is literally true, and that little, if anything, need be taken as hyperbole or poetic licence.

The following quotation is from Van-Lennep's work, *Bible Lands*.

"The young locusts rapidly attain the size of the common grasshopper, and proceed in one and the same direction, first crawling, and at a later period leaping, as they go, devouring every

green thing that lies in their path. They advance more slowly than a devouring fire, but the ravages they commit are scarcely inferior or less to be dreaded. Fields of standing wheat and barley, vineyards, mulberry orchards, and groves of olive, fig, and other trees are in a few hours deprived of every green blade and leaf, the very bark being often destroyed. The ground over which their devastating hordes have passed at once assumes an appearance of sterility and dearth. Well did the Romans call them 'the burners of the land,' which is the literal meaning of our word 'locust.' On they move, covering the ground so completely as to hide it from sight, and in such numbers that it often takes three or four days for the mighty host to pass by. When seen at a distance, this swarm of advancing locusts resembles a cloud of dust or sand, reaching a few feet above the ground, as the myriads of insects leap forward. The only thing that momentarily arrests their progress is a sudden change of weather; for the cold benumbs them while it lasts. They also keep quiet at night, swarming like bees on the bushes and hedges until the morning sun warms them and revives them and enables them to proceed on their devastating march. They 'have no king' nor leader, yet they falter not, but press on in serried ranks, urged in the same direction by an irresistible impulse, and turn neither to the right hand nor to the left for any sort of obstacle. When a wall or a house lies in their way, they climb straight up, going over the roof to the other side, and blindly rush in at the open doors and windows. When they come to water, be it a mere puddle or a river, a lake or the open sea, they never attempt to go round it, but unhesitatingly leap in and are drowned, and their dead bodies, floating on the surface, form a bridge for their companions to pass over. The scourge thus often comes to an end, but it as often happens that the decomposition of millions of insects produces pestilence and death. History records a remarkable instance which occurred in the year 125 before the Christian era. The insects were driven by the wind into the sea in such vast numbers that their bodies, being driven back by the tide upon the land, caused a stench which produced a fearful plague whereby eighty thousand persons perished in Libya, Cyrene, and Egypt. The locust, however, soon acquires its wings, and proceeds on its way by flight, whenever a strong breeze favours its progress. Our attention has often been attracted by the sudden darkening of the sun in a summer

sky, accompanied by the peculiar noise which a swarm of locusts always makes moving through the air; and, glancing upward, we have seen them passing like a cloud at a height of two or three hundred feet."

We call particular attention to the above mention of the fire-like effects of the locusts; of the noise made by their wings; of the darkening of the sun; and of their destruction at the sea shore exactly as Joel describes (ii. 20). But if a locust "*swarm*" is so awful, what must a locust "*plague*" be! It is little wonder that when Moses announced a coming plague of locusts Pharaoh's counsellors exclaimed in desperation, "Knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?"

Mr. James Bryce, in his *Impressions of South Africa*, writes: "It is a strange sight, beautiful if you can forget the destruction it brings with it. The whole air, to twelve or eighteen feet above the ground, is filled with the insects, reddish brown in body, with bright, gauzy wings. When the sun's rays catch them it is like the sea sparkling with light. When you see them against a cloud they are like the dense flakes of a driving snow-storm. You feel as if you had never before realised immensity in number. Vast crowds of men gathered at a festival, countless tree-tops rising along the slope of a forest ridge, the chimneys of London houses from the top of St. Paul's—all are as nothing to the myriads of insects that blot out the sun above and cover the ground beneath and fill the air whichever way one looks. The breeze carries them swiftly past, but they come on in fresh clouds, a host of which there is no end, each of them a harmless creature which you can catch and crush in your hand, but appalling in their power of collective devastation."

Or, to quote, in an abbreviated form, from W. M. Thomson's classic work, *The Land and the Book*: "Their number was astounding; the whole face of the mountain was black with them. On they came like a living deluge. We dug trenches, and kindled fires, and beat and burned to death 'heaps upon heaps'; but the effort was utterly useless. Wave after wave *rolled up* the mountain side, and poured over rocks, walls, ditches and hedges—those behind covering up and bridging over the masses already killed. It was perfectly appalling to watch this animated river as it flowed *up* the road, and ascended the hill above my house. For four days they continued to pass on toward the east . . .

millions upon millions. In their march they devour every green thing, and with wonderful expedition. The noise made in marching and foraging was like that of a heavy shower on a distant forest. Nothing in their habits is more striking than the pertinacity with which they all pursue the same line of march, like a disciplined army."

In the *Journal of Sacred Literature*, October 1865, a writer recorded: "Our garden finished, they continued toward the town, devastating one garden after another. Whatever one is doing one hears their noise from without, like the noise of armed hosts, or the running of many waters. When in an erect position their appearance at a little distance is like that of a well-armed horseman." Another writer says: "To strength incredible for so small a creature, they add saw-like teeth, admirably calculated to eat up all the herbs in the land." Another says: "After eating up the corn, they fell upon the vines, the pulse, the willows, and even the hemp, notwithstanding its great bitterness." And another says: "For eighty or ninety miles they devoured every green herb and every blade of grass." And another says: "The gardens outside Jaffa are now completely stripped, even the bark of the young trees having been devoured, and look like a birch-tree forest in winter." And still another: "The fields finished, they invade towns and houses, in search of stores. Victual of all kinds, hay, straw, and even linen and woollen clothes and leather bottles, they consume or tear in pieces. They flood through the open, unglazed windows and lattices; nothing can keep them out." W. M. Thomson tells us that when the millions upon millions of locust eggs hatch, the very dust seems to waken to life, and the earth itself seems to tremble with them; and later, when the vast new breed have acquired wings, the very heavens seem tremulous with them. And as for Joel's likening of the locusts to "dawn scattered on the mountains," G. A. Smith says: "No one who has seen a cloud of locusts can question the realism even of this picture; the heavy gloom of the immeasurable mass of them, shot by gleams of light where a few of the sun's imprisoned beams have broken through or across the storm of lustrous wings. This is like dawn beaten down upon the hilltops, and crushed by rolling masses of cloud, in conspiracy to prolong the night."

We need add no more. The foregoing evidence settles two things conclusively: the *awfulness* of a really bad locust plague; and the

literalness of Joel's description. There can remain no doubt that the invasion which Joel announced as imminent was an invasion by locusts; nor can we doubt that it was this to which he referred, in the first place, when he said: "The day of Jehovah is at hand." The connection in the context is too clear to mistake.

"The Day of Jehovah"

Five times in this effusion from the pen of Joel we find the phrase, "The day of Jehovah" (i. 15; ii. 1, 11, 31; iii. 14). In fact we may say that Joel is distinctively *the prophet of "the day of Jehovah."* What is more, his use of the expression furnishes us with a guide as to its use in Scripture prophecy generally.

Let us note, then, that Joel uses this appellation in three ways. First, in chapters i. 15; ii. 1 and 11, he uses it of *the threatened locust plague*, as the context shows, and especially a comparison of ii. 11 with ii. 25, as already mentioned. Second, in chapter ii. 31, he uses it of a "great and terrible" day which is even yet to come, at *the end of the present age*; for, as the New Testament comment on this passage shows (Acts ii. 14-21), the context here refers to "the last days." Thirdly, in chapter iii. 14, he uses it of a day of Divine judgment which was even then "near" upon *the Palestinian nations* which had afflicted Israel; for the context addresses these (iii. 4-8); and their being gathered to "the valley of Jehoshaphat" (iii. 2, 12, 14) was for a "day of Jehovah" which, as plainly stated in verse 14, was "*near*" even when Joel wrote. Yet in this case the language is such that we cannot *restrict* it to this event of long ago. The description is couched in terms which evidently intend the event to adumbrate that final "day of Jehovah" which is yet to be; so that this *third* way in which Joel uses the expression *combines* both the historical and the prophetical, both the local and the racial, both the near and the far, both the now past and the yet future—a remarkable feature which we find again and again in the prophetical writings of Scripture.

This phrase, then, "The day of Jehovah," is used in three ways—first in a *local* sense; second in a *final* sense; and third in a *double* sense. Examples of each of these are found in the following references: Isaiah ii. 12; xiii. 6, 9; xiv. 3; Jeremiah xxx. 7, 8; xlvi. 10; Lamentations ii. 16; Ezekiel vii. 19; xiii. 5; xxx. 3, 9;

Amos v. 18, 20; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah i. 7, etc.; Zechariah xiv.; Malachi iv. 5.

Therefore the phrase must not *always* be interpreted of the end of the present age. Sometimes it must *not* be. Sometimes it *must* be. Sometimes it *may* be. If we take a purely local reference and give it an apocalyptic interpretation we get confusion. We see this in the Scofield Bible note to Joel ii. 11. It says that although the invading army in verses 1 to 10 is the host against the Lord at Armageddon, yet the army in verse 11 is a different one; it is now the *Lord's* army (because it says, "The Lord shall utter His voice before *His* army"). Now this idea is flatly contradicted by verse 25 which plainly says that the Lord's army was the *locust* army, the effects of which are lamented in chapter i., and an imminent further invasion of which is described in chapter ii. 1—11; so that *all* these first eleven verses of chapter ii. refer to the Lord's army, and not just verse 11 as the Scofield note says! There is much that is excellent in the Scofield notes; and while we express occasional criticism we do not lack appreciation; but the many Bible readers who unquestioningly accept the Scofield word on a passage should at least pay the respect of exercising a little kindly suspicion here and there. Certainly we cannot make the above Joel passage apocalyptic without doing violence to it.

But we must add that even where this expression, "The day of Jehovah," does not look right on to the end of our own age it is reserved to denote only the most extraordinary visitations of Divine judgment. Here in Joel, for instance, where it is used of the threatened locust-plague, the plague is such that "*there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations*" (ii. 2). Knowing what we now do about the awfulness of locust plagues, we can appreciate what blackness of horror such an announcement would mean. Many observers have confessed that the earthquake and the locust-plague, above all other physical disasters, produce a helpless, awesome, ominous sense of the supernatural. How indescribably awful, then, this super-plague of Joel ii. was to be may be easily inferred.

What "the day of Jehovah" at the end of the present age will be passes the power of imagination to anticipate. We only need to look up the references to it in both Testaments to realise that all the events of past history will be dwarfed by this **magnitudinous**

culmination. It will suddenly burst into occurrence with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ in supernatural splendour. This will precipitate Armageddon, when the "Beast" and the "False Prophet" and the anti-Christ "kings of the earth with their armies" shall be utterly overwhelmed, the present world-system smashed, Satan flung into the bottomless abyss, and all powers of evil crushed to the dust. And this will inaugurate the world-wide empire of Christ, with a restored Israel in Palestine, and all the peoples of the earth forming the one kingdom of "our God and His Christ." This "day of Jehovah" will be heralded by cosmic disturbances and other preternatural signs; it will continue for a thousand years; it will end with a Divinely permitted final insurrection of evil inspired by Satan; then the final abolition of evil from the earth, the general judgment of the human race at the Great White Throne, and a cataclysm of fire, followed by a "new heaven and a new earth."

Seeing then that we look for such things, "what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!"

Addendum on Joel ii. 28 etc.

It is usually held that the inauguration of the Christian church dates back to Pentecost. Acts ii. 16, however, explains Pentecost as, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel . . ." And the Joel passage (ii. 28—iii. 21) refers, not to the church, but to the even yet future "great and terrible day of Jehovah", the final regathering of Israel, and the Messianic kingdom. But if that Joel prophecy is even yet unfulfilled, how could Peter say at Pentecost, "This is *that*"? The answer is as follows.

In fulfilment of promise, our Lord proclaimed the kingdom to the Jews, and offered Himself as Messiah. (How certain anti-dispensationalists can deny this is passing strange.) The Jews, who had doted on the material aspects of the promised kingdom, to the neglect of its spiritual requirements, rejected and even crucified Christ—which, however, was foreknown and overruled of God to effect a world-wide Gospel of individual salvation.

On the Cross, our Lord prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". In answer, the Jews were given a further opportunity in the period covered by the Acts, when the new offer was accompanied by the additional message (and proofs) of the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus, and

the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostal miracles were God-given *signs* that the kingdom was verily drawing near again in offer. Hence Peter's "This is *that*. . ." But Israel again rejected; and as the further rejection crystallised, the Pentecostal signs were withdrawn, as also was the kingdom. The Joel passage now awaits the second coming of Christ, when the church age ends, and the kingdom age begins.

TEN QUESTIONS ON HOSEA AND JOEL

1. Was Hosea a prophet to the northern or the southern kingdom? And why may we call him the prophet of zero hour?
2. Can you mention some of the evils which existed in Israel, and which Hosea denounced?
3. What was the name of Hosea's wife, and what were the names of his three children?
4. What are the three main chapter-groups in Hosea?
5. In what way is the narrative in the first three chapters of Hosea symbolical?
6. Give reasons for the early date of the book of the prophet Joel.
7. Give a brief outline of the Book of Joel.
8. Why cannot we accept the apocalyptic and allegorical interpretations of Joel, chapter ii.?
9. Give reasons for believing that the invading host predicted in chapter ii. was to be an actual locust plague.
10. What are the three ways Joel uses the expression, "The day of the LORD"? And what great passage is quoted from Joel by Peter at Pentecost?

THE PROPHET AMOS

Lesson Number 90

NOTE.—For this study read the prophecy of Amos through at least twice.

Note on Amos v. 26, 27.

These verses read in the Authorised Version :

“But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves. Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts”.

The word rendered as “tabernacle” in verse 26 is the Hebrew *Succoth*, and research has now shown that it is the name of a heathen god, not just the Hebrew word for a tent or tabernacle. The more correct rendering is, “Succoth your king”.

Schrader translates the verse : “Thus shall ye then take Succoth your king and Kēwān your star-god, your images which ye have made for yourselves, and I will carry you off into captivity. . . .”

It was the forewarning of expulsion to a people who had forsaken Jehovah and made idols their gods.

J.S.B.

THE BOOK OF AMOS

AMOS, the herdsman-prophet, is a singular figure among the Old Testament prophets. His writing, too, is distinguished by a peculiar forcefulness and rural freshness. Although we are devoting less space to Amos than to some of the other prophets, this must not suggest a lesser estimate of him. Far from it! We give extra space and attention to a book like that of Jonah simply because of the aggravated problems and prevalent misunderstandings associated with it. This book of Amos ranks high among the writings of the prophets. Let us glance at the man himself, and then briefly examine his prophecies.

THE MAN

In chapter i. 1, the prophet speaks of himself as "Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa." So he was a rustic from away down south, from the wild country west of the Dead Sea, the wide stretch of open land known as "The Wilderness of Judæa." The sparse ruins of the little Judæan town, Tekoa, are identifiable even today, some six miles south of Bethlehem. Mile after mile the open country stretches away to the east of Tekoa and Bethlehem till it reaches the Dead Sea, fifteen miles or so away.

It was here, in this so-called "Wilderness of Judæa," that David kept his sheep, and where he afterward roamed a refugee from the court of Saul. It was here, nearly three centuries later, that Amos went forth with the herdsmen of his day; and it was here that he heard the call of God to become a prophet to the northern kingdom, Israel. In chapter vii. 14, 15, he says: "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdsman and a cultivator (not just a 'gatherer,' as in the Authorised Version) of Sycamore fruit (that is, the Sycamore-fig tree): and the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me: Go, prophesy unto My people Israel."

When Amos says he was not a prophet nor the son of a prophet, he means this merely in the technical or professional sense. He had not been trained in any of the "schools of the prophets," and therefore was not, in the usual sense, a member of the recognised prophetic order. He was what we would call today a "layman." He is a great encouragement to thousands of Christians today who have had no academic or theological training. God is sovereign in His choice of servants. He is not tied to any bishop's hands. He is not bound to any set of officials. He is not restricted in His workings to any recognised ministerial order. "The wind bloweth where it listeth"!

Mark the definiteness with which Amos speaks of his Divine call—"The Lord took me"; "The Lord said unto me: Go, prophesy." What confidence does the consciousness of such a call give a man, especially in face of opposition or discouragement such as Amos had to meet! What straightforward speaking it always puts in a man's mouth! What a sense of authority (along with humility) it gives him!—"The Lord said unto me: Go, prophesy unto My people Israel. *Now, therefore*, hear the word of the Lord." It is that ring of "now, therefore" which is absent from many of our preachers today; and therein lies their weakness. It is the conviction of a Divine call deep in the soul which makes any man or woman a telling witness for God.

Amos, although a native of Judæa, was called to prophesy in the northern kingdom, Israel. Try to imagine the impression that his appearance and preaching would make at the capital, or at Bethel. Alexander Maclaren says: "If one fancies a godly Scottish Highlander sent to the West End of London, or a Bible-reading New England farmer's man sent to New York's 'Upper Ten,' one will have some notion of this prophet, the impression made, and the task laid upon him." We know that Amos went to Bethel, the main centre of Israel's golden-calf worship (vii. 13), and there, like a solitary Luther, he denounced the prelate and the priests and the state idolatry, under the very shadow of "the king's chapel."

Amos himself tells us the *time* when he prophesied. It was "in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel" (i. 1). The *style* of Amos may not be marked by sublimity, but there is a clearness and regularity, an elegance and colour and freshness about it, which give

it a literary charm all its own. His vocabulary, his figures of speech, his illustrations, are all redolent of the country life from which he came. There was an unconventional bluntness about him which must have been pretty disconcerting to the college-trained professional prophets of the Bethel calf-worship, with their polished ambiguities and evasions. They would certainly feel a cold shiver down their spines to hear Amos address the upper-class ladies of Samaria as "cows"!—"Hear this word, ye cows of Bashan that are in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters: Bring, and let us drink" (iv. 1).

No doubt Amos created a stir when he appeared on the scene; and probably he was hailed with appreciation at first, for he began by announcing coming judgments on the surrounding nations. But when he suddenly wheeled round with scathing threat of coming judgment on Israel, the visage of his hearers changed. A public man in *our* land today may fling invectives at other nations to his heart's content; but let him really charge his own countrymen to their face with the rottenness and crookedness of their ways, and his popularity is doomed; nor need he be astonished if he finds the leaders of the national religion among his enemies. Bethel was Israel's Canterbury: the head priest of Bethel was Israel's primate: and we find the primate of Israel denouncing Amos as a conspirator, to the king himself (vii. 10, 11), and afterwards telling Amos to flee the country (vii. 10-13).

Whether Amos later returned to Judæa or not we do not know for certain, though the traditional site of his tomb at Tekoa suggests that he probably did. Of this, however, we may be assured, that this dauntless messenger of God did not return until he knew that his witness was fully given—not until God's word was true of him, as it later was of Ezekiel, "They shall know that there hath been a prophet among them." Amos is the kind of prophet-preacher needed in many places today. As we think of him again, Charles Wesley's lines come to mind—

Shall I, to soothe the unholy throng,
Softener Thy truth or smooth my tongue,
To gain earth's gilded toys, or flee
The cross endured, my Lord, by Thee?

THE BOOK

We have noted that the language of Amos is marked by clearness and regularity. We shall now see that the subject-matter of his little treatise is arranged with a corresponding orderliness.

Chapters i. and ii.

First, in chapters i. and ii. we find eight prophetic "*burdens*," or messages burdened with the news of coming retribution. These eight burdens concern eight Palestinian nations—Syria, which is addressed through Damascus its capital (i. 3-5); Philistia, which is represented by its fortress-city of Gaza (i. 6-8); Phoenicia, which is represented by its great seaport, Tyre (i. 9, 10); Edom (i. 11, 12); Ammon (i. 13-15); Moab (ii. 1-3); Judah (ii. 4, 5); Israel (ii. 6-16).

There are several points to notice about these eight burdens. First, each is prefaced by the formula, "For three transgressions and for four . . ." The phrase is not to be taken arithmetically, to mean a literal three and then four, but idiomatically, as meaning that the measure was full, and more than full; the sin of these peoples had overreached itself; or, to put it in an allowable bit of modern slang, they had "gone one too many," and "tipped the scale." The first time they had done the evil, God had rebuked. The second time, He had threatened. The third time, He had menaced with uplifted hand. Now, at the fourth time, He smites! Let the nations know that though God may bear long with the wicked, they can sin once too often! God is not mocked: there cannot be cumulative sin without a culminative stroke of retribution. The prophets believed in "poetic justice"—a retribution corresponding to the guilt, as truly as one line of poetry parallels another. The operation of such poetic justice may be seen all through history—and it operates today, as events and issues in World War II impressively demonstrated to all observant eyes.

Second, in each of these burdens the symbol of judgment is *fire* (i. 4, 7, 10, 12, 14; ii. 2, 5)—the most destructive of all the elements. Extreme guilt brings extreme doom.

Third, in each case (except Judah and Israel) the sins to be punished are *cruelties against other peoples*. See the recurrence

of "Because they . . ." God hates inhumanity. Yet never in all history have nations shown such coldly calculated inhumanity to other nations as have certain nations of today. And is God blind to this? And will He not punish?

Chapters iii. to vi.

Next, in chapters iii. to vi., we have three short *sermons*, or perhaps we ought to call them sermon "breviates," as they are doubtless written précis of the prophet's much lengthier *utterances*. These three addresses are easily picked out. They each begin with "Hear this word . . ." (iii. 1; iv. 1; v. 1). The first of them runs through chapter iii. The second runs through chapter iv. The third runs through chapters v. and vi.

Each of them is divided by an emphatic "*therefore*," so that in each we have, in the first part, judgment *deserved*, and in the remainder, judgment *decreed*. In the first of these addresses (iii.) the "*therefore*" is at verse 11. In the second address (iv.) the "*therefore*" is at verse 12. In the third address (v., vi.) the "*therefore*" is in the fifth chapter, at verse 16. (In this fifth chapter there are two "*therefores*" which come before this, in verses 11 and 13, but they are merely incidental, whereas see the emphasis at this sixteenth verse: "Therefore, Jehovah, the God of Hosts, the Lord, saith thus . . .") It will be observed that these three addresses grow in intensity, and that the third is made longer than the others by two culminating "*woes*" which are appended to it (see v. 18 and vi. 1).

The first of these addresses declares the fact of Israel's guilt in the *present*. The second stresses Israel's sin in the *past* (see verses 6 to 11, which recount Jehovah's repeated but unavailing chastenings of Israel, and note the five-times occurring mournful refrain, "Yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith Jehovah"—verses 6, 8, 9, 10, 11). The third address stresses the punishment of Israel's sin in the *future* (see v. 1-3 and v. 16 to vi. 14). Note the vehemence and intensity at the end (vi. 8-14). Yet notice, also, in this third address, the eleventh hour warning in the thrice-uttered appeal of Jehovah: "Seek ye Me, and ye shall live," etc. (v. 4, 6, 14).

Note further about these three addresses that in the first we see the *principle* underlying Divine judgment—"You only have

I known of all the families of the earth; *therefore will I punish you* for all your iniquities" (iii. 2). This is the key verse of this book. Amos is the prophet of *judgment for abused privilege*. Judgment is always determined according to privilege. Increased privilege is increased responsibility. Israel had been supremely favoured, and therefore was supremely responsible. Here is a solemn lesson for all of us to learn.

In the second address we see the *forbearance* behind Divine judgment. Before the stroke of a final major judgment is allowed to fall on the nation, there comes a succession of minor judgments, to warn (iv. 6-11). It is when these are ignored and the Divine patience is outraged that the culminative judgment falls (iv. 12).

In the third address we see the uncompromising *severity* of Divine judgment on the impenitent, where sin has been obdurately persisted in (v. 2, 3; vi. 8-14).

Chapters vii. to ix.

Finally, in chapters vii. to ix. we have five *visions*. In chapter vii. 1-3 there is the vision of the *grasshoppers*, or locusts, eating up the product of the soil. But in answer to the prophet's entreaty to "forgive," the plague is *averted*.

Next, in verses 4 to 6, we have the vision of the devouring *fire*. This is definitely the symbol of judgment; yet in response to the prophet's entreaty to "cease," the fire is stayed: so that here we have judgment *restrained*.

Next, in verses 7 to 9, there is the vision of the plumbline (fitting symbol of judgment according to a righteous, Divine standard). Here God says: "I will not again pass by them"; and there is no intercession of Amos. Here, then, is *judgment determined*.

Following this there is the parenthetical episode of Amaziah's rebuke to Amos (vii. 10-17), making it clear that the nation, at least officially, was certainly set against the appeals of Jehovah. Then, in chapter viii., we find the vision of the basket of *summer fruit*. The fruit, that is, was dead ripe; and once fruit has reached that point, especially in hot lands, it is on the point of quickly perishing. Here, then, we see judgment *imminent*.

Lastly, in chapter ix., in one of the most awing visions of the Bible, we are shown Jehovah Himself "standing upon the altar"—that is, upon the false altar at Bethel. No symbol is here used, as in the visions of the grasshoppers, the fire, the plumbline, and the summer fruit. It is the Lord Himself; and He says: "Smite the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake, and cut them in the head, all of them. . . ." Here is judgment *executed*.

Thus, in these five visions we have, successively, judgment averted, restrained, determined, imminent, executed; and thus we see that there is an increasing intensity in the five visions, as there is in the three sermons. Yet even amid the execution of the culminative judgment, not one grain of the pure wheat was to be allowed to perish (see ix. 9)! Even "in wrath" God "remembers mercy"!

Such then is the Book of Amos. We are sorry that we cannot expand our treatment of it; but if the foregoing is firmly grasped we may feel some satisfaction. For the sake of clarity and easy remembrance we will set out our findings in a flat analysis.

THE BOOK OF AMOS

JUDGMENT FOR ABUSED PRIVILEGE

1. EIGHT "BURDENS" (i.-ii.).

DAMASCUS (i. 3); GAZA (6); TYRE (9); EDMON (11);
AMMON (13); MOAB (ii. 1); JUDAH (4); ISRAEL (6).
Note: "For three transgressions and for four."

2. THREE SERMONS (iii.-vi.).

JUDGMENT DESERVED (iii. 1-10); DECREED (iii. 11-15).
JUDGMENT DESERVED (iv. 1-11); DECREED (iv. 12-13).
JUDGMENT DESERVED (v. 1-15); DECREED (v. 16-vi.).

3. FIVE "VISIONS" (vii.-ix.).

GRASSHOPPERS (vii. 1); FIRE (vii. 4); PLUMBLINE (vii. 7);
SUMMER FRUIT (viii.); GOD OVER THE ALTAR (ix.).
Note the final promise to Israel (ix. 11-15).

THE BOOK OF OBADIAH

Lesson Number 91

NOTE.—For this study read through the prophecy of Obadiah several times at one sitting, noting the divisive “But” at verse 17, which divides the little prophecy into its two parts, the one concerning Edom, the other concerning Israel.

Whatever has to do with God is, of necessity and in the nature of things, supernatural and superhuman, extraordinary and unique. It belongs on a level of its own, standing alone and apart, by itself, unapproachable, defying alike competition and comparison. We should therefore expect both sublimity and originality, elevation and isolation, much that transcends all the limits of human thought, involving more or less the element of the inscrutable: and the presence of such characteristics instead of an obstacle to faith is rather an argument for it.

A. T. Pierson, D.D.

THE PROPHET OBADIAH

THIS remarkable fragment from the pen of Obadiah is the shortest and perhaps the earliest of the writings which have come down to us from these Hebrew prophets. It has one subject only, namely, *judgment* on Edom, though this is offset in the closing verses by a contrastive reference to the final salvation of Israel.

Of Obadiah himself nothing is known. Not even his father's name is given in the title of the book. The name, "Obadiah," was common enough among the Hebrews, and means a worshipper, or servant, of Jehovah; but our prophet cannot be identified with any of the persons so named in Scripture. The contents of his prophecy, however, indicate that he belonged to Judah, the southern kingdom. We need not here discuss the *pros* and *cons* as to the *date* of this writing, for in the case of Obadiah the question of date is not vital from an interpretative point of view.

"Concerning Edom "

The prophet begins: "Thus saith the Lord God *concerning Edom.*" First, then, we must jog our memory as to the *identity* of the Edomites. The name "Edom" means *red*. It is the name which was given to Jacob's brother, Esau, because he sold his birthright for Jacob's red pottage. See Genesis xxv. 30: "Esau said to Jacob: Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage, for I am faint. Therefore was his name called Edom." The Edomites were Esau's descendants, and their country was Mount Seir. Genesis xxxvi. 8, 9, says: "Esau dwelt in Mount Seir: Esau is Edom . . . the father of the Edomites in Mount Seir."

This "Mount Seir" was not just one mountain, but a mountainous *region* extending from the south of the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Akabah, and it was named "Seir" after Seir the Horite. In Genesis xiv. 6 and xxxvi. 20 we read: "The Horites in their Mount Seir. . . . These are the sons of Seir the Horite ("Horite" means, a rock-dweller), who inhabited the land." So, then, the Horites, or rock-dwellers, were the earlier inhabitants of Mount

Seir, and the land was called after the early Horite chief, Seir. The Edomites, or Esauites, later displaced the Horites and settled in Mount Seir. This we read in Deuteronomy ii. 12: "The Horims (Horites) dwelt in Seir beforetime; but the children of Esau succeeded them, when they had destroyed them, and dwelt in their stead."

It is a coincidence that the name "Seir" means hairy, rough, rugged. Whether the Horite chief, Seir, was so named because he was a hairy, rough, rugged man is not said, though it may possibly be suggested that he was such a man by the fact that he and his fellow tribesmen were rock-dwellers. This, however, is certainly true, that the name of this man after whom Mount Seir was called was a most appropriate name for the *territory* where he and his people lived, with its straggling bushes and tufts, its ragged crags, and serrated ridges. It is an added coincidence that Esau himself is said to have been a hairy man (Gen. xxvii. 11), and that he was called Esau for that very reason (Gen. xxv. 25)—for the name "Esau" means rough, or hairy. It may have been because of this, and because of his love for the field and the hunt and the wild life of the open, that Esau was first drawn to Mount Seir and its Horites, or rock-dwellers. At any rate, this was the identity and background of the Edomite people who are addressed by the prophet Obadiah. Their Father was Esau. Their country was Seir.

The area occupied by the Edomites, although mountainous and craggy, had no lack of fertile valleys and fruitful soil. The ancient capital was Bozrah, a few miles south of the Dead Sea; but in Obadiah's days the capital was the famous Sela, or Petra, the rock city, which, because of its peculiar position, its difficult access, its rock-hewn dwellings, and its precipitous natural defences, was considered impregnable, and had fostered a spirit of fierce independence and security in the Edomites, which defied attack and scorned all attempts to subjugate them.

Edomite Anti-Jacobism

Now the Edomite people were like both their father and their country. Their nature was marked by a hard earthiness. They were profane, proud, fierce, cruel; and these tempers found concentrated vent in a strangely persistent, implacable, bitter,

gloating spite against Israel, the nation which had descended from the twin-brother of their own national father, Esau. This violent nastiness had expressed itself again and again in the history of the two peoples. A never-forgotten instance of it was away back in the days of Israel's wilderness wanderings, when, with vicious threat, Edom had flung refusal to the courteous appeal of Moses that Israel might be allowed to pass through the Edomite country (Num. xx. 14-22).

In the times of our prophet, Obadiah, this undying Edomite anti-Jacobism had flamed out more wickedly than ever, in unprovoked treachery. See verses 10 to 14. In the day of Jerusalem's disaster, instead of befriending or at least sympathising, the people of Edom had indulged the passive cruelty of looking on with gloating satisfaction (verses 11, 12), and had egged on the plunderers. It was this Edomite venom that the Judæan captives in Babylon recalled, in the words of psalm cxxxvii. 7—"Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem, who said: Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof."

But passive callousness had given place to active alliance with Jerusalem's destroyers. The Edomites had "entered the gate"; they had robbed and despoiled Jacob; they had barred the escape of the refugees, and had delivered up the remnant to the spoilers (verses 13, 14). We shall see shortly the arresting significance of all this; but for the moment we simply note the fact of it.

Sentence on Edom

It was for this long-accumulating guilt that Divine retribution was now determined against Edom, as stated in this writing of Obadiah. If in verses 10 to 16 we have seen the *reason* for this coming requital, in the earlier verses (1 to 9) we see the *certainly* of it. Note specially verses 3 and 4—"The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart: Who shall bring me down to the ground? Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord."

Writers on Obadiah seem usually to hit on the last verse (21) as the key here. That verse reads: "And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom

shall be the Lord's." But while this is the *final* thought, it is not the *key* truth here. The key verse is 15—"As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee." Whoever be the prophet, and whatever be his prophecy, the ultimate prospect before the eye of all true prophecy is that "the kingdom shall be the Lord's"; but here, in this particular prophecy about Edom, we are meant to learn emphatically that there is a principle of "poetic justice" operative in the Divine government of the earth's peoples. This is the distinctive contribution of this Edom prophecy. Obadiah, let us remember it well, is *the prophet of poetic justice*.

Poetic Justice!

See how this key truth is amplified by the context. Edom had indulged in treachery against Judah (verses 11, 12); therefore Edom should perish through the treachery of confederates (verse 7). Edom had seized the chance to rob Judah (verse 13); therefore Edom should be robbed even till his hidden things, or treasures, were searched out (verses 5, 6). Edom had lifted the sword and shown violence against Judah (verse 10); therefore Edom should perish by slaughter (verse 9). Edom had sought the utter destruction of Judah (verses 12-14); therefore Edom should be utterly destroyed (verses 10, 18). Edom had even sought to hand over and dispossess the remnant of the invaded Jerusalem (verse 14); therefore, in the end, the remnant of Jacob should possess the land of Edom (verse 19). Yes, poetic justice!—the penalty corresponding to the iniquity as one line of poetry corresponds to another! And have we not had eyes to see the operation of poetic justice in our own day in the anti-Axis war? Never was there a war with such strange anomalies. To mention only one—was it altogether without significance that Britain was forced off the European mainland, first in the north, at Dunkirk, and then in the south, from Greece, and made to stand aside for the time, while Germany and Russia, the two nations which, officially and more blatantly than all others, had blasphemed God, slaughtered each other, despite their recently-signed pact of friendship? Were not the shocking brutalities of both these nations to the Jews paid back to them in identical terms? Yes, if we believe the Hebrew prophets, and Obadiah in particular, then we believe in poetic justice!

It should be noted that Obadiah predicts even the *extinction*

of Edom. "Thou shalt be cut off for ever" (verse 10), "There shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau" (verse 18). At the time when the prophet wrote, Edom might have seemed far more likely to survive than Judah; yet history has strikingly endorsed the prophecy. Edom has perished, Judah persists.

Although there is no explicit record, it would seem that the Edomites, despite their rocky bulwarks, fell beneath the yoke of Babylon some five years after they had helped that same nation to raze Jerusalem. A comparison of Jeremiah xxvii. 3-6 and Malachi i. 3, 4, with the writing of Josephus on the Babylonian campaign makes this practically certain. Thereupon, the Nabathæans, an Arabian tribe, occupied Edom's capital, Petra. Possibly they were sent there by Nebuchadnezzar. Later, in 312 B.C., Antigonus, one of the generals of Alexander the Great, crushed these people and despoiled Petra. Still later, in the second century B.C., the Edomites themselves, who had now settled in southern Palestine, sustained crushing defeats from Judas Maccabæus (1 Macc. v. 3, 65). Josephus tells us that still later Alexander Jannæus completed their ruin. The small Edomite remnant were almost entirely put to the sword in the massacre at the siege of Jerusalem. The survivors took refuge among desert tribes, in which they became absorbed; and Origen, in the third century A.D., spoke of them as a people whose name and language had altogether perished. Thus, the sentence on Edom was executed, and Obadiah's prophecy fulfilled.

The contents of Obadiah's prophecy may be set out very simply, as follows.

THE BOOK OF OBADIAH

THE PROPHET OF POETIC JUSTICE

1. THE DESTRUCTION OF EDOM (verse 1-16).

THE CERTAINTY OF IT, verses 1-9.

THE REASON FOR IT, verses 10-16.

2. THE SALVATION OF ISRAEL (verses 17-21).

THE PROMISE OF IT, verses 17-18.

THE FULNESS OF IT, verses 19-21.

Latent Type-teaching

But finally, we shall miss the inmost meaning of this little book if we fail to discern its latent *typical* sense. It is here that its living message and permanent values lie. Esau-Edom is a type of the "natural man," of the Adam-nature, the "flesh," the old "self-life" in us.

There is a strangely fascinating, symbolic interest about the successive *pairs of sons* away back in Genesis—Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob. In these pairs, Abel, Isaac, Jacob are the spiritual men, and they represent different aspects of the new life which is ours through union with Christ. On the other hand, Cain, Ishmael, Esau are the "natural" men, who are "of the earth, earthy," and they represent different aspects of the self-life, or the "flesh." Cain is the natural heart in its antipathy to *redemption*. He is all for a religion of culture. He would offer the fruits of the ground—of that which is under the curse through sin. He has no eye for the bleeding lamb, and will not admit the need for atonement. He tills the ground, builds cities, and finds his portion in the life that now is. As for the next of these men—Ishmael, in him we see the self-life in its antagonism to that which is of *faith*, as Paul tells us in Galatians iv. 29 (which please look up in its context). And next, in Esau, we see the self-life in its disappreciation of that which is *spiritual*. He is the man "who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright" (Heb. xii. 16). From these three pairs of sons let us learn that the "flesh" persists with us—a sad reminder of the rock from which we were hewn and the pit from which we were digged; and let us see its hostility to redemption, to the life of faith, and to the things of the Spirit.

But Esau is of special interest, for in him we see the "flesh," the Adam-nature, *in its fairest form*. In certain respects he is attractive and lovable. He is a decided advance on Cain and Ishmael. From Genesis xxv. 25 we learn that two characteristics distinguished him from his birth; he was "ruddy," and he was "hairy," which two things speak of beauty and strength. He was a bonnie babe and a comely youth, marked by physical grace and power. Yes, there is no doubt that in Esau the "flesh" is attractive. But wait; see how soon the beauty corrupts. Esau the "ruddy" becomes Edom, "the red one"; and his hue, like

that of the red horse and the red dragon and the scarlet beast in Revelation vi., xii. and xvii., betokens the fierce life within. The hair which at first bespeaks strength soon comes to indicate animal coarseness. Esau the strong becomes Edom the wild, the hunter, the slayer. After all, in the Hebrew, the word "Edom" is actually a form of the word "Adam." Edom is Adam, and Esau is the "flesh" again—outwardly fair but inwardly fierce. When he really expresses himself, see the value he puts on spiritual things; for a dish of lentils he scorns his birthright, even though he knows that the birthright from his grandfather Abraham downwards carries the Divine promises of great spiritual and future blessing. This is the "flesh" in every age. For a momentary gratification it will despise the hope of a heavenly glory, and esteem an earthly morsel in the present far more than a Divine promise for the future.

It is an illuminating study to trace out the recurring references to Edom in the Scriptures. We cannot do this here; but throughout, Edom is the "flesh"; and in our prophet Obadiah we see the ultimate expression of this. Look again through these verses of Obadiah, and let Edom picture the "flesh" or Adam-nature. See first its pride—"The pride of thine heart" (verse 3); then see how strong its hold is—"Thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock" (verse 3); then see its defiance—"Who shall bring me down?" (verse 3); then see its ambition—"though thou set thy nest among the stars" (verse 4); then see its hatred of the spiritual—"thy violence against thy brother Jacob" (verse 10); then see its real cruelty (verses 11-14). But, on the other side, see its self-deceivedness (verse 3); its detestableness to God (verse 2); its eventual defeat by the sons of faith (verses 17-21); and its final destruction by God (verses 10, 18).

Truly, in the light of New Testament teaching such as we have in Romans vi. 6-14, and Galatians v. 17-25, all this is full of vivid meaning! Nor must we fail to note that Edom is a type of all nations hostile to God, and foreshows the coming action of God against the present Gentile world-system. Nor must we fail to note yet again the truth that no weapon against God's covenant people prospers, and that nations pay dearly, in due course, for their anti-Israel policies. Thus, although the Book of Obadiah is the shortest of the prophetic writings, it is certainly *multum in parvo*, much in little.

TWELVE QUESTIONS ON AMOS AND OBADIAH

1. What little town did Amos come from? Where was it? And in what verse does he tell us that he was from there?
2. What does Amos say of himself in regard to the prophetic office and his own occupation?
3. Where and when did Amos prophesy? And what was his style of speaking?
4. What noticeably repeated preface to his prophecies does Amos use in the opening chapters, and what is the significance of that expression?
5. Give a general outline of the book of the prophet Amos.
6. What is the subject of the prophecy of Obadiah?
7. What does the word "Edom" mean? Whose descendants were the Edomites?
8. Where was the region named "Mount Seir," and how did it get its name?
9. What act of hostility to Israel did the Edomites show in the days of Moses? And what does Obadiah say about their spite in his own day?
10. What is the key verse in the little prophecy of Obadiah? What is the distinctive truth of the book?
11. What is the two-fold division of the prophecy of Obadiah?
12. What latent type-teaching does it contain for us concerning Edom?

THE PROPHET JONAH (I)

Lesson Number 92

NOTE.—For this study read the story of Jonah through twice at least.

The religious revolt of the sixteenth century rescued the Bible from the Priest. God grant that the twentieth century may bring a revolt which shall rescue it from the Professor and the pundit.

Sir Robert Anderson.

All knowledge begins and ends with wonder; but the first wonder is the child of ignorance, and the second is the parent of adoration.

Coleridge.

THE BOOK OF JONAH (I)

Fact or Fiction?

THE BOOK of Jonah—is it history, allegory, or romance? Was Jonah a real person? Was he really housed in the great fish as the book declares? Did he really preach Nineveh to a repentance which averted Divine judgment? Or is the book merely fictional? The answer to these questions is of much deeper consequence than many persons realise; for if the book is really a narrative of actual fact it brings to us one of the most striking revelations of God, and one of the most priceless messages of Divine comfort ever given; whereas, if it be merely fictional, it contains no authentic significance at all. Moreover, this question as to whether it is really historical or not involves both the integrity of the Scriptures as a whole, and the word of the Lord Jesus Himself, as we shall see. The true answer to the question, so we ourselves believe, is clear and convincing to any candid mind.

Modernist theologians, true to their Sadducean lineage, would discredit the book because it relates that which is miraculous; but their own supposedly scholarly “explainings” so ludicrously contradict each other that we turn back to the Scripture again, preferring even the miraculous to the ridiculous!

Meanwhile, on the one hand, this Book of Jonah, more than any other book of Scripture, has been the butt of the scoffer, while, on the other hand, those who accept it, and have taken the trouble to discover the tender message which lies at the heart of it, will appreciate Charles Reade’s description of it as “the most beautiful story ever written in so small a compass,” and the words of another, who speaks of it as a “highwater mark of the Old Testament revelation.”

First, then, without wasting time on the merely negative theories of the critics, let us examine the positive evidences for the historicity of Jonah and his book.

Is Jonah Himself Historical?

That Jonah himself was a real person there can surely be no doubt. The opening verse of the book calls him "Jonah the son of Amittai," and says: "Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah," thus indicating that he was a prophet. Do we read anywhere else of such a person? We do. Turn to 2 Kings xiv. 25. "He (king Jeroboam II of Israel) restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He spake by the hand of His servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher." Now this king Jeroboam was a real enough person. He was, in fact, the greatest and longest-reigning of all the kings who reigned over the northern kingdom. In a moral and religious sense there was little to choose between him and his evil predecessors on the throne, but in military prowess he remarkably excelled. His recaptured and newly annexed territories reached up as far as Hamath, over two hundred miles north of Samaria, so that his domain became almost as extensive as David's had been!—and all this is plainly said to have been in fulfilment of a prophecy by "Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet which was of Gath-hepher." Surely, then, if this Jeroboam, who *fulfilled* Jonah's prophecy, was a real enough person, so was this Jonah himself who *uttered* it!—and if confirmation is required outside the pages of the Bible, it may be worth noting that Gath-hepher is now identified with a village name El Meshed some miles north of Nazareth, in Zebulun, where, according to a firm tradition dating back to Jerome's time, the tomb of Jonah is pointed out even to this day.

No, we cannot doubt that this prophet Jonah who is mentioned in 2 Kings was a real person; nor can we doubt that this prophet Jonah in 2 Kings is identical with the Jonah of the book which bears that name; for in both cases Jonah is the son of Amittai, and neither of these two names, "Jonah" and "Amittai," do we find anywhere else in the Old Testament. Incidentally the reference in 2 Kings fixes the *time* of Jonah's ministry. It was during the later years of Joash, and (presumably) the earlier years of Jeroboam II. He would probably be one of the leaders *among the "schools of the prophets"* when *Elisha* was nearing *the end of his remarkable ministry*.

Is the Narrative Historical?

Jonah himself was a real enough person; but can we believe what the book says *about* him? Is the *narrative* historical? In reply, we call attention to the following points.

First, *there is nothing in the book to suggest otherwise*—except, of course, to our modern critics, to whom *any* narrative which records the supernatural is *ipso facto* incredible.

An unprejudiced reading will satisfy any reader that the narrative is at least *meant* to be taken as a record of actual fact. The rationalistic schools of theologians would have us believe on supposedly philological grounds, that the book is a fiction written about three hundred years later than Jonah's time; but they stupidly contradict each other; for while some of them are thus arguing a very *late* date for the book, others tell us that such crude notions as that of Jonah's fleeing "from the presence of the Lord" belong to the time of Israel's undeveloped *earlier* ideas of God! We had better leave the critics to settle their own disagreements! The fact is, that in all probability the historicity of the book would never have been called in question but for the large presence of the supernatural in it. Apart from the admitted presence of striking miracles, there is nothing whatever to suggest that the book is not meant to be read as a narrative of true fact.

Second, *tradition strongly attests its historicity*. Its early and unquestioned place in the Hebrew Scriptures at once argues the original belief of the Hebrews in its historicity. The apochryphal Book of Tobit, written probably in the fourth century B.C., includes these death-bed words of Tobit to his son, Tobias: "Go into Media, my child; for I surely believe all the things which Jonah the prophet spake of Nineveh, that it shall be overthrown." Philo, the Jewish philosopher of the first century A.D. and Josephus, the historian, both hold its historicity; and, in fact, this has been the unbroken Jewish belief from earliest times.

Moreover, until recent days, the Christian Church has emphatically endorsed this Jewish belief. In the Catacombs of Rome, those subterranean cemeteries of the early Christians, no Biblical representation is found more often than that of Jonah, whose deliverance from the deep had now become a Christian symbol of faith in the coming resurrection of the saints. Jerome, Irenæus, Augustine, Chrysostom, and others of the Christian Fathers, all

indicate their belief in the historicity of the book. So, in later days, do Calvin, Luther, and the other great Bible-men of the Reformation. It is only in recent days that certain schools of rationalistic "higher critics" have endeavoured to fling the mantle of doubt over it; and the outstanding feature of even these men is the way they contradict each other.

Third, *the word of Christ Himself conclusively confirms it*. In Matthew xii. 39, 40, He says: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonas; for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Surely, to a straight-thinking Christian mind this testimony of our Lord Himself will settle the matter; yet the critics, to save their own faces, will even call our Lord's own words into question. Some of them try to show that these words are an *interpolation*; but unfortunately for them the manuscript evidence is quite sound; and still more unfortunately for them, Luke also records the same words!

Others, forced to disown the interpolation theory, try to argue that our Lord was simply citing the Jonah story just as a preacher today might use a well-known incident from Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, or from one of Shakespeare's plays, without implying for a moment its actual historicity. But, alas for the critics, this idea is broken to bits by our Lord's further words about Jonah, in that twelfth chapter of Matthew. He says: "The men of Nineveh shall rise in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here." Will anyone dare to maintain that the Son of God was here teaching (as one has well put it) that "imaginary persons who at the imaginary preaching of an imaginary prophet repented in imagination, shall rise up in that day and condemn the *actual* impenitence of those, his *actual* hearers, that the fictitious characters of a parable shall be arraigned at the same bar with the living men of that generation?" To maintain this is monstrous! Nor dare we allow the dishonouring theory that our Lord "accommodated" his teaching to the ignorance of his hearers. Our Lord was "The Truth," and He spoke the truth. An honest reader of the New Testament must surely see that the Lord Jesus was the most *unaccommodating* preacher who ever preached!

What then? Why, this: Our Lord really spoke the words about Jonah as recorded by Matthew and Luke; and in those words He clearly and conclusively confirmed the historicity of the *Book* of Jonah.

As for such objections as that we cannot believe the narrative because there is no reference in secular history to Nineveh's repentance; or that the book must have been written long after Jonah's time because it uses the past tense in chapter iii. 3—"Now Nineveh *was* . . ."; or that there are certain Aramaic words used by the writer, which indicate its late date; we can only say that to ourselves they appear to be the despairing petty subterfuges of critics who, when their other criticisms have been soundly trounced, are bent on destroying faith in the book by any means whatever; and in any case, these objections have been easily and fully disposed of again and again. We may settle it in our minds, both from the convincingness of the evidence *for* it, and from the utter poverty of the supposed arguments *against* it, that this Book of Jonah is, indeed, a narrative of true happenings.

But What of the "Whale"?

Someone, however, even yet, is sure to trot out the hackneyed old question: *What about the whale?* So we must needs add a patient little word about this, although the question has been answered time and time again. This matter of the "whale" has been aggravated into an altogether disproportionate prominence by the contention which our modern critics have created around it. Were it not for that, we would not trouble to add this extra word here; for there is no fundamental difficulty about it to those who believe in God and in the inspiration of the Scriptures. The truth is, that this *physical* miracle of the "whale" is not nearly so wonderful as the *moral* miracle of Nineveh's repentance, or as the *spiritual* miracle of the Divine Self-revelation at the end of the book. This much is certainly true, that just as often as critics have held up this "whale" incident to ridicule, able writers have turned the ridicule of the critics back upon their own heads.

The three questions are: *Could* it happen? *Would* it happen? *Did* it happen?

As to whether it *could* happen, the obvious answer, for all who believe in God, is that *of course* it could!—for if God created *all* the fish in the seas, He could very easily create one specially for the purpose of preserving Jonah. As a matter of fact, however, we are under no necessity to believe that God actually *created* a whale to receive Jonah; for the narrative simply says that God “*prepared*” a great fish; and the Hebrew word which is here translated as “prepared” has no thought of direct creation. What is more, the narrative does not say that the fish was a whale, but only that it was “a great fish”; and although the word “whale” is used in Matthew xii. to describe this “great fish,” we need to remember that our New Testament is translated from the Greek; and the Greek word which is translated as “whale” would be better translated as “sea-monster” (as in the margin of the Revised Version). It *may* or *may not* have been a whale.

Now our modern critics have urged that no kind of fish ever heard of could perform such a feat as the swallowing and containing of a grown man; but alas for them, they have thereby exposed their own ignorance of the submarine world, as the following cullings will show.

In the *Daily Mail* of December 14th, 1928, Mr. G. H. Henn, a resident of Birmingham, gave the following testimony.

“My own experience was in Birmingham about twenty-five years ago, when the carcase of a whale was displayed for a week on vacant land in Navigation Street, outside New Street station.

“I was one of twelve men, who went into its mouth, passed through its throat, and moved about in what was equivalent to a fair-sized room. Its throat was large enough to serve as a door. Obviously it would be quite easy for a whale of this kind to swallow a man.”

Or again, in the late Sir Francis Fox’s book, *Sixty-three Years of Engineering*, the manager of a whaling station informs us that the sperm whale swallows lumps of food eight feet in diameter, and that in one of these whales they actually found “the skeleton of a shark *sixteen feet in length*”!

Mr. Frank Bullen, in his book, *The Cruise of the Cachalot*, furnishes the information that the cachalot, or sperm whale, always ejects the contents of its stomach when dying. Parts of one such ejection he himself witnessed, consisting of huge masses, some of which were estimated as about "eight feet by six feet into six feet," the total being equal to the bodies of "six stout men compressed into one!"

Most striking of all, perhaps, is an incident related by Sir Francis Fox, which, he assures us, "was carefully investigated by two scientists, one of whom was M. de Parville, the scientific editor of the *Journal des Debats* of Paris, well-known as "a man of sound judgment, and a careful writer." The incident is as follows:

"In February 1891, the whale-ship *Star of the East* was in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands, and the look-out sighted a large sperm whale three miles away. Two boats were lowered, and in a short time one of the harpooners was enabled to spear the fish. The second boat attacked the whale, but was upset by a lash of its tail, and the men thrown into the sea, one being drowned, and another, James Bartley, having disappeared, could not be found. The whale was killed, and in a few hours the great body was lying by the ship's side, and the crew busy with the axes and spades removing the blubber. They worked all day and part of the night. Next day they attached some tackle to the stomach, which was hoisted on deck. The sailors were startled by spasmodic signs of life, and inside was found the missing sailor, doubled up and unconscious. He was laid on the deck and treated to a bath of sea-water which soon revived him; but his mind was not clear, and he was placed in the captain's quarters, where he remained two weeks a raving lunatic. He was kindly and carefully treated by the captain, and by the officers of the ship, and gradually gained possession of his senses. At the end of the third week he had entirely recovered from the shock, and resumed his duties.

"During his sojourn in the whale's stomach Bartley's skin, where exposed to the action of the gastric juice, underwent a striking change. His face, neck, and hands were bleached to a deadly whiteness, and took on the appearance of parchment. Bartley affirms that he would probably have lived inside his house of flesh until he starved, for he lost his senses through fright and not from lack of air."

Bartley is also said to have explained that after being hurled into the sea the waters foamed about him, evidently from the lashings of the whale's tail. Then he was drawn along into darkness and found himself in a great place where the heat was

intense. In the dark he felt around for an exit and found only slimy walls around him. Then the awful truth rushed into his mind, and he became unconscious till the sea-water bath revived him on the ship's deck.

And where now are the critics who have declared the swallowing of Jonah to be an impossible feat?

As to whether this providential miracle *would* happen, when we come to consider the contents of the narrative in a later lesson we shall see that it is thoroughly congruous. As for the fact that it actually *did* happen, we have the confirmatory word of the infallible Christ Himself; and, so far as we ourselves are concerned, *that settles it*.

Yes, "that settles it," and the very saying so reminds me of an incident which my dear mother related to me in connection with the famous evangelist, D. L. Moody. Years ago, when my mother was a young deaconess in the Manchester City Mission, Moody and Sankey, who were big names by that time, came for their memorable Manchester campaign. Along with other deaconesses, my mother was there to hear and to help. At first she was not greatly impressed, and Moody's American nasal twang was an annoyance; but he "grew" on his hearers as the meetings progressed, and a wonderful work of conversion attended the preaching. There was a big-hearted love always pouring itself through the messages, and yet at the same time there was an air of unhesitating finality which might have caused resentment toward a preacher of different personality. But the thing which ever afterwards stood out in my mother's memory was his conclusion to a sermon on John iii. 7, "Ye must be born again". Whether Moody felt he was wasting words or somehow not making headway with his hearers I do not know, but he suddenly and abruptly ended by exclaiming, "Men and women of Manchester, ye *must* be born again. Jesus said it. *That settles it*".

That is where every *true* believer on the Lord Jesus Christ is. What *He* says settles it. It settles it regarding Jonah, and the whole of the Old Testament, and every other subject on which He made pronouncement. Our Christ is no mere *kenosis* Christ of modern criticism, but the Christ of whom, when He actually incarnate, John wrote, "We beheld His glory. . . . *FULL* of grace and *TRUTH*".

THE BOOK OF JONAH (2)

Lesson Number 93

NOTE.—For this second consideration of Jonah, read the whole of the short story again, asking: Do the chapter breaks really represent the different movements in the story?

Since writing the foregoing instalment on Jonah we have come across the following news-item in the *Madras Mail* of November 28th, 1946:

"Bombay, November 26.—A twelve-foot tiger shark, weighing 700 lbs., was dragged ashore last evening at the Sassoon Docks. When the shark was cut open a skeleton and a man's clothes were found.

"It is thought that the victim may have been one of those lost at sea during the recent cyclone.

"The shark was caught by fishermen thirty miles from Bombay."

THE BOOK OF JONAH (2)

HAVING satisfied ourselves that this Book of Jonah is a genuine bit of history, we are now ready to learn its priceless significance.

The little story is in four parts, which correspond with the four chapters into which it is divided in our English version, except that the last verse in chapter i. should be the first verse of chapter ii. (as, in fact, it *is* in the Hebrew). Jonah is the central figure, until the closing verses, where the prominence is transferred to the Lord Himself, and the supreme message of the book is uttered. The four movements of the story are—

- Chapter i. JONAH AND THE STORM.
- ii. JONAH AND THE FISH.
- iii. JONAH AND THE CITY.
- iv. JONAH AND THE LORD.

In these four movements we have Jonah's disobedience, preservation, proclamation, and correction. In chapter i. he is *fleeing from* God. In chapter ii. he is *praying to* God. In chapter iii. he is *speaking for* God. In chapter iv. he is *learning of* God. If we get at the real point in each of these chapters, we shall find that the final message of the book is one of captivating tenderness. First, then, we turn to chapter i.; but here, right away, we are faced with a question the answering of which will determine our appreciation of the whole story; and we must devote careful thought to it, the more so because there has been much misunderstanding in connection with it.

Why did Jonah Flee?

The crucial question is: *Why did Jonah flee?* Our answer to that question will decide for us whether Jonah was a petty-spirited bigot or one of the most heroic patriots Israel ever produced. Our answer, also, will either enhance or reduce for us the force of the book as a whole.

The common idea is that Jonah was a narrow-minded Jew, unwilling to carry a merciful warning to a Gentile people. For instance, even a writer of such keen insight as the late Dr. A. T. Pierson says: "His national prejudice construed God's election of Israel as a rejection of all others. His religious intolerance was mixed with no mercy for the heathen. His legal spirit inclined more to vengeance than to grace. His disloyal temper made him wilful and wayward." The late Dr. Kitto, whose writings we have gratefully quoted a number of times in this Bible Course, goes so far as to say: "One cannot love this Jonah or think well of him. We seem unable to recognise in him those signs of grace which we expect to see adorning the commissioned servants of God. It may be recollected that we do not know all Jonah's character, but only some parts of it, excited under rare and extraordinary influences. Yet it must be confessed that there is such a pervading homogeneity in *all* the traits which appear in his history, as to suggest that we see in them his real and natural character—a character, no doubt, solidly good, and open to conviction, but habitually irascible and morose, and apt, under exciting circumstances, to view things in their worst and most gloomy aspects."

In face of such words we can only protest that poor Jonah is surely the most misunderstood personality in the Bible. If such was indeed the spirit and temper of this man, then, far from his merely needing to be corrected on this or that or the other point, he was unfit for the prophetic office and for spiritual leadership. On occasions, God can and does use strange vessels; but that God should sustain, through years of inspired prophetic ministry, such a man as Jonah is here said to have been is surely hard to believe.

Now this, the common idea about Jonah, is mainly due to our misunderstanding the motive for his flight, in chapter i. The usually suggested reasons for it are three—(1) cowardly *fear* of going to Nineveh, (2) bigoted *prejudice* against the Gentiles; (3) selfish *jealousy* for his own prestige. But these three supposed reasons may be seen to be untenable simply by reading through chapter i. It certainly was not *fear* that deterred this prophet-successor of the brave Elijah and Elisha; for on board ship he shows utter fearlessness of death, himself urging the sailors to cast him overboard! Nor was it anti-Gentile *prejudice*, however

keen his national spirit may have been; for he displays immediate compassion toward the idol-worshipping Gentile sailors, even to the point of being willing to die for their safety's sake! Nor was it selfish *jealousy* lest, by prophesying a destruction of Nineveh which should afterward be averted, he should injure the professional reputation which he had gained in Jeroboam's court as the predictor of Israel's expansion; for surely it is hard to believe that the prophet who was willing to sacrifice not only his reputation but his life itself for the distressed mariners, would peevishly set his own prestige against all the thousands of lives in great Nineveh!

What, then, is the *real* reason why Jonah fled, rather than deliver his message to Nineveh? The answer is found in Jonah's own words, in chapter iv. 2, coupled with certain information which we know Jonah possessed about Assyria, of which Nineveh was the capital. In chapter iv. 2, Jonah says to God: "Therefore I fled to Tarshish, because I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil." Nothing could be franker than that! —*Jonah did not want God to spare Nineveh.* Moreover, Jonah had shown himself prepared to forfeit his prophetic office, prepared to flee into exile, prepared even to resign life itself, rather than that Nineveh should be spared! Now such deliberate self-abandon, followed by such frankness to the One who, as Jonah well realised, could read his inmost motive, surely will persuade us that Jonah must have had some far greater reason than any thought of personal safety, or prejudice, or prestige, for wishing to leave Nineveh to its doom: and, as a matter of fact, we know that Jonah *did* have such a reason—a reason which transforms his motive from apparent pettiness to something touchingly heroic.

There were two awesome facts about Assyria which gave Jonah a vehement dread lest the threatened judgment on its wicked capital, Nineveh, should be averted, through the compassion of God. First, *Assyria was the rising world-power destined to destroy Israel*; and Jonah knew this. Second, the notorious brutality of the Assyrians was such as to make the surrounding peoples shudder with a sickly terror of ever falling prey to them. Without a doubt, the Assyrians were the German Nazis of those days. The inscriptions on Assyrian monuments which have been

interpreted for us by our archaeologists reveal how they revelled in hideous cruelty on those whom they vanquished.

Speaking of this grim testimony from Assyrian inscriptions, the late John Urquhart says: "No considerations of pity were permitted to stand in the way of Assyrian policy. It could not afford to garrison its conquests, and it practised a plan which largely dispensed with the necessity for leaving garrisons behind the Assyrian armies. There was unsparing slaughter to begin with. The kings seem to gloat in their inscriptions over the spectacle presented by the field of battle. They describe how it was covered with the corpses of the vanquished. This carnage was followed up by fiendish inflictions upon individual cities. The leading men, as at Lachish when Sennacherib had conquered that city, were led forth, seized by the executioners, and subjected to various punishments, all of them filled to the brim with horror. Some of the victims were held down while one of the band of torturers, who are portrayed upon the monuments gloating fiendishly over their fearful work, inserts his hand into the victim's mouth, grips his tongue and wrenches it out by the roots. In another spot pegs are driven into the ground. To these, another victim's wrists are fixed with cords. His ankles are similarly made fast, and the man is stretched out, unable to move a muscle. The executioner then applies himself to his task; and, beginning at the accustomed spot, the sharp knife makes its incision, the skin is raised inch by inch till the man is flayed alive. These skins are then stretched out upon the city walls, or otherwise disposed of so as to terrify the people and leave behind long-enduring impressions of Assyrian vengeance. For others, long sharp poles are prepared. The sufferer, taken like all the rest from the leading men of the city, is laid down; the sharpened end of the pole is driven in through the lower part of the chest; the pole is then raised, bearing the writhing victim aloft; it is planted in the hole dug for it, and the man is left to die."

The late Professor Sayce says: "The barbarities which followed the capture of a town would be almost incredible, were they not a subject of boast in the inscriptions which record them. Assurnatsir-pal's cruelties were especially revolting. Pyramids of human heads marked the path of the conqueror; boys and girls were burnt alive or reserved for a worse fate; men were impaled,

flayed alive, blinded, or deprived of their hands and feet, of their ears and noses, while the women and children were carried into slavery, the captured city plundered and reduced to ashes, and the trees in its neighbourhood cut down." Nor is this all about the horrible Assyrian mania for blood and vengeance; but we forbear.

Every man in Israel knew these things. Jonah most certainly did, for he came of a border town, and may even have witnessed Assyrian savageries in frontier raids. Let Nahum express the mind of the Hebrew prophets about Nineveh, the representative city of Assyria. "Woe to the bloody city! It is all full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth not . . . there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcases, and there is none end of their corpses; they stumble upon their corpses, because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the well-favoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts." "The lion (Nineveh, as representing Assyria) did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lioness, and filled his holes with prey, and his dens with ravin." "All that hear the bruit of thee (i.e. the news of Nineveh's destruction) shall clap their hands over thee; for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?" (Nahum iii. 1-4; ii. 12; iii. 19). Not a spark of pity mingles with Nahum's delight at the destruction of Nineveh and the foul butchery of Assyria. *He* felt just as *Jonah* did about it!

Now besides knowing full well the blood-curdling savagery of the Assyrians, Jonah knew that Assyria was the nation which was predicted to destroy his own beloved land and people. For some years before the ministry of Jonah, Assyria had been rising as the dominant world-power, and had already been laying her hands on the nations of the Mediterranean coast. The Hebrew prophets were made aware of what was to happen consequent upon Assyria's rise to the mastery. Twenty or thirty or more years before the event, Isaiah foretold how Assyria would despoil Israel (vii. 17, etc.); and Hosea, hard on the heels of Jonah, foretells the same (ix. 3; x. 6, 7; xi. 5); and Amos, whose ministry possibly overlapped the last bit of Jonah's, tells of the judgment God was soon sending, not only on Israel, but on the nearby nations too, and adds, "The Lord God will do nothing but He revealeth His secret unto His servants, the prophets"

(iii. 7). Yes, Jonah knew the bitter role that Assyria was intended to play; and when the almost unbelievable Divine announcement came to him, that Nineveh was to be destroyed within forty days, his heart must have leapt with a sudden sense of relief. Gladder news had never come to him!—for we must not forget that besides being a prophet he was a man, and a man of Israel, and an ardent patriot, who loved his native land, and yearned as a shepherd over his beloved but wayward countrymen. What would he not have done or given for their salvation? With what emotion he would cogitate on the Divine command—“Arise; go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me”! So Nineveh’s cup was full! The great Judge had passed sentence; and if Nineveh perished, then—oh, the gladness of the thought—Israel was saved! There was but one thing Jonah feared—Jehovah was a merciful God; and if Nineveh cried to Him, even at the eleventh hour, Assyria might be spared, and then Israel would perish. Oh that he might be quite sure that Nineveh would not be spared! But how could that be? Well, there was one way—he could leave Nineveh without the warning! Thus she would be left to reap the deserved harvest of her wickedness.

Jonah must now make the most costly choice of his life. He must choose between suffering the Divine vengeance upon himself for awful disobedience, and thus save Israel; or else he must go to Nineveh, and possibly cause the salvation of Nineveh, which would result in Israel’s ruin. His mental agony resolves itself into the determination to flee rather than risk delivering the message. He would sacrifice himself that Israel might be saved; for if it came to a choice as to which should not be spared, Nineveh or Israel?—then let it be wicked Nineveh!

Let those who would pillory Jonah as the peevish bigot think of all this. Let them imagine themselves in Jonah’s position. Nay, more than that, let us put Jonah where he really belongs—with Moses, who prayed: “If Thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book”; and with Paul, who said: “I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.” Yes, that is where Jonah really belongs. God knew the motive of His servant; and surely that is why He preserved and restored him; and surely that is why Jonah could express himself with such

intense frankness to God afterwards. Let us admire Jonah's self-abnegation and sympathise with his motive, even though we must still condemn his disobedience to God. His spirit was that of the famous words, "Who dies if England lives? Who lives if England dies?" It has been truly said that "with a patriotism no less deep, and a flaming consciousness of all that the preservation of the elect nation meant for the fulfilment of the Divine promises made to the fathers, Jonah in his heart, in the crisis of his renunciation, might have said: Who dies if Israel lives? Who lives if Israel dies? What matter if I perish?" Truly Jonah had the spirit of the martyrs.

Let it be clearly understood, too, that when Jonah "rose up to flee unto Tarshish *from the presence of the Lord*," he certainly did not think he could go where God was not! No; his going out from "the presence of the Lord" was his renunciation of his prophetic standing before Jehovah, as we shall see later.

Jonah knew well enough the omnipresence of God. He knew that he could not escape Him: but he was willing to suffer the inescapable vengeance of Heaven if only Israel might be saved. Yes—if only Israel might be saved—that was why Jonah fled! Let us never again stigmatise Jonah as merely an obstinate bigot, or a coward, anxious only about the safety of his own skin. He stands out with a unique emphasis as Israel's prophet-*patriot*; and his motive is touchingly heroic even though, at the Nineveh crisis-point, it misguides him into regrettable disobedience to his Divine commission.

I seem to have noticed more than once or twice that those of the type who criticise Jonah for his supposed narrowness or meanness have exhibited the same spirit, though without suspecting its presence in themselves. I recall an upright Christian man who quite seriously warned us that the too speedy evangelisation and education of the negroes would hasten a major crisis between blacks and whites, and that therefore it should be slowed down! I remember another who argued that similar enlightenment was prejudicial to the retention of India in the British empire! And yet another comes to mind, who said he could never bring himself to help displaced and parentless German children because of the atrocities committed by their nation in the Second World War!

One can understand the human proneness to such feelings under aggravating circumstances, and it is rather grimly pathetic how Jonah's highest-minded critics can be far worse Jonahs themselves without suspecting themselves of it ; but such attitudes simply must not be tolerated, either in ourselves or in others. No such passionate pettiness must ever be allowed to come between us and God's gracious will toward others to whom He sends us with the message of His redeeming love in Christ.

That big-hearted evangelist, D. L. Moody, has pictured the scene on that mountain slope when the risen Lord Jesus commissioned His first disciples to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. Moody pictures Peter's wide-eyed wonder as he asks Jesus if they must go to those who drove the nails through His hands. Again Peter asks if they must go to the man who drove the spear into the Master's side ; and Jesus says, " Yes, tell him there's a nearer way to My heart than that ". And those early disciples entered into the compassions of their Master. His Spirit came upon them and broke down all their little human boundary-walls.

What Jonah needed, and what we all need, if we are to be the Lord's true servants and messengers, is so to get our minds and feelings in the great, wide flow of the Divine compassions for sinning, suffering, struggling, sorrowing men and women that all lesser considerations are submerged. God's Jonahs must go even to Nineveh.

THE BOOK OF JONAH (3)

Lesson Number 94

NOTE.—For this further instalment on Jonah, read the story through yet again, noting carefully the wording of Jonah's prayer, and the comments on Nineveh.

The Book of Jonah . . . which, in any case, is earlier than the close of the prophetic Canon, contains a prayer of Jonah (chapter ii. 2-10), admittedly based on passages from different parts of the Psalter. This implies some collection of these psalms.

James Orr, D.D.

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

William Cowper.

THE BOOK OF JONAH (3)

IN THIS, our third instalment on the Book of Jonah, we shall glance through the first three chapters, reserving our fourth and final lesson for the last chapter and the closing message of the book.

Jonah and the Storm

In chapter i. we see Jonah amid the storm at sea. The storm came *because* of him—because of his fleeing “from the presence of Jehovah.” Three times in the first ten verses we have it that Jonah’s flight was “from the presence of Jehovah.” These words were never meant to suggest that Jonah thought he could sail to a place where God was not! Obviously not, for Jonah himself says to the sailors: “I am an Hebrew, and I fear Jehovah, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.” Long before Jonah’s day, David had written: “If I ascend up into heaven Thou art there: if I make my bed in Sheol, behold Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning (the uttermost east), or dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea (the uttermost west—where Jonah was now going), even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me.” Indeed, the twenty-four verses of that sublime one-hundred-and-thirty-ninth psalm, running in four strophes of six verses each, are devoted successively to the omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence of Israel’s God, and then the psalmist’s awe-inspired reaction to these infinite Divine attributes. This psalm, of course, not to mention other and similar writings from inspired pens in Israel, was in Jonah’s possession. The language of his prayer from the interior of the great fish shows how familiar he was with the writings of his nation. And, in fact, from the very days of Israel’s constitution as a nation, under Moses, the Hebrew people had believed in the omnipresence of Jehovah, as the God of gods. No, Jonah certainly was not imagining the possibility of out-sailing the reach of God!

These words, “from the presence of Jehovah,” must be interpreted in the light of Elijah’s and Elisha’s words, “As Jehovah

liveth, *before whom I stand*," and such words as those to the priests, in 2 Chronicles xxix. 11, "Jehovah hath chosen you *to stand before Him*." When Jonah "rose up to flee unto Tarshish, from the presence of the Lord," he was voluntarily forfeiting his prophetic office and his prophetic standing before Jehovah. That is undoubtedly the significance of the words, and should be clearly understood.

Jonah *knew* that the storm had come because of himself. He explained so to the sailors (i. 12). But even before this the sailors themselves seem to have sensed that there was something uncanny about it, for they resorted to the casting of lots, to find for whose sake it had come (i. 7). Jonah's being found asleep tells its own story of sheer fatigue after nights of sleepless cogitation followed by his fugitive haste for the ship.

Note verses 9 and 10. Jonah had *already* told the sailors that he fled "from the presence of Jehovah"; but now, when they realise the greatness of Jehovah from Jonah's own words, they are filled with consternation at having one of His prophets—a disobedient one—on board with them. Understanding fully, now, Jonah's identity, they try their very utmost to spare him (as we see in verses 12 and 13), but without avail; and at last—try to imagine the scene—they reluctantly swing him, unresisting, from the deck of the plunging vessel into the foaming fury beneath: and lo, the storm at once dies away into dead calm! We are not surprised to read, in verse 16, that these amazed men "feared Jehovah exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto Jehovah, and made vows."

One wonders what the next move of these sailors was after their scaring experience. They certainly could not have proceeded with their intended voyage, for all their cargo had been jettisoned (i. 5), and probably their boat was damaged (i. 4). Presumably they would return to Joppa, to report on the happening, and to make new preparations. And what a strange report it was which they carried back! One wonders if they had actually seen the fish appear, and Jonah pass into its great wide mouth. Nor can one help wondering how soon and how far the story got round—possibly even as far as Nineveh, before ever Jonah himself got there!

Jonah and the Fish

We are now at chapter ii. Let us clearly grasp the fact that the swallowing of Jonah by the "sea-monster" was not an act of punishment but of preservation. That, perhaps more than anything else, confirms the belief that Jonah's *motive* in fleeing was, as we have said, the high motive of Israel's salvation.

Note the following points about Jonah's prayer from inside the great fish. It is not a cry for deliverance. Jonah knew that he was already being delivered. His prayer is really a psalm of praise, a "Te Deum," a "doxology." I know of a man who once sang the "Doxology" with his head in his empty flour barrel, as an expression of faith that God would send a further supply of flour! But the novelty of singing a doxology with your head—and all the rest of you—inside a great fish, in mid-ocean, is absolutely without rival!

There is not one word of petition in Jonah's prayer. It consists of thanksgiving (verses 2-6), contrition (verses 7, 8), and rededication (verse 9). Inside that fish Jonah realised in a new way the wonderful love and care of his God. He learned, as never before, that underneath and round about him were the "everlasting arms" of Jehovah. It was there, too, that he came to understand with vividness the folly and futility of disobedience to God; for he said: "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy" (rebuking himself, in these words, for his own self-willed subterfuge). Still more, it was there, in that fish, that Jonah re-covenanted with God, saying, "I will pay that which I have vowed"; while his final word is, "Salvation is of Jehovah." Thereupon, the fish discharged its unusual cargo, safe and sound at an unnamed port of call.

Jonah and the City

Most remarkable of all, perhaps, is chapter iii., which recounts Nineveh's repentance. How great this moral miracle was may be judged from the size of the city. Three times God speaks of Nineveh as "that *great* city." In this third chapter, also, we have it that "Nineveh was an *exceeding* great city of three days' journey." Then, in the last verse of the last chapter, we find it referred to as having had in it "more than six score thousand

persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle."

Now consider how great this city was. The late Professor C. F. Keil, in his *Archaeology of the Old Testament*, says: "The conclusion to which recent discoveries lead is that the name of Nineveh was used in two senses: first, for one particular city; and secondly, for a complex of four large primeval cities (including Nineveh proper), the circumvallation of which is still traceable . . . the mounds of which cover the land." The names of these four component cities which made up the vast Nineveh quadrangle are Nimrud, Koyunjik, Khorsabad, and Keramles. To go the round of these would be to cover a distance of sixty miles, which, according to the old reckoning of twenty miles to a day, would be a "three days' journey."

This quadrangular picture of ancient Nineveh is borne out by Diodorus Siculus, the famous Sicilian historian and contemporary of Julius Cæsar. He asserts that it was a quadrangle one hundred and fifty stadia in length, ninety in breadth, and four hundred and eighty in circumference; so that it was a parallelogram, with its longer sides making thirty-six miles, and its shorter sides twenty-four miles, the circumference being about sixty miles. The walls were one hundred feet high, and so broad that three chariots could be driven abreast on them. They were fortified with fifteen hundred towers, each of these being two hundred feet in height. Based on a trigonometrical survey of the locality, the full area of the Assyrian metropolis has been computed as three hundred and fifty square miles, which is some twenty miles more than that of London today!

Of course, it must be understood that Greater Nineveh included great gardens, orchards, and even pastures and corn-fields. This need not surprise us. The great walled towns of Babylonia seem to have enclosed large spaces for cultivation and pasture, so that in case of long siege they were largely self-contained. It is this fact which explains the mention of "much cattle" in Nineveh (iv. 11). Modernist critics have smiled with superior toleration at such a mistaken slip as that reference to the "much cattle"; but today the *really* modern scholar, with the evidence of archaeology before him, may smile at the presumptuous ignorance of the critics!

On the basis of the Scripture reference to the great number of young infants in Nineveh, namely, the "six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand" (iv. 11), and the size of the place, and fuller knowledge of these great old-time cities, the population of Nineveh is estimated at about one million, probably more, and certainly "not less than six hundred thousand." Thus, it will be seen that Nineveh was indeed "an exceeding great city."

Can we believe, then, that the whole of this vast and populous metropolis repented, with an immediate and genuine repentance, at the preaching of this lone prophet from Israel? Once again the critics have found occasion to smile; but once again the likelihoods are against them. We *can* believe it; and that for several reasons.

We must always be careful not to read into the Scriptures what is not there: yet undoubtedly there is room, again and again, for a legitimate "reading between the lines," inasmuch as the Scriptures often compress very much into very small compass. For instance, in this very chapter, we are simply told that Jonah's words to Nineveh were, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown"; yet obviously he did not merely repeat and repeat and repeat this without variation or addition without a single word of explanation or amplification. Who had given him this message? What was his authority? Who was he? Was he a prophet in all sanity and reality? Or was he some unbalanced fanatic? And if there really was a message from the God of gods, what must Nineveh do to appease Him? Quite plainly, Jonah would tell them how Jehovah's message had come to him, and *why* Nineveh was to be overthrown. Maybe he would also tell them of his own disobedient flight, of his miraculous preservation, and of his further commission to warn Nineveh. It surely takes little imagination to visualise the at-first curious, then serious, then perturbed Ninevites besieging Jonah with questions, and at least getting earnest replies to some of them. Less than this there surely could not have been, unless we rob the story of all naturalness. Yet this is not stated in so many words.

Now the most significant clue to the reason why Jonah's appearance and proclamation at Nineveh created such an immediate stir is found in the New Testament, in our Lord's words

—"This is an evil generation: they seek a *sign*; and there shall no *sign* be given unto it, but the *sign* of the prophet Jonas. For as Jonas was a *sign* unto the Ninevites, so shall the Son of Man be to this generation" (Luke xi. 29, 30). We have emphasised that word "*sign*." Jonah was a *sign* unto the old-time Ninevites, by his miraculous experience in the great fish: but the question at once presents itself: How could Jonah have been a sign to them if the Ninevites *did not know* of Jonah's experience? And if they had been given no evidence for it besides Jonah's own word, would they have given it credence?

Now let us do just a little "reading between the lines." Our thoughts turn back to chapter i., to the sailors. When Jonah booked his passage on that boat, certain questions would be asked of him. We have noted already (i. 10) that before ever the storm broke, Jonah had told them "that he fled from the presence of Jehovah": but would he, or *could* he have given this most unusual explanation without telling them at least *why* he was thus fleeing? At the time, Jehovah was only a "god" by hearsay to these Gentile sailors; and what Jonah may have said to them about the message for Nineveh may have meant nothing to them: but when that uncanny storm swept about them and they learned the omnipresent greatness of Jehovah, and when Jonah's disappearance in the water brought that equally uncanny calm, what would their thoughts be! Their cargo had been thrown overboard (i. 5). Their boat was badly knocked about (i. 4). What could they do but make back for port? And what a tale they had to tell! Along that seaboard no little Assyrian commerce was done. One of the most amazing revelations which recent archaeological discovery has brought us is that of the travel and traffic which were carried on over wide distances in the days of which we are now speaking. What intense interest would the Jonah occurrence have to those who went to and from Nineveh!

But what of the feelings of all, when the supposedly drowned Jonah himself reappeared, and recounted his none-such experience, and announced his purpose of now going to Nineveh! How could it be otherwise than that this phenomenal story should reach Nineveh before ever Jonah got there?

And so, without resorting to any such explanation as that Jonah's experience in the "whale" had perhaps left a bleached

appearance about him (!), we can well imagine what a startling and solemn "sign" he would be to the astonished Ninevites.

Strangely enough, too, it appears that Jonah's mission to Nineveh coincided with a period when fear of some impending calamity lurked there in many hearts. Although Assyria was rising to become the proud and cruel mistress of the nations, there was one period when she suffered reverses and temporary decline, and when it seemed that still greater calamity might be coming. Babylon at this time, as Professor Rawlinson has pointed out, refused further submission. Israel, and Judah, and Syria all ceased to pay tribute. Jeroboam, King of Israel, as we have seen, reclaimed and annexed much territory. Other revolts shook Assyria's hold, and contracted her boundaries. It began to look as though Assyria's hour was coming. Jonah's sudden cry came just at the most telling moment. It was like a spark on dried wood, or a thrusting in of the sickle when the harvest was dead ripe. The hearts of Nineveh's thousands were bowed as the heart of one man.

Nor is there any difficulty in believing that the king and the nobles led Nineveh's mourning for sin, and that a general fast was proclaimed by royal edict; for, as Professor Sayce says, "It is just such a fast as was ordained by Esarhaddon II when the northern foe was gathering against the Assyrian empire, and prayers were raised to the sun-god to 'remove the sin' of the king and his people." Nor is there any difficulty in believing that the animals were included in the edict; for other cases of this occurred, as the Greek historian, Herodotus, has shown us.

No, there is no real reason why we should not believe that Nineveh's repentance took place just as the Book of Jonah declares. It is just such as *could* have taken place; and that it actually *did* take place is settled by the words of Christ Himself—"The men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonas." We have seen that there is no getting over our Lord's words about Jonah and Nineveh: and they who will not bow to the clear word of Christ should not dare to call themselves Christians.

How can I call Him Lord, and yet forsooth
Diverge from Him who said "I am the Truth",
And offer Him that strangest disrespect
Of much preferring my own intellect?

THE BOOK OF JONAH (4)

Lesson Number 95

NOTE.—For this final study of Jonah read the whole story through once again, but with special concentration on the last chapter.

Should a voyager chance to be on the point of shipwreck on some unknown coast, he will most devoutly pray that the lesson of the missionary may have reached thus far. . . .

Charles Darwin.

I will not believe that it is given to man to have thoughts higher and nobler than the real truth of things.

Sir Oliver Lodge.

For the love of God is broader
Than the measures of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.

F. W. Faber.

THE BOOK OF JONAH (4)

WE HAVE seen that this little book of Jonah is in four movements—chapter i., Jonah and the *storm*; chapter ii., Jonah and the *fish*; chapter iii., Jonah and the *city*; chapter iv., Jonah and the *Lord*. In this, our final consideration of the book, we are at chapter iv. We shall briefly reflect on this chapter, and then make two or three parting observations on Jonah himself, before passing on to the next of Israel's prophets.

Jonah and the Lord

Chapter iv. gives us the supreme message of the book. This can be expressed in few words, but it is one of affecting tenderness. The chapter is a dialogue between Jonah and the Lord.

Jonah cuts a sorry figure; but if we would rightly appraise his attitude we must realise afresh the intense identity of interests which existed between him and his nation. So passionate was his religious patriotism that all self-interests were sunk in his deep concern for Israel. The earlier chapters have already made this clear to us. We have protested that Jonah's motive in fleeing, rather than deliver the warning to Nineveh, was not anti-Gentile prejudice, but the high motive of concernedness for Israel's salvation; and we would re-emphasise that. Yet we are keenly alive to this, also, that while Jonah's mind may not have been warped by actual prejudice, his very consciousness of the Divine privileges conferred upon Israel may have occasioned a looking upon other peoples as somewhat inferior. Such a grave error needed to be corrected; and in this fourth chapter we see with what condescending patience the correction is given.

Note verses 1, 2, and 3. Jonah is not only "displeased" and "angry," but his dismay at Israel's dark future, now that Nineveh is to be spared, so overcomes him that he prays for his life to be taken away. The Lord tenderly reproves him with the question, "Doest thou well to be angry?" (verse 4). Thereupon Jonah, thinking that possibly there was still a gleam of hope,

"went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, *till he might see what would become of the city*" (verse 5). Here the Lord patiently and tenderly reasoned with His overwrought servant, by three "prepared" things—a gourd, a worm, a wind.

First, God "prepared a *gourd*, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief." It has been truly observed that "the tenderness in the heart of God is manifested not only in His compassion for repenting sinners, but also in His patience with repining saints." The Hebrew word which is here translated as "a gourd" has been thought by some to refer to the castor-oil plant, which, because of its broad, palmatic leaves, would provide just such a comforting screen as Jonah would appreciate. Dr. W. M. Thompson, however, in *The Land and the Book* raises forceful objection to this. "Orientals never dream of training a castor-oil plant over a booth, or planting it for a shade," he says; "and they would have but small respect for anyone who did. It is in no way adapted for that purpose, while thousands of arbours are covered with various creepers of the general gourd family." So much, then, for that; but whichever plant of the gourd family it may have been, its growth was miraculously accelerated, for it "came up in a night" (verse 10), and was thus "prepared" by the time the hot sun mounted the sky again. It would form a welcome draping around Jonah's booth of tree branches, and we are not surprised to read that "Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd."

But with the next sunrise God also "prepared" a *worm*, which "smote the gourd that it withered" (verse 7). Either this was a single gourd-worm which punctured the main stem of the plant, and thus caused the whole of it to wither, or else, collectively, it was a *swarm* of such worms or caterpillars which, in short time, stripped the plant of all its leaves—a common enough happening in many an Oriental locality, where a warm, moist night will product a host of such caterpillars. Thus Jonah was now left exposed to the sun again.

Still further, however, God "prepared" a *sultry east wind*. It is a pity that our Authorised Version here gives it as a "vehement" east wind. The Revised Version rightly changes it to "sultry." Perhaps even the word "wind" here tends to convey a wrong

impression to us who live latitudes away from the tropics. A "wind," to us, on a hot day, would be a welcome refresher: but the wind which our text refers to was what might be described as a kind of hot breath almost suffocating the land. Dr. Thompson has told us of one such dust-laden *sirocco*, or hot wind, which he experienced when travelling from Lydd to Jerusalem. "There is no living thing abroad to make a noise. The birds hide in the thickest shades; the fowls pant under the walls with open mouth and drooping wings; the flocks and herds take shelter in caves and under great rocks; the labourers retire from the fields, and close the windows and doors of their houses; and travellers hasten, as I did, to take shelter in the first cool place they can find." The languor, enervation, and weariness which such a *sirocco* can cause is easy to imagine. Poor Jonah, dispirited at the thought of Israel's dark future now that Nineveh is to be spared, inadequately screened from the glare of the merciless sun, and reduced to utter lassitude by the sweltering heat, sinks down and yearns that he might die (verse 8).

He is roused by a voice, however. It is God speaking. "Doeſt thou well to be angry for the gourd?" Jonah's reply is: "I do well to be angry, even unto death" (verse 9). This occasions the wonderful Divine utterance with which the book closes.

"Then ſaid Jehovah: Thou haſt had pity on the gourd, for the which thou haſt not laboured, neither maदेſt it grow; which came up in a night, and periſhed in a night. And ſhould not I ſpare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than ſix ſcore thouſand perſons that cannot diſcern between their right hand and their left hand, and alſo much cattle?"

This is the revelation of the heart of God to which the whole book has been moving, and for which, indeed, it was written. Therefore, as ſoon as this point has been reached, the book closes. We are not told what Jonah ſaid or did further, for Jonah was not intended to be laſt in our minds at the cloſe of the book. We are left in the preſence of God, face to face with this moving revelation of the Divine compaſſion. To ſome the book ſeems to end with a ſtrange abruptneſs and incompleteness. This is becauſe they have not perceived the one real purpoſe of it. They

have not sensed the genius and motive of the Scripture writings. Nothing is told us for the mere sake of the telling. All has a moral and a Divine aim. The Book of Jonah was never written merely to tell us the story of Jonah as an end in itself. A thousand times, No! We are told the story of this man and Nineveh because of what it reveals to us of *God*. That is the vital reason why it was written. Once that purpose has been served, the writer is content to lay down the pen. He has no mind to add more, for the mere sake of interesting us. He is under the guidance of the inspiring Spirit; and the Spirit guides him where to stop as clearly as He guides him what to write.

Ponder, then, this revelation of God, in the closing three verses of this book. It is perhaps the tenderest anticipation of John iii. 16, and the parable of the prodigal son, and the world-embracing message of the Gospel, to be found anywhere in the Old Testament. God's tender patience with the resentful prophet, and His tender concern for the Ninevites, despite their wickedness, together give us a unique expression of the Divine compassion. See here the compassion of God toward penitent wicked-doers, and toward innocent little children, and even toward the dumb animals! Truly, "His tender mercies are over all His works," as the psalmist says. He is as slow to punish as He is quick to pardon where there is penitence.

Jonah needed to learn that God's special favour toward Israel did not mean a lessened love for other peoples. He must learn that the Divine election is not arbitrary, but for the fulfilling of high purpose. Israel had not been chosen simply for Israel's own sake, but to fulfil a Divine purpose, the end of which was the blessing of *all* peoples. The election of the one nation did not mean the rejection of others! God loves *all* His human creatures "without respect of persons"—yea, even the wicked sinners of Nineveh, much as He hates their sin itself! It was by revelations such as this to Jonah that the Hebrew people came to learn that their omnipresent Jehovah had an omnipresent care and concern and compassion toward *all* men and women, boys and girls, and even the lower animals. Yes, even the oft-misrepresented Jonah helped to prepare the way for Jesus to say: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

There is one point of tender significance which seems to have been overlooked in the parallel between Jonah's pity for the gourd and God's pity for Nineveh. Jonah's pity for the gourd was not only because a thing of beauty and fragrance had been ruined, but because the loss of the plant meant much *to himself*. Even so, God's pity toward the Ninevites is not wholly because of their intrinsic preciousness as human souls, but because they mean much *to His own heart*. How the comparison must have set Jonah thinking! And how precious to ourselves is this thought that each one of us means much to the heart of the Eternal! And how it pulls at our heart-strings to know that each man and woman and boy and girl, of whatever race or clime or colour, means something very tender in the mind of God! Surely this is the deepest inspiration of all overseas missionary activity!—and this revelation was given to the first foreign missionary ever sent out from Israel! This revelation of God at the end of the book of Jonah is such that even a modern critic like Dr. Arthur Peake is obliged to say: "That out of the stony heart of Judaism such a book should come, is nothing less than a marvel of Divine grace"; while another recent critic, Cornill, says: "One of the deepest and grandest things ever written. I should like to exclaim to anyone who approaches it: Put thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Yes, as we come to this final word in the Book of Jonah, we may well tread reverently and adore; for here the heart of God is revealed with special tenderness.

Jonah as a Type

We must not close this lengthened treatment of the Book of Jonah without noting that, in addition to the spiritual and historical values of this book, Jonah himself has significance as a *type*. This is markedly so in three ways.

First, Jonah typically foreshadows *the history of his own nation, Israel*. If we watch the movements of this man discerningly, we shall see the whole nation of Israel moving with him, just as a man's shadow on a wall behind him moves with him. As is often the case, the shadow is much bigger than the man himself. We see here the *national* Jonah, the Hebrew nation. As Jonah moves, so Israel's history moves before us. See here the people of Israel

—disobedient to the heavenly commission, as Jonah was; out of their own land, as Jonah was; finding precarious refuge with the Gentiles, as Jonah did; everywhere a trouble to the Gentiles, as Jonah was on that ship; yet witnessing to the true God, among the Gentiles, as Jonah did to those sailors; cast out by the Gentiles, as Jonah was cast out by the troubled seamen; yet miraculously preserved amid their calamities, as Jonah was miraculously preserved in the deep; calling on Jehovah, at last, in penitence and rededication, as Jonah did from inside the great fish; finding salvation and deliverance in Jehovah-Jesus, as Jonah found salvation in a new way in the deep, concluding his prayer with the words, "Salvation is of Jehovah"; and in the end becoming missionaries to the Gentile nations (see Zech. viii. 13, 20, 23), as Jonah, in the end, became God's missionary to Gentile Nineveh.

Second, Jonah typically anticipates *the death and burial and resurrection of Christ*. Chapter i. tells us that Jonah was inside the great fish "three days and three nights." Why was he thus retained for this duration? So long as the fish had served the purpose of preventing drowning, might not the prophet have been discharged from the fish without further delay? Our Lord Jesus has given us to know why Jonah was in the fish for that duration. He says, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the sea-monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." There is a strange impressiveness about this fact that, hundreds of years before our Lord's incarnation, Jonah's entombment in the great fish should be sovereignly overruled to become a type in this way. As we have said before, the latent typology of the Old Testament is one of the most impressive credentials of its Divine inspiration.

There are those who hold that Jonah actually died inside the fish, and that he was literally brought to life again, so as to make him a type absolute of our Lord's resurrection. To press this, however, is not really necessary to Jonah's typifying our Lord's death and resurrection. Indeed, to our own mind, he fulfilled the type more truly by remaining conscious in the fish; for the interior of that fish is likened, in Jonah's prayer, to *Sheol* (the Hades of the New Testament), into which our Lord went between the death and resurrection of His body, and where He "preached unto the spirits in prison" (1 Pet. iii. 19).

In an earlier study we have shown that the three notable prophets who came in quick succession during the last period before the destruction of the ten-tribed kingdom, namely, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, are a kind of *type-trio*. Elisha dies and is buried, but in his death gives life to another—as our Lord by His death gives life to others. Jonah, in symbol, not only dies, but goes down into Sheol, and then comes up that he should not see corruption—as also did our Lord. Elijah ascends to heaven and casts down his mantle—as our Lord ascended and sent down the Pentecostal Spirit to us.

Third, Jonah is a type of *Christ Himself, as God's "sign" Messenger*. Our Lord Jesus said: "As Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of Man be to this generation." What did His words mean? We give a grandly worded reply to that question from the pen of the late Rev. John Urquhart. "Look back over those well-nigh nineteen centuries," he says, "and you will read the answer. When Jonah, having become a curse for his people, came back, as it were, from the dead, whither did he carry the word of the Lord? To Israel? No; to the Gentile city of Nineveh. And there he beheld what he had in vain longed and prayed to see among his own people—the turning of a whole city to God—the leaders leading for once in the right direction, and the entire people following and seeking God with purpose of heart. When Christ came back from the grave, and the word of the Lord was once more to be proclaimed, whither was it carried? It was borne to the Gentiles. And how fared it with the message there? The Word of Life, which Israel had rejected, these received. Age after age the Jew has been confronted with that sign. Out of the grave of the Crucified has come this power that has tamed the barbarian, changed the savage, cleansed and raised the hopelessly debased, brought back the outcast races into the brotherhood of man, and given to all who have received the message, the nobleness, the spiritual insight, the compassions, and the purity of the children of God. He who said that the Jew should have that sign read the future. He gave a promise, and, rising from the grave, He has kept it. He has proved His claim to be the Son of God and the world's Saviour. He has attested the Book of Jonah; He has attested the entire Scripture; and for us that attestation is final."

AND NOW, TRY THESE . . .

1. What reference in the Old Testament *historical* books proves that Jonah was a real figure of history?
2. How does this reference to Jonah in the historical books guide us as to the *time* of Jonah's ministry?
3. How do our Lord's words about Jonah unmistakably confirm that Jonah and what is related of him were really historical?
4. What are the four movements in which the story of Jonah is arranged?
5. What, briefly, was the real reason why Jonah fled rather than go to Nineveh?
6. What is the number of Nineveh's little children given in chapter iv. 11, and what is the full population of the city inferred from this?
7. Why was it that Jonah was such a convincing preacher to the people of Nineveh?
8. What were the three "prepared" things by which God reasoned with Jonah, in chapter iv.?
9. What is the great lesson, or revelation of God, to which the story moves and with which it ends?
10. In what ways is Jonah a *typical* figure?

THE PROPHET MICAH

Lesson Number 96

NOTE.—For this study read right through the prophecy of Micah at least twice. Then read it through again in a modern translation or the Revised Version.

As in any organism, no member or part, however minute, can be fully understood aside from its relation to the whole; so, in scripture, every paragraph and sentence is part of its totality, and must be studied in relation to all the rest. The text will be illumined by the context, or scripture immediately preceding and following. Every occurrence and utterance should be studied in its surroundings. How, why, when a word was spoken or an act done, helps to explain it, is its local colouring. Hidden relationships must be traced like underground roots and subterranean channels.

A. T. Pierson, D.D.

THE BOOK OF MICAH

It is good to know that in the Judæan capital, long ago, the great prophet Isaiah had such a trusty comrade and such a doughty fellow-champion of truth as "Micah the Morasthite." With the first few strokes of his pen Micah tells us that he prophesied "in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah"; which means that he and Isaiah wrought contemporaneously (compare Isa. i. 1). Isaiah, however, who was the elder of the two, not only continued with Micah through these three reigns, but commenced his ministry even earlier, in the reign of Uzziah; so that he had already been championing the cause of Jehovah for some years when the prophetic mantle fell on Micah. Although Isaiah was a man of the schools and Micah a man of the fields, these two giants of faith would no doubt have their heart-to-heart consultations on the stirring doings of those eventful days; and we are not surprised, therefore, that in their writings certain sentiments, expressions, and historical references are common to them both. Probably Isaiah's ministry was more to the upper classes, and Micah's more to the lower—with which by descent his sympathies were the more closely connected.

The Hebrew name translated "Micah" means "Who is like Jehovah?" We detect a little play on this when Micah winds up his message with the question, "Who is a God like unto Thee?" (vii. 18). Our prophet calls himself a "Morasthite," which means that he was of Moresheth, a little place in Judæa, near Gath on the Philistine border (called Moresheth-gath in i. 14, that is, "Territory of Gath"). He records no events of his life; so the little we may know of him must be deduced from this short synopsis of his preachings which has come down to us as "The Book of Micah." This much is clear: he was a prophet of Judah, with Jerusalem as the centre-point of his prophetic ministry and message (though he often also includes Samaria).

Moderns have doubted the superscription that Micah prophesied "in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah"; but, as we have repeatedly seen, one part of Scripture cannot be impugned

without the involving of some other. This is another instance; for in Jeremiah xxvi. 18 we have an incidental yet decisive corroboration of Micah's superscription, along with a noteworthy tribute to his remarkable influence as a preacher. Furthermore, all the historical allusions in Micah correspond with those times, as comparison with 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles shows; but into this we need not enter here.

The Book and its Message

Perhaps to the ordinary reader this book may not open up too intelligibly at first. This is partly due to obscurities in translation. Yet even to the reader who is limited to the Authorised Version it opens up rewardingly after a little further patience. No one can read these seven chapters carefully without noting (even while bits here and there remain obscure) that chapters i. to iii. are an announcing of *imminent judgment* because of sin; that chapters iv. and v. mark a gladsome contrast to this by fixing our eye on the *ultimate blessing* of the covenant people; and that the remaining two chapters consist of exhortations to *repentance* in view of the message delivered. Some Bible teachers have it that the little work consists of three addresses, each opened by the word "Hear" (i. 2; iii. 1; vi. 1). This is simply division according to literary form rather than subject-matter. If we would get the message of the book as a whole we must analyse according to subject-matter; and when we do this we find, as just shown, a triple message, the logical sequence of which is clear:

1. IMMINENT JUDGMENT DECLARED (i.-iii.).
2. ULTIMATE BLESSING PROMISED (iv.-v.).
3. PRESENT REPENTANCE PLEADED (vi.-vii.).

The obscure verses in Micah should be read in a modern translation. It is one of the most rewarding books when clearly understood. The central thought is: *PRESENT JUDGMENT BUT FUTURE BLESSING*. The present judgment is because of Israel's unfaithfulness to the Covenant. The future blessing is because of Jehovah's *unchanging faithfulness* to it. In the case of Micah we scarcely need give a fuller analysis, though the book

lends itself to this. With our limited space let us rather glance through the three main parts to clear up verses which may still seem obscure.

Chapters i. to iii.

The "it" and the "he" in chapter i. 9 may have seemed awkward. The "wound" in this verse is the stroke of retribution (as the Septuagint renders). There had been earlier chastisements, but this coming one was to be "incurable," that is, there would not be recovery from it. Jehovah's rod to inflict the stroke was Assyria: and after the Assyrians had laid low the northern kingdom (Israel) they also invaded the southern kingdom (Judah), even to Jerusalem itself (see 2 Kings xviii. 9-xix. 37), so that this ninth verse truly says in advance of the event: "It (the stroke) is come unto Judah; it (not 'he') is come unto the gate of *my* people, even to Jerusalem."

The unfamiliar names in verses 10 to 16 are names of *places* in the locality where Micah was reared—places dotted among the broad, fertile glens of the Shephelah, or range of low hills which lay between Judah and the Philistine plain, stretching away west of Judah to the Mediterranean. Micah foresees these places bearing the brunt of invasion, which will come from the south-east because the Assyrians will first strike at Egypt (on which Judah foolishly relied) and then march on Judah through Micah's own home-locality. There is an intriguing play on these place-names. David's words, "Tell it not in Gath" (in his elegy over Saul: 2 Sam. i. 20) had become a proverbial saying; and Micah here says (i. 10) in effect, "Tell it not in Tell-town." The words "Weep ye not at all" (verse 10) are really "Weep ye not at Weep-town" (*Acco*). Again in verse 10, "Aphrah" is dust; so Micah says, "Roll thyself in dust at the House of Dust." In verse 11 "Saphir" is beauty; so Micah says, "Pass away inhabitress of Beauty-place, in nakedness and shame." Again in verse 11, "Zaanan" is March-town; so Micah says, "The inhabitress of March-town marches not forth." Again, "Beth-ezel" (verse 11) is the "House-of-the-side," that is, "Neighbour-town"; and Micah says that the mourning of Neighbour-town shall be such as to take away any neighbourly "standing" or support. "Maroth" (verse 12) means bitter, evil; and Micah

says, "Evil hath come down from Jehovah." In verse 13 "Lachish" means Horse-town; and Micah says, "Bind the chariot to the swift beast, O inhabitant of Horse-town." In verse 14 "Achzib" means a deceit, a lie; and Micah says, "The houses of Lie-town shall be a lie to the kings of Israel." In verse 15 the word "heir" should be "possessor" or "conqueror"—meaning the Assyrian.

In chapter ii., verses 6 and 7 may have been perplexing. Some would simplify them by changing the word "prophecy" here to "prate" or "sputter"—as referring to false prophets, because Micah's word here is not the common one for prophesying. But the same word is used elsewhere of *true* prophesying (in Ezek. xx. 46, for instance, where the Lord certainly did not mean Ezekiel either to prate or sputter!). Micah ii. 6, 7 must be seen as part of the contrast between the false prophets and the true (see last clause of verse 7 with verse 11, in which latter "the spirit" should be "wind". Note iii. 7, 8). Now read chapter ii. 6, 7 thus:

"Prophecy not"—so they (the false prophets) prophesy—"Let none prophesy such things" (as Micah did). "Their insults (lit. 'shames') are endless!" (Now comes Micah's reply)—"Shall this be said (not 'named'), O House of Jacob? Is the Spirit of Jehovah to be restrained? Are such things His doings? Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?"

Chapters iv. and v.

As we have said, these two chapters picture the ultimate blessing of the covenant people. In chapter iv. we have the future *kingdom*, in chapter v. the future *king*. To Micah and other Hebrew prophets it was given by the Spirit of inspiration to foresee a golden day-break of restoration beyond the grim nightfall of retribution. They were not given to see all the intervening historical processes; they did not discern the long period between the Messiah's *first* coming, as the suffering Servant to bear the curse of the Law, and His *second* coming, as King of kings, to administer the blessings of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants; but they *did* see the eventual consummation. In 1 Peter i. 11 we learn that they actually studied their own writings to ascertain

"what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." The present age of grace and of the Church was a secret of God not divulged until apostolic times (see Eph. iii.).

There is something rather thrilling, all the same, in the fact that these Hebrew preachers of twenty-five centuries ago should be telling us even today of things which are still to happen. An unbiased consideration of such predictions as we have in Micah iv. and v. will convince any honest mind that there has not yet been a fulfilment which satisfies all their intent. They await the Millennial era for their full realisation. They will burst into consummating occurrence at the reappearing of Israel's great Deliverer, the now-rejected Christ. If only they were heeded, these Hebrew prophets have grand wisdom and mighty comfort for the harassed nations of today. They were brave men; they would not conceal the awful retribution and dispersal which were coming to their people; yet they were men of glad heart, for they had glimpsed the shining height beyond the fearsome valley; they had caught the song beyond the storm; they had seen the flashing sunrise of a new age beyond the thunder-clouds of judgment and the frowning enigmas of the present.

And now, in this fourth chapter, note the opening phrase, "In the last days." It clearly lifts the passage from any application merely to the prophet's own time, and points to the far future. Also note verse 2. The nations other than Israel are to be in the Messianic kingdom and are to walk in the ways of Jehovah. This largely clears the apparent difficulty of verse 5, which seems to contradict verse 2. It should read: "*All the peoples now walk in the name of their god, but shall walk in the name of Jehovah our God for ever.*"

See, too, the sharp contrast Micah makes between the restoration promised for the *last days*, and the judgment imminent in *his own*. In verses 1 to 8 he speaks of "in the last days" and "in that day" (verse 6); but see verse 9—"NOW dost thou cry . . ."; and verse 10—"NOW shalt thou go . . . to Babylon"; and verse 11—"NOW also many nations are gathered against thee"; and chapter v. 1—"NOW . . . he hath laid siege against us"; and see chapter v. 3 where we are told that the time of God's giving up the nation to humiliation is "*UNTIL*" the coming of Christ.

This brings us to Micah's remarkable prediction of the place of Christ's birth (v. 2). Micah and Isaiah give the two clearest predictions concerning our Lord's incarnation. Isaiah foretells His birth of the *Virgin*. Micah tells the *place* of His birth so plainly that when the Magi long after enquired of Herod where the King of the Jews should be born, the scribes answered without hesitation: "In Bethlehem of Judæa; for thus it is written by the prophet" (Matt. ii. 5). Note that between the first half of Micah v. 3 and the second, the present age, with its further scattering of the Jews, intervenes—which Micah was not given to foresee. The rest of this fifth chapter looks on to the kingdom-age yet to be. Note Israel's double aspect in verses 7 and 8—fresh as the dew, strong as the lion! Mark the regeneration of Israel in verses 10 to 14. And in verse 15 see the coming wrath on the earth's impenitent peoples. This verse should read: "I will execute vengeance in anger and fury upon the nations which do not hearken."

Chapters vi. and vii.

The last two chapters of Micah are in the form of a *colloquy*; and when read as such they light up with new interest. All we can do here is to point out where the different speakers come in. First, in chapter vi. 1, 2, the *mountains* are exhorted to listen, like stately referees, to Jehovah's "controversy." Then, in verses 3 to 5, *Jehovah* pleads. In verses 6 and 7 *Micah* speaks, representing those in the nation who would fitly respond. In verse 8 the overhearing mountains break in—"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Next, in verses 9 to 16, *Jehovah* speaks to "the man of wisdom," wheresoever he is, in the city, exposing the nation's sin, and showing why the nation suffered. Then, in chapter vii. 1 to 6, the unhappy *nation* is impersonated as confessing its baneful state. In verses 7 to 10 the "man of wisdom" speaks again. In verses 11 to 13 it is *Jehovah*. In verse 14 the "man of wisdom." In verse 15 *Jehovah*. Finally, from verse 16 to the end it is the "man of wisdom." These two chapters, reflect, are Jehovah's pleading for *repentance*. They are the "application" of the great sermon preached

in the foregoing chapters. Moreover, they maintain throughout a high-water mark of literary excellence.

Great Truths

Some of the mightiest truths in the Old Testament are expressed in Micah. As our prophet relates the sovereignty of Jehovah to human life and history he recognises and emphasises resultant realities of immense importance.

Note first *the profound significance of the Divine dealings with the Hebrew nation*. Micah addresses a small people in a strip of land merely about the size of Wales, yet in chapters i. 2 and vi. 1, 2, he commands the whole earth, the mountains, the hills, to attend (in Scripture usage mountains and hills frequently symbolise kingdoms). This is no mere rhetoric. Micah realised that the covenant people were brought into their unique relationship with Jehovah so that through them the sovereignty of the true God, in its governmental administration among the nations, might be objectified to all peoples and for all time. Had Israel remained faithful she would have displayed the munificence of the Divine government. Alas, Israel exhibits a tragically different yet vastly significant aspect of the Divine government; and well may the nations of today heed it!

Note, too, the solemn yet glorious significance of the contrast which Micah strikes by *the unmasking of false rulership versus the unveiling of true rulership in Christ*. God delegates authority to human rulers. Micah recognises this fact in the Divine economy, and addresses the princes, priests, and prophets as the ordained representatives of the Divine administration. Their responsibility is commensurately great. See Micah's scathing indictment of false rulership in chapter iii. versus the arresting description of the true "*RULER*," in chapter v., who was yet to come. Christ is God's ideal of rulership. Micah traces the perversion and adversity of the people to the misrule of those over them; and all who abuse such authority incur equal penalty. Let the rulers of today take heed!

Finally, we revert to Micah's *august declaration as to the true essence of religion*. A great scholar has said of Micah vi. 1-8: "These few verses in which Micah sets forth the true essence of religion may raise a well-founded title to be counted as the most

important in the prophetic literature." Underline that eighth verse. Note that God "**REQUIRES**," for He is *God*. And God also **REVEALS**, for "He hath *showed* thee, O man, what is good . . ." (a reference to the Law of Moses: see Deut. x. 12). Yet even this is not enough. If we would know the full chord in the music we must turn on to the New Testament, and learn there that God **REDEEMS**. He "requires" because He is *God*. He "reveals" because He is *good*. He "redeems" because He is *love*. The Christ of God has been already to redeem. He will come again to restore. Meanwhile let us view all our life in the light of the Divine purposes and the future reappearance of the great "**RULER**" whose goings forth have been "from of old, even from everlasting."

THE PROPHET NAHUM

Lesson Number 97

NOTE.—For this study read right through the short prophecy of Nahum three times, and then again in a modern translation or the Revised Version.

Also, turn back again to our third study in Jonah and re-read what is said there about the great city of Nineveh.

For all things exist only as seen by Thee, only as known by Thee.

All things exist

Only in Thy light, and Thy glory is declared even in that which denies Thee; the darkness declares the glory of light.

Those who deny Thee could not deny, if Thou didst not exist; and their denial is not complete, for if it were so, they would not exist.

They affirm Thee in living; all things affirm Thee in living.

T. S. Eliot.

THE BOOK OF NAHUM

AS WE make our way through the writings of these Hebrew prophets, one thing must impress us ever more forcibly; these inspired men profoundly realised the sovereignty of God, especially in its governmental super-control of nations and history. This is vividly re-emphasised in Nahum's vehement oracle on the doom of Nineveh.

Of this prophet who tolls the knell over Nineveh practically nothing is known. He comes to us simply as "Nahum the Elkoshite"; that is, he was of Elkosh, a place which cannot now be located with certainty. It is surmised that he was of Galilee. His name is thought to have been preserved in the Galilæan city of Capernaum, the name of which (Kaphar-Nahum) means Village-of-Nahum. The present-day village of *El-Kauzeh*, which lies in the area long ago occupied by the tribe of Naphtali, is supposed by some to be the modern continuer of Elkosh. Nahum's reference to Carmel, Lebanon, and Bashan, also, is said to indicate special interest in the northern part of the Holy Land. If Nahum was indeed a man of Galilee, then it may be that when the Assyrian monarch, Esarhaddon, repopled the northern province with a mongrel population, after the deportation of the ten tribes of Israel (2 Kings xvii. 5, 6), Nahum, with others of his disconsolate fellow-countrymen who had been left, evacuated to Judah. All this, however, lies in the realm of conjecture. This much is certain: Nahum *addresses Judah* (i. 13, 15); and the impression left on the reader's mind is that he also wrote *from* Judah.

The *date* of Nahum's writing seems settled by his reference, in chapter iii. 8, to the overthrow of No-Amon (not "populous" No, as in Authorised Version). No-Amon was the famous Egyptian city of Thebes, where the god, Amon, was worshipped; and it is now known, from discoveries in the Assyrian monuments, that the Assyrian monarch, Assurbanipal, overthrew that city in 665 or 664 B.C. Nahum wrote soon after that; and thus he follows Isaiah, in the reign of Judah's wickedest king, Manasseh.

Jehovah and Nineveh

Nahum's oracle is given to one subject alone—the *doom of Nineveh*, capital of Assyria, and (when Nahum wrote) the world's greatest city. It is noteworthy that *two* of the books among the so-called Minor Prophets are devoted wholly to Nineveh. Over a century before Nahum, Jonah had lifted up his voice for Jehovah in the great thoroughfares of Nineveh; and the Ninevites had learned through him that "Jehovah is slow to anger" (Jonah, iv. 2). Jonah would certainly preach this to the Ninevites, and it would strike a sharp contrast between Jehovah and the fierce-tempered deities of the Assyrians. To this strangely welcome compassion of Jehovah, uttered through His unique ambassador, the Ninevites had responded; but soon afterward they had presumed upon it, going to greater lengths of wickedness than ever before. They must now learn, therefore, through Nahum, that "Jehovah is a jealous God" (i. 2), jealous, that is, of His rights over His creatures. They must now learn that wrath restrained (as in Jonah's time) is wrath *reserved*, if there is wilful return to wickedness (i. 2). Nahum, so to speak, takes up where Jonah left off. Like Jonah, he says, "Jehovah is slow to anger" (i. 3), but he adds the other side of the truth—"and great in power, *and will not at all acquit the wicked.*"

These words in chapter i. 3 are, in fact, the *key* to this doom-song of Nahum, and they utter its message for all time—"Jehovah *will not acquit.*" The fact that *two* of the Minor Prophets are devoted to Nineveh emphasises its significance. This mighty metropolis of a bygone empire was meant to objectify for all peoples and for all time the governmental method of God with the Gentile nations. Let nations and peoples take heed! Let all who would presume upon the Divine patience and silence beware! Though God will forgive sin repented of, He will not condone sin persisted in. "God is not mocked," and there is no escaping Him; for, as Nahum goes on to say, "Jehovah hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet . . ." (i. 3-6). Since the lesson of the past is lost on the Assyrians, Jehovah will now have His way with them even in the whirlwind and the storm. The righteous principles of His administration among the earth's peoples are unchanging. Compassion can never be exercised at the expense of righteousness. There must be a settling of accounts. Nineveh was the

proudest and fiercest, as well as the vilest of cities. The surrounding peoples cringed at her feet. She swelled with pride in the imagination of her seeming invulnerability. But now, besides rebuking Nineveh's pride, oppression, idolatry, and defiance of the sovereign Jehovah, Nahum publishes the irreversible decree that she shall be forever destroyed. With Nineveh before our eyes, we may well say with Paul, "Behold, therefore, the goodness and severity of God"—His goodness through Jonah, and his severity through Nahum.

Let the peoples of today take a long, steady, thoughtful look at old-time Nineveh. She is one of God's special object-lessons to all rulers and nations. It is the same God who super-rules the world today. He is not one whit less severe than He was in Old Testament times, and He is not one whit more compassionate. He is just as uncompromising toward sin, just as compassionate toward the penitent, the same from age to age. The idea that the Gospel of Christ somehow tones down the severity in the Divine character is wrong. Certainly, the Gospel is the supreme *expression* of the Divine graciousness; but it does not in the slightest degree modify the inflexible principles of righteousness by which God governs nations. God has always been gracious. God has always been intolerant of wickedness. He is the same today. Unless we are strangely unseeing, the Anti-Nazi war demonstrated again how surely the hand of God still controls, to bring guilty nations to book. Let the modern leaders of Europe mark God's dealings with old-time Nineveh!

There is no need to give a detailed analysis of Nahum's prophecy if we get hold of its main movements. Practically throughout it is poetic in form, and it is poetry unsurpassed for power of description. It opens with a description of the attributes and operations of God, and runs in three strophes, answering to the three chapters in our English version. Chapter i. asserts the *certainty* of Nineveh's overthrow. Chapter ii. depicts the *siege and capture* of the city. Chapter iii. tells of the *wickedness* which provoked the retribution, ending with the words, "Upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?" Thus—

Chapter i.—NINEVEH'S DOOM DECLARED.

„ ii.—NINEVEH'S DOOM DESCRIBED.

„ iii.—NINEVEH'S DOOM DESERVED.

Use a modern translation along with the Authorised Version. This will make the three movements clearer. For instance, in chapter i. 12, the words, "Though they be quiet" will become "Though they be very strong," which gives the true sense, namely, that though the Assyrians were very strong and very many, they should be cut down. Again, in chapter ii. 2, instead of "For the Lord hath turned away the excellency of Jacob," we shall read that the Lord "bringeth again" or "restoreth" the excellency of Jacob, which makes the verse at once intelligible and in keeping with the context. Verses 3 and 4 in chapter ii. describe the *attackers* of Nineveh. Verse 5 describes the enfeebled *defenders*. The words, "He shall recount his worthies" refer to Nineveh's king.

Nineveh's Vastness and Vileness

Beyond all doubt, Nineveh is one of the most remarkable cities in history. Recent discovery has shown that it was really a complex of four cities in one, making a vast quadrangle no less than sixty miles round. The walls were one hundred feet high, and so broad that three chariots could be driven abreast on them. These walls were fortified with fifteen hundred towers, each two hundred feet high. Based on a trigonometric survey, the full area has been computed as three hundred and fifty square miles—the area of modern London! Of course, greater Nineveh included spacious gardens, orchards, pastures, and grain fields. This need not surprise us. Babylonia's great walled towns enclosed large spaces for pasturage and produce so that in case of siege they were self-provided for. The reference, in Jonah iv. 11, to "much cattle" in Nineveh is therefore easily understandable. The mention, in that same verse, of "six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand," means that there were some hundred and twenty thousand infants there alone. From this it has been estimated that Nineveh's population in Jonah's time was about one million. It would be even more in Nahum's time.

But Nineveh's vastness was eclipsed by its *vileness*. The brutality of the Assyrians toward the victims of their conquests was such as to make the flesh creep. The surrounding peoples shuddered with a sickly horror at the thought of ever being prey to them. Their mania for blood and savagery was gruesome and

foul (look back over our second lesson on Jonah). And Nahum now drags out to view the violence, murder, witchcraft, whoredom, and vile corruption *inside* the harlot city (iii. 1-7). The word of God to her is: "I will make thy grave, *for thou art vile*" (i. 14).

Nahum's Prophecy Fulfilled

The decisive test of prediction is fulfilment. One of the unanswerable arguments for the superhuman origin of the Bible is its amplitude of fulfilled prediction. Nahum's oracle on Nineveh is an impressive instance. His reference to "the gates of the rivers" being opened, and the palace "dissolved," in chapter ii. 6, is striking in view of what actually happened. Read the following abbreviated extract from an article on Nahum in the *Pulpit Commentary*.

"This prophecy, so precise and assured, was the result of no human prevision. When Nahum prophesied, Assyria was at the height of its prosperity. No enemy in its neighbourhood was left unsubdued; the distant Egypt had submitted to its arms; Phoenicia and Cyprus owned its sway; Judah paid annual tribute; commercial enterprise had drawn unto it the riches of all nations. No one at this epoch could have foreseen the speedy end of this prosperity. In fifty years the end came. On the death of Assurbanipal, matters began to assume a dangerous attitude. Egypt rose against its former conqueror; Babylon revolted; the Medes, now a powerful monarchy, prepared to attack Nineveh. The successor of Assurbanipal himself marched against the latter, sending Nabopolassar to recover Babylon. The Medes were defeated, and for a time driven back. Nabopolassar also was successful, and received as a reward for his services the title of King of Babylon. Here he managed affairs so skilfully, and strengthened himself so effectually, that after fifteen years he found himself able to throw off the Assyrian yoke. Nabopolassar made alliance with all the enemies of Assyria, and became the ruling spirit of a strong confederacy which comprised Medes and Persians, Egyptians, Armenians, and other nations, all animated with the fierce desire of revenging themselves on Assyria. About 612 B.C. the allied forces attacked Nineveh, but were repulsed with loss. Victory for some time hovered over the Assyrians; but the enemy, reinforced from Bactria, proved irresistible. The

Ninevites, fearing for their final safety, attempted to escape from the city. They were overtaken, and again shut up within their walls. Here they defended themselves for more than two years, when a circumstance against which no remedy availed laid them at the mercy of the besiegers. An unusually heavy flood of the Tigris carried away a large section of the huge rampart that surrounded the city. Through the gap thus formed the enemy forced their way within the walls and captured the place. The town was sacked, and a great number of the inhabitants were massacred. Thus fell Nineveh, 608 B.C., according to the prophecy of Nahum." So completely was Nineveh destroyed, we may add, that in the second century A.D. even the site of it had become uncertain. See, also, Ezekiel xxxii. 22, 23.

Parting Reflections

The name of the prophet Nahum means *Comfort*; and let us frankly agree that in Nahum's dirge there is very real comfort for the godly. It is the comfort of knowing that in the righteous government of God, the outrages of impenitent evil-doers against their fellow-humans are Divinely requited. The desire for revenge is not Christian; but the appeal that God Himself shall avenge outraged justice, and vindicate the right against impenitent evil-doers, is fully in accord with Christian principles. Note the fact that Nahum scarcely mentions his own nation. The reason for this is clear. He does not exult in Nineveh's downfall merely for Judah's sake, or for his own. Nineveh had sold whole peoples by her whoredoms and witchcrafts. Nahum voices the outraged conscience of mankind. Other than merely indulging revenge, he identifies himself with the government of God in its guarantee that such wrongs shall not go without redress.

Yes, there is comfort here. As we think of the outrages which are committed with apparent impunity against the godly, as we see how the wicked often flourish and gloatingly grind down the innocent, we find relief in Nahum's assurance that "Jehovah will not acquit." There is comfort for the godly in the very anger of God. Nineveh proclaims to us the final vindication of right against wrong; and therein is comfort. That, indeed, is what the elect cry for, day and night (Luke xviii. 7, 8; Rev. vi. 10, 11); and the Almighty has pledged Himself to avenge, in a day which is yet to be (Rom. xii. 19, etc.).

Again, Nineveh figures to us "this present evil world," in its outward display, its seeming security, its superficial response to God's message, its false religion, its inward corruption, its cruelty to the souls of men, and its eventual overthrow by Divine judgment. But there is another significant correspondence. In chapter i. 11, Nahum says to Nineveh: "There is one come out of thee that imagineth evil against Jehovah, a wicked counsellor (lit., a counsellor of Belial)." Possibly Nahum here harks back to Rab-shakeh, who, a few years earlier, had come from Assyria to terrify Jerusalem (2 Kings xviii. ; xix. ; Isa. xxxvi.). Rab-shakeh certainly was a "counsellor of Belial," a "man of sin" with a foul mouth speaking insolent things, and exalting the Assyrian sovereign above all gods, even above Jehovah Himself. He certainly adumbrated, if he did not actually typify, the "man of sin" who is to appear toward the end of the present age. Again and again, in the course of history, the world-spirit, the spirit of anti-Christ, has expressed itself with blatant concentration through some outstanding evil personality. A braggart instance was Hitler; and so again is Stalin. But there is yet to appear the Rab-shakeh whose number is 666, through whom the forces of evil will vent their culminating defiance of the true God and His Christ. It will then be as it was with Rab-shakeh and the suddenly death-smitten Assyrian host (Isa. xxxvii. 36); for it is written, in 2 Thessalonians ii. 8, "Then shall the lawless one be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the breath of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming." Yes, Nineveh is fallen, is fallen! Jehovah will not acquit! His government is righteous. He is the stronghold of the godly. Christ is His supreme pledge. Lo, He comes, and every eye shall see Him! Wrongs shall be righted. The valleys shall be exalted, and the mountains brought low. The dark shall be made light, and the crooked straight; and the kingdoms of this world shall yet become the kingdom of our God and His Christ.

We cannot emphasize too strongly that this doom-song on Nineveh is no mere human cry for revenge. If it had been, it would not have been worthy of a place in the canon of Scripture, and certainly would never have been included. Nahum does not even view Nineveh's coming destruction with patriotic gratification from the standpoint of his own nation and countrymen. The

predicted requital is viewed solely from the requirements of Divine justice.

God Himself has implanted in our human nature a constitutional sense of right, of justice, of fair-play, of demand that the wicked, wanton, cruel hurter of souls does not finally "get away with it", even though he may not have hurt ourselves personally. We do not want any mere human revenge; but there is a sense of moral necessity in us which cries out that God Himself shall *avenge* such wrong. And when we read such a message as that of Nahum on such a monster of vileness and cruelty as old-time Nineveh, our innate sense of justice "amens" the Divine sentence. Read again our study on the Imprecatory Psalms; for this doom-oracle of Nahum casts further light on those psalms, as well as belonging to the same category.

That this prophecy of Nahum actually *is* a product of Divine inspiration, and not just a vehement thirst for human revenge, is made sure, of course, by the fact that it was fulfilled to the very letter. And in these days when monstrosities of wickedness terrorise the earth, on a scale never known before, when Christian and godly and innocent people in many lands suffer coldly calculated or brutally inflicted cruelties for the sake of upright principles, it is a thoroughly Christian attitude to pray for and to take refuge in the soon-coming final vengeance of God on the wicked, and His vindication of the upright.

THE PROPHET HABAKKUK

Lesson Number 98

NOTE.—For this study read right through the short prophecy of Habakkuk three times at one sitting, and then in a modern translation.

The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination, by means of direct impressions, by the testimony of facts and events, by history, by description. Persons influence us, voices melt us, looks subdue us, deeds inflame us. Many a man will live and die upon a dogma; no man will be a martyr for a conclusion.

J. H. Newman.

Speak to Him then, for He hears,
And spirit with spirit can meet;
Closer is He than breathing,
And nearer than hands or feet.

Tennyson.

THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

HUMAN personality is an endless study. No two minds react in exactly the same way. Each individual is unique. We are impressed by this again as we go through the writings of these Hebrew prophets. All of them are conscious of Divine inspiration, and give good evidence of it; yet their inspiration does not swamp their individuality, but leaves ample play for it. Each has his own distinguishing characteristics. Each makes his own distinctive contribution. Each stamps his own individuality on what he writes.

This, in particular, is true of the prophet Habakkuk. Unlike the other prophets, he does not address either his own countrymen or a foreign people: his speech is to God alone. Again, unlike the other prophets, he is not concerned so much with delivering a message as with solving a *problem*—a problem which vexed his own sensitive soul relating to Jehovah's government of the nations. The first part of this prophecy (i. and ii.) is a *colloquy* between Habakkuk and Jehovah. The remainder (iii.) is an exquisitely beautiful ode describing a majestic *theophany*, or visible coming of God to the earth. Both in the colloquy which it relates and in the theophany which it describes, this Book of Habakkuk is unique.

The focus of Habakkuk's problem and prophecy is *Babylon*. Of the enemies which afflicted the covenant people long ago, three were outstanding—the Edomites, the Assyrians, and the Chaldeans, or Babylonians. It was given to three of the Hebrew prophets specially to pronounce the doom of these three powers. The prophecy of Obadiah sealed the fate of Edom. The prophecy of Nahum tolled the knell over Assyria. The prophecy of Habakkuk dug the grave of Babylon.

This, of course, bears on the question of the *time* when Habakkuk wrote. Of Habakkuk himself we know no more than we do of Nahum, though conjectures are not lacking: but the time he wrote does not seem too difficult to settle within fairly clear

limits. We are plainly told that it was when the Chaldeans were rising to power (i. 5-11). Now it was not until Nineveh had been destroyed that Babylon rose above the nations as the new dominating world-power, which fact at once suggests that Habakkuk wrote either a little while *before*, or, more probably, soon *after* the fall of Nineveh, in 608 B.C. The latter is supported by Habakkuk's omission of any reference to Nineveh, which suggests that all menace from Nineveh had now passed.

Years before Habakkuk, the prophet Isaiah had forewarned king Hezekiah that his treasures should be carried to Babylon, and his sons become eunuchs in the palace there (Isa. xxxix. 6, 7); but at that time it was Assyria which Judah feared; and it was only after the fall of Assyria, in Habakkuk's time, that the menace from Babylon became suddenly imminent. King Josiah of Judah was slain in battle just before Nineveh fell. When the Egyptians came up to join with the other allies against Nineveh, Josiah, who was vassal to Nineveh, went out to resist the Egyptians, but was killed at Megiddo (2 Kings xxiii. 28-30). Josiah's son Jehoahaz, reigned only three months, and was then carried captive to Egypt by Pharaoh-Necho of Egypt, who put Judah under tribute to Egypt, and made Josiah's *other* son, Eliakim, king of Judah, changing his name to *Jehoiakim* (2 Kings xxiii. 31-7). We conclude, therefore, that it was probably in Jehoiakim's reign that Habakkuk wrote, somewhere about 600 B.C., and we are confirmed in this by 2 Kings xxiv., which gives the reign of this Jehoiakim as the time when the Babylonians began their harassing of Judah which eventually culminated in Judah's seventy years' Babylonian servitude.

Thus Habakkuk, contemporary of Jeremiah, was a prophet of fateful days in Judah. The dark storm-clouds were massing over Jerusalem. Josiah, Judah's last good king, had been followed by Jehoiakim, the wicked king who burned Jeremiah's "roll" (Jer. xxxvi.). The last two or three decades had set in for Judah when Habakkuk took up his pen to write; and it was perhaps to Habakkuk that God first revealed *how near* the end was.

This prophecy of Habakkuk puts into words a struggle and triumph of faith which took place in the soul of the prophet himself. It begins with a sob, and ends with a song; and it is in the process from the one to the other that the little book discloses the heart of its meaning to us. There can be no mistaking

the author's own *arrangement* of what he writes. There are three parts, corresponding to the three chapters of the book in our English version (except that perhaps the first verse of chapter ii. should go at the end of chapter i.). The first part (i.) begins: "The *burden* which Habakkuk the prophet did see." The second part (ii.) begins: "The Lord answered me and said, Write the *vision*, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it; for the *vision* is yet for an appointed time. . . ." The third part (iii.) begins: "A *prayer* of Habakkuk the prophet, upon Shigionoth" (i.e. set to a triumphal strain). So then, in these three parts we have—

Chapter i.—A "BURDEN."

„ ii.—A "VISION."

„ iii.—A "PRAYER."

A glance through the book again will show that these three titles truly represent the contents of the three parts. But let us now inspect the "burden" and the "vision" and the "prayer" a little more closely, to get a true understanding of them.

Chapter i.—A "Burden."

The prophet here is in an agony of perplexity. He is beset by a double enigma of the Divine providence, or, at any rate, what *seems* to be so. He sighs—

"O Lord, how long shall I cry, and Thou wilt not hear? I cry out unto Thee of violence, and Thou wilt not save! Why dost Thou show me iniquity, and look upon perverseness?" (read verses 2 to 4).

Habakkuk's problem was the silence, inactivity, and apparent unconcern of God. Violence abounded; lawlessness was rife; blatant evils defied all protest from God's prophets; and God seemed to be doing nothing. But Habakkuk's problem on this score was cleared up by a special word from God—

"Behold ye among the nations, and regard, and wonder marvelously; for I work a work in your days which ye will not believe though it be told you. For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation; which march through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling-places that are not theirs" (read verses 5 to 11).

This, however, to the distraught Habakkuk, only solved the one problem by raising a still bigger one. Certainly the crushing requital coming to Judah was deserved; but why should God punish Judah by means of a people far more wicked and ruthless than the Jews themselves? The thought of this was a painful shock to Habakkuk. It seemed hard to reconcile with his belief in the righteousness of Jehovah's government over the nations of the earth. It was the same kind of problem which some of ourselves felt when Hitler wrought such havoc in Europe, struck France, bleeding, to the ground, and even seemed likely to wreak his evil will on Britain. We could understand that Britain, with other peoples, was being punished for her godless ways; but why should it be by the Nazis, the most brutal, immoral, and anti-Christian horde on earth?

Habakkuk's plaintive further appeal to God is given in verses 12 to 17, which should be read again in the Revised Version. What can Habakkuk do about it? After all, God is sovereign. It is no use beating one's head against a wall. Will God be gracious and give His servant some understanding of this matter? Habakkuk resolves to await God's word. He says: "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will look forth to see what He will speak with me" (ii. 1).

Chapter ii.—A "Vision."

In this chapter we have the wonderful "vision" which God gave to Habakkuk; and here faith finds a solution, though not a solution in the *logical* sense, but a *spiritual* solution which is thoroughly intelligible to faith. The chapter should be read again with special regard to two great pledges which God gives, in verses 4 and 14. Verse 4 says: "Behold his soul (the Babylonian's) is puffed up; it is not upright in him; *but the just shall live by his faith.*" Verse 14 says: "*For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.*" If, then, in chapter i. we have a double problem, in chapter ii. we have a double pledge.

What is the meaning of these two assurances? Take the first of them—"The just shall live by his faith." The words might almost seem to occur in a merely incidental way; yet in reality they are so significant that they are quoted no less than three times in the New Testament as a decisive factor in evangelical argument (see Rom. i 17; Gal. iii. 11; Heb. x. 38). It should be

understood at once that the words look beyond the body to the *soul*. This is indicated by the earlier half of the sentence, in which God says of the proud Chaldean, "Behold, his *soul* is puffed up; it is not upright in him." That word "soul" betokens the deeper sense in which we are to read the remaining words of the sentence, namely, "the just shall live by his faith." The words look beyond the outward to the *inward*, beyond the merely physical to the *spiritual*, beyond the present to the *future*, beyond the intermediate and episodal to the *ultimate* and *eternal*. It is as though God said to Habakkuk: "Yes, your estimate of the Chaldean is quite right; his soul is all wrong; but though I use him to chastise My people, he himself shall be brought to woe in the end; and although in the present painful process the righteous suffer with (and by) the wicked, yet the righteous shall never perish in the end like the wicked, but shall live because of his faith, as will yet be seen, for the earth shall yet be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord." The fact is that this word to Habakkuk is one of those prolific words of the Old Testament which must be read in the light of New Testament revelation if we are to grasp the full meaning. Those who by faith in the God of the Lord Jesus are justified, or made righteous, in Christ, *do* "live" by their faith, in the sense that they *receive* new spiritual life here and now, and *shall* live forever with Christ beyond the short years of mortality on earth.

As for the second pledge—"For the earth shall (yet) be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord", that also must be read anew in New Testament light. Not yet have the words had fulfilment. They await the return of Christ. They look on to the Millennium. *Then* the meek shall inherit the earth, and the controversy of history be resolved in the final vindication of the right and true. God's word to Habakkuk is: "Though it tarry, *wait* for it; because it will surely come" (ii. 3). God has given supreme pledge in Christ that He is indeed working out great and gracious purposes for mankind. Habakkuk himself grasped something of this, and said, "Jehovah is in His holy temple; *let all the earth keep silence before Him*" (ii. 20).

Chapter iii.—A "Prayer."

This "prayer" of Habakkuk is really a sublime rhapsody of faith. It begins, however, with an appeal to God, to grant

a gracious revival "in the midst of the years," before ever His ultimate purpose for history has worked out to its final fulfilment (iii. 2). Then, from verse 3 to verse 15 there is a glorying in Jehovah's mighty doings of the past, His coming forth for the emancipation of Israel, His marvels from the time of the Exodus onwards. There can be no doubt that Habakkuk here refers to these things; yet significantly enough he puts his verbs in the *future* tense, so that from the imagery of the Exodus and the journeying to Canaan there is a solemn picturing of a far greater coming of God to judgment which is yet to be. Thus, verse 3 should really read: "God *shall come* from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran"; similarly the future tense in most of the verses. "Teman" and "Paran," we may just add, are the land of Edom, and the land between Edom and Egypt.

Finally, in verses 16 to 19, we have a postlude, in which faith soars on wings above all doubts and fears. It does the heart good to read such exulting words of assurance in days like these. Although the prophet had "trembled" at the coming judgment upon his own people (verse 16), he now speaks of himself as "I who shall *rest* in the day of tribulation." That is the more literal translation. Though he should be brought to utmost destitution, as in verse 17, yet, says he, "I will rejoice in Jehovah; I will joy in the God of my salvation" (verse 18). The literal is, "I will jump for joy in the Lord; I will spin round for delight in God." Here is the hilarity of faith!—joy at its best with circumstances at their worst! What a victory! May it be ours!

Such, then, is the Book of Habakkuk—in chapter i. a "*burden*"; in chapter ii. a "*vision*"; in chapter iii. a "*prayer*." In chapter i. we have a twofold *problem*; in chapter ii. a twofold *promise*; in chapter iii. a twofold *product*—praise for the past and confidence for the future. In chapter i. we have faith *sighing*; in chapter ii. faith *seeing*; in chapter iii. faith *singing*. Perhaps we cannot do better than set it out thus—

- Ch. i. A "BURDEN": FAITH GRAPPLING WITH PROBLEM.
 ,, ii. A "VISION": FAITH GRASPING THE SOLUTION.
 ,, iii. A "PRAYER": FAITH GLORYING IN ASSURANCE.

The key verse to Habakkuk is chapter ii. 4—"The just shall live by his faith"; and around this truth precious lessons for

faith are written. The living message of the little book is clear. Faith has still its problems. If Habakkuk's days seemed draped with dark enigmas, even more do our own. But this book tells us not to judge merely by the appearances of the hour. God has given us great promises, and is working out great purposes. He cannot tell us the whole in so many words; but He has revealed enough to make faith intelligent, and to give it scope for development.

There is also truth of high value for us in the *process* by which Habakkuk passed from his sob of doubt to his song of trust. First, he told his honest doubt to *God*, and not to any mere human "brains trust." If we would only do that instead of sighing abroad our doubts on *human* ears, what unrest we would escape! But second, Habakkuk resolved to *wait* on God. He said: "I will get to my watchtower. I will wait to see what it all means." Nor did God mock him. Nor does God ever mock such a man. We do not know how long Habakkuk waited; but we *do* know God answered him. Oh, if we would only give God time, so that He might prepare our minds for what He has to say! People say that God does not speak to men today as He did long ago. The truer statement is that men do not listen today as they did of old. To the man who waits, God does not remain silent. Thus, thirdly, Habakkuk broke through to joyous certitude and song. He had seen a vision. All was changed. When he had looked at circumstances he was in despair. When he waited and heard God speak he began to sing.

Finally, let us keep Habakkuk's golden hope before us, that the earth shall yet be filled with the glory of the Lord. The age is far spent. The final epoch hastens to us. The vision has tarried; but now it speeds to its full realisation. Christ is coming soon; the big events of our time are the solemn heralds of His return. God help us to wait with the patience of a true hope, to watch with the eye of a true faith, to work with the zeal of a true love—until He come!

Oh, the golden dawn may be at hand
Which dries the mourner's tears!
War and woe shall be abolished and unknown!
Men shall batter swords to plowshares,
And to pruning hooks their spears,
When the Lord returns in glory for His own!

NOTE.—For this study read the little Book of Zephaniah right through at least twice, and then in a modern translation.

One of the most characteristic and prominent features of the Bible, considered as a whole,—that which runs through it from beginning to end, and which distinguishes it at once from all other books, is that it subordinates everything to the idea of GOD. It is not without reason called the Book of God; and *would* be so, in a very intelligible sense, even if there were no God at all. From the first sentence to the last, HE is the great theme of it, the Alpha and Omega. Infinitely various as are its contents, this is the keynote which runs through the whole.

Henry Rogers.

THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

IN INTRODUCING himself to us, Zephaniah gives his pedigree more fully than any other of the prophets. He is "Zephaniah, the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah" (i. 1). The reason for this lies in the last of these names, "Hizkiah," which should really be "Hezekiah" (as in the Revised Version). There does not seem to be any weighty reason for doubting that this Hezekiah was the godly *king* Hezekiah; and we can understand how a prophet like Zephaniah would be grateful to show his near descent from a king like Hezekiah. So then, Zephaniah is by distinction the prophet of royal descent. He is a prince of the house of David, and the great-great-grandson of king Hezekiah.

Zephaniah also tells us *when* he prophesied. It was "in the days of Josiah, the son of Amon, king of Judah" (i. 1). This carries with it the information that he was a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah (see Jer. i. 2); though, of course, Jeremiah would outlive him. We can well appreciate that king Josiah, in his noble religious reforms, would have the ardent backing of his prophet-cousin; and, without reading too much between the lines, it may be that much of the urge toward these reforms came from Zephaniah, who would have the intimate influence of a relative in the royal house.

There is something pathetic, however, about the religious reform in the days of King Josiah. Outwardly it was impressive perhaps, but inwardly it was far from what was needed. It was an outward reformation sponsored by the king, rather than a real spiritual revival among the people themselves. Read again 2 Kings xxii.-xxiii. and 2 Chronicles xxxiv.-xxxv., noting particularly the words of prophetess Huldah to Josiah, in 2 Kings xxii. 15-20. In effect, the prophetess said: "Yes, king Josiah, do all that is in your mind; it is good: but the heart of this people is become gross; there will not be a real heart-turning to God such as would avert judgment." Certainly Josiah's clean-up of Judah's religious abuses, and his reorganising of religion on the

older lines, gave a grand royal lead; but even a king cannot "organise" a real revival; and the movement in Josiah's time was reformation as distinct from regeneration. It did not get down to the undercurrents of the nation's life. This is made clear by Jeremiah iii. 6, 10. The stream of iniquity flowed on unstemmed. Judgment was unavoidable, though the storm was not unleashed until good king Josiah's reign was over.

We are not greatly surprised, therefore, that our prophet Zephaniah does not make mention of these outward reforms. His perceiving eye left him in no doubt as to the real state of the nation's life. He exposes the transgressions and pollutions of his days, and with a stern vehemence warns his people that the "Day of Jehovah" hastes toward them, with its tornado of Divine wrath. The two prophets Joel and Zephaniah are in an emphatic way the prophets of judgment against Judah; yet both of them, having delivered their message of judgment, foretell a glorious aftermath. The final passage from Zephaniah's pen is one of the most beautiful in the Scriptures. It looks on to that promised age which is yet to be, when Israel's Messiah, the Church's Divine Husband, shall hold empire over all the earth.

Zephaniah's Threefold Message

Let us now look through the book, to find its main movements, and to get at its central message. If we read carefully we soon see that what Zephaniah has to say falls into three parts, though these three parts, unfortunately, do not coincide with the three chapters into which the book is arranged in our English version.

Part one runs from chapter i. 1 (or, strictly, from i. 2) to chapter ii. 3. A glance through these verses will show us at once that everything here refers to the judgment that is coming on *Judah* (see specially i. 4, 7, 8, 11, 12; ii. 1; and note that "Maktesh" in i. 11 was a depression, or small valley, in Jerusalem where the bazaars were). In all this run of verses there is no mention of the outside nations. The one theme is the sin and coming judgment of *Judah*. Note the one grimly significant "*because*" in chapter i. 17. Why is all the terrible calamity which is described in the foregoing verses coming on Judah? Verse 17 gives the simple, fundamental, awful answer—"Because they have sinned against Jehovah." And note, also, that this part of the book ends with

an appeal for repentance, and an encouraging word to the little company of upright ones among the degraded populace (ii. 1-3).

Part two runs from chapter ii. 4 to chapter iii. 8. There can be no mistaking it—in this part the prophet looks away from Jerusalem and Judah to *the surrounding nations*. First he turns west, to Philistia and the Philistines (ii. 4-7). Then he turns east, to Moab and Ammon (ii. 8-11). Then he turns south, to Ethiopia (ii. 12). Then he turns north, to Nineveh and Assyria (ii. 13-15). Note that this part concludes with a sudden turning round on Jerusalem again, the point being that if God so smites the surrounding nations with judgment, how certainly will he smite the people of Judah who have had privileges above all others! That this is the point of this wind-up to part two is clear from the last three verses in it—"I have cut off the nations; their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by; their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant. I said, Surely (in view of all this) thou (Jerusalem) wilt fear Me, thou wilt receive instruction . . . but they rose early and corrupted all their doings. . . . Therefore . . . I rise to the prey" (iii. 6-8).

Part three runs from chapter iii. 9 down to verse 20, which is the last verse of the chapter and of the book. Here the prophet is not just looking *within*, at Jerusalem and Judah, nor looking *around*, at the other nations; he is looking *beyond*, to a time of healing and blessing which shall come to Israel and to all peoples alike, after the days of judgment have served their purpose. The passage begins: "For then will I turn to the *peoples* (not singular, as in the Authorised Version, but plural, as in the Revised) a pure language, that they may *all* call upon the name of Jehovah, to serve Him with one consent." In this the vision of Zephaniah is like that of other prophets. The coming Messianic kingdom is to embrace all the nations. Yet the covenant people are to be the centre of that kingdom; and therefore Zephaniah concludes by picturing the exalted blessings of Israel in that golden age. There is to be a regathering of the dispersed (verse 10). There is to be a changed temper and behaviour in the people (verses 11-13). There is to be complete banishment of evil, and an exulting joyousness (verses 14, 15). God Himself is going to find utter pleasure in the Holy City and her people; it shall be said

to Zion: "Jehovah, thy God, is in the midst of thee, the Mighty One who will save; He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love; He will joy over thee with singing" (verses 16, 17). All afflictions are to be forever over, and Israel is to be made "a praise among all the peoples of the earth" (verse 20). It is a delectable picture indeed, and sets our longing hearts praying the more fervently: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. xxii. 20).

For memory's sake let us now set all this out in flat analysis. There is really no need for any more elaborate analysis than that which here follows.

THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

THROUGH JUDGMENT TO BLESSING

LOOK WITHIN!—WRATH COMING ON JUDAH (i. 1-ii. 3).

THE PURPOSE OF JEHOVAH TO JUDGE (1-6).

THE "DAY" OF JEHOVAH "AT HAND" (7-18).

And so—plea to Jerusalem (ii. 1-3).

LOOK AROUND!—WRATH ON ALL NATIONS (ii. 4-iii. 8).

WEST, EAST—PHILISTIA, MOAB, AMMON (4-II).

SOUTH, NORTH—ETHIOPIA AND ASSYRIA (12-15)

And so—"Woe" to Jerusalem (iii. 1-8).

LOOK BEYOND!—AFTER WRATH, HEALING (iii. 9-20).

CONVERSION OF GENTILE PEOPLES (9).

RESTORING OF COVENANT PEOPLE (10-15).

And so—the new Jerusalem (verses 16-20).

The key thought in Zephaniah is not expressed so much in any one verse as in the *contrast* between the very first verse and the very last. After the super-scription, the first word is, "*I will utterly consume.*" This is the fierce fire of judgment. But the last word of the book is, "*I will make you a name and a praise.*" This is the final fulness of blessing.

God has a glorious end and purpose in view; but even that golden goal must not be gained at the expense of absolute justice

and righteousness in the present; and therefore present sin must be equated by present judgment. Yet, even so, the ultimate purpose shall be realised; for the sovereign Jehovah so overrules, that, however grievously His people sin, and however grievously He must punish, the present process of judgment shall eventually issue in the final blessing. This is what we have in Zephaniah. There must be the smiting with retribution before there can be the smiling of restoration. Thus we may say that the key thought of Zephaniah is, "*THROUGH JUDGMENT TO BLESSING.*" Closely allied with this is the thought that "Jehovah is in the midst." He is in the midst of Jerusalem to *judge* (iii. 5); and He is in the midst of Jerusalem to *save* (iii. 15, 17). Well may we sing—

*"And though His arm is strong to smite,
'Tis also strong to save."*

Big Meanings

This prophecy of Zephaniah is loaded with big meanings for us today. Here was a man who had the mind of God on the national and international situation when few others, if any, had taken the measure of it or sensed the gravity of it; and he declared it even though it was severely unpopular. This is ever the mark of the true prophet. This man saw beneath the sudden new burst of religious activity, and judged it for what it was really worth. He looked out also on that larger crowd of the populace, the irreligious lot, who simply nodded an artificial respect for the new stir of Jehovah-worship because the king was chief patron, but who said among themselves that these religious ideas were now played out, that "Jehovah will not do good, neither will He do evil" (i. 12), or, in other words, that Jehovah just didn't bother and didn't matter—Zephaniah looked out on these and saw the tragic farce of their unconcern: he had heard the sickening thud and rumble of a coming judgment which would crush the nation to pieces: he knew that soon there would be upon them the biggest calamity since Israel had become a nation. Zephaniah was the man who knew; and he cried to his countrymen, "The Day of Jehovah is at hand!" (i. 7). This is his great theme, especially in the first part of his prophecy (i. 1–ii. 3).

If we mistake not, there is a correspondence between Zephaniah's day and our own. We are far from claiming to be prophets in the sense that Zephaniah and his compeers were; yet in another sense we shall not shrink from holding that we are truly the Lord's spokesmen. If we do not have the special kind of inspiration by which God spoke through the Hebrew prophets, that is not now needed, since "the volume of the Book" is now completed for our guidance; but we *do* claim to have the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and we *do* claim to be honestly interpreting the word of Scripture, in declaring our conviction that the time is once more here when we must lift up our cry that "The Day of the Lord is at hand!" Zephaniah's fervid depicting of "The Day of Jehovah"—the awful judgment which was determined on his own generation, is really an adumbration of that all-eclipsing "Day of the Lord" which is to be at the end of the present age; and unless we are strangely deceived, the words of the Book, together with the signs of the times, point to its near approach. The religious and social conditions are morally similar to those of Zephaniah's days. Despite the new bursts of religious activity, in movements such as the Anglo-Catholic and other ritualistic groups, and the strong passion for conferences on denominational reunion, the spiritual condition of the churches and the people is worse than at any time since just before the Methodist revival. Modernism has done its deadly work through its "fifth-columnists" in the pulpits and schools of our land; and the gulf between organised religion and the masses grows steadily wider. We fix no dates. We give no limit of years. We simply keep to the clear words of the Book and the big indications of our time. We are surely in that period now which is to move up quickly to the august, awful day of Christ's return.

That day will be joy superlative for Christ's own, the blood-bought, Spirit-born members of the true Church; but it is well that we should cry aloud the *terror* of that day to many others. This is the aspect of it which grips and excites Zephaniah. Mark his phrases as he struggles to impress his lethargic fellow-countrymen with the dread of it: "That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities and against the high towers" (i. 15, 16). The "day of Jehovah"

which came upon Judah long ago was all that Zephaniah had foretold; and if that day, then, was meant to adumbrate the supreme "day" which is yet to be, in which all God's earth-judgments will have their awful culmination, then that coming day is one that should cause all who refuse the Gospel of Christ, and all who live impenitently in sin, to tremble with fear. In recent days we have seen the horrors which men can inflict on their fellow-men by the weapons of modern warfare; but what are these compared with the terrors of the Almighty upon the wicked? What will it be when the seven trumpets of the Apocalypse are sounded, and the seven vials of the Divine wrath are poured out, and the blazing fury of Armageddon breaks loose! Well may we cry to the careless, unawakened sinners around us, "Flee from the wrath to come! Flee from the wrath to come!" The popular attitude today is exactly that of Zephaniah's time—"The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil," that is, God doesn't act in human affairs: He neither blesses nor punishes: the world is governed by "natural laws," and God doesn't interfere with these laws to give supposed answers to prayers. God's existence is remotely admitted; but His interest and activity in human affairs is denied. That "day" which is soon coming will heap burning coals on the tongues of those who thus dishonour God.

Finally, let us learn the threefold truth that God permits, but punishes, and in the end perfects. Men are free agents. God allows enough freedom to the human will for any man to know at any time that he is thinking and speaking and choosing and acting of his own volition. Thus God *permits* sin—and suffering. If God were to intervene every time the innocent are made to suffer by the wicked there would be no history at all. But God *punishes* the wicked—usually by overruling natural processes, and not by miracles. Thus, he allows Israel to be punished through the agency of wicked nations; but in turn He punishes these nations for their own wrongs. In this process the innocent often suffer; but God has pledged a final restitution; and He has pointed us to a time when the present darkness shall give way before a sorrowless daybreak, and the present travail shall be forgotten in the tender triumph of love and virtue. The faith of many has been shaken by the recently permitted cruelties of war. Why should such suffering be allowed? God has overruled

the natural processes of human sin to bring judgment on wicked nations, and the innocent again have suffered with the wicked; but the age is far spent, and the longed-for dawn is about to bring in that better time. Smiting will give place to smiling. The peoples shall serve the Lord "with one consent." God will *perfect* His purpose, and fulfil all His promises. Christ shall reign. The curse shall be gone. God will rejoice over His redeemed sons and daughters. He will rest in His love. He will "joy over them with singing."

THREE QUESTIONS EACH ON MICAH, NAHUM, HABAKKUK, AND ZEPHANIAH

1. In what reigns did Micah prophesy? And what was the name of his great prophet contemporary?
2. How were Micah and his ministry different from Isaiah and his ministry?
3. What is the threefold arrangement of the Book of Micah, and what the central thought?
4. What is the subject of Nahum's prophecy? What is the key verse? What contrastive offset to the Book of Jonah do we see in it?
5. What is the threefold division of the prophecy of Nahum?
6. Could you show, briefly, how Nahum's prophecy was strikingly fulfilled?
7. Which city is the focus of Habakkuk's prophecy? How does his referring to that city help fix the date of his prophesying?
8. What is the threefold division of Habakkuk's prophecy? What, briefly, was his problem?
9. What great text in Habakkuk is quoted three times in the New Testament? And how did Habakkuk pass from his sob of doubt to faith?
10. Of which king was Zephaniah the great-great-grandson? And in which king's reign did he prophesy?
11. To which kingdom (Judah or Israel?) did Zephaniah prophesy? And who was his famous prophet contemporary?
12. Can you give the key thought of Zephaniah's prophecy, and a brief outline of the little book?

THE PROPHET HAGGAI

Lesson Number 100

NOTE.—For this study read Haggai's short prophecy through three times, and then in a modern rendering.

These are Thy glorious works, Parent of good,
Almighty! Thine this universal frame,
Thus wondrous fair: Thyself how wondrous then.
Unspeakable! Who sitteth above these heavens
To us invisible, or dimly seen
In these Thy lowest works; yet these declare
Thy goodness beyond thought, and power Divine . . .
On Earth join, all ye creatures to extol
Him first, Him last, Him midst, and without end.

John Milton.

THE BOOK OF HAGGAI

THIS "Book of Haggai" is really a momentous little fragment. Although it covers a period merely of about four months, it puts on record one of the crucial turning-points of the Divine dealings with Jerusalem and the covenant people. It has to do with the Jewish "Remnant" who returned to Jerusalem and Judæa after the Babylonian exile, and should be read along with the Book of Ezra.

It was in 520 B.C. that this otherwise unknown prophet Haggai stood forth and voiced his message to the leaders of the returned Jews. Sixteen years before this, the Persian emperor, Cyrus, had issued his historic decree for the rebuilding of Jehovah's temple at Jerusalem; and the "Remnant," numbering some fifty thousand, had returned to Judæa, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, to implement the royal proclamation (Ezra i. and ii.). Two years later the foundation of the temple had been laid, amid mingled praises and tears (Ezra iii. 8-13), and the prospects for the rebuilding had seemed bright.

But now, in 520 B.C., circumstances were gloomily otherwise. Adversaries, from the mongrel race of the Samaritans, had "hired counsellors" to misrepresent the cause of the Jews all through the reign of Cyrus; and at the accession of his successor, Artaxerxes, they had managed to bring about a complete suspension of the project (Ezra iv.). Fourteen years had now dragged by; the temple remained unbuilt, and the foundations were silted with debris and overgrown with weeds.

The repatriated Jews seem to have accepted the situation with an almost fatalistic resignation. This was the result, so it would appear, at least in part, of a wrong reaction to prophecy. Jeremiah had predicted a seventy years' period of "desolations" on Jerusalem (Jer. xxv.). We find this later exercising the mind of Daniel (Dan. ix. 1, 2), and mentioned again by Zechariah (Zech. i. 12). The Jews of the returned "Remnant" seem to have mistakenly inferred (despite God's sign to them by the edict of Cyrus) that even the *temple* could not be rebuilt until the period

of the "desolations" on the city had run its course. It is this which the prophet has in mind in his very first words—"This people say, *The time is not come, the time that Jehovah's house should be built*" (i. 2). They were paralysed by a wrong attitude to prophecy. We shall touch on this again later.

Now the pivotal significance of Haggai lies in the fact that this very year in which he uttered his fourfold prophecy, 520 B.C., was *the year which ended the period of the "desolations" and introduced a new period of Divine blessing*. Whether the Jewish leaders, or even Haggai himself, understood this clearly is another matter; but in actual fact it was so, as is made very plain in the word of God. Through the lips of the inspired Haggai, the Spirit of God has marked and emphasised the point of transition, to the very month, and even to the very day. Turn to chapter ii. 15-19, and note the deliberate stress on the words—

"Consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord . . . consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it . . . from this day will I bless you."

Could language be more definite? But even so, how do we *know* that this underscored date ended the period of the desolations? The answer is most interesting. Turn back to Ezekiel xxiv. 1, 2. Here we find another date made equally conspicuous by a similarly significant emphasis—

"Again, in the ninth year, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying: Son of man, write the name of the day, even of this selfsame day. The king of Babylon hath set himself against (i.e. hath besieged) Jerusalem this selfsame day" (see R.V.).

This tenth day of the tenth month in the ninth year of Ezekiel's captivity in Babylonia, is also clearly given in 2 Kings xxv. 1, as the day when the siege began. This is the first time in the historical books that an event is dated to the very day. The same exact date is also given in Jeremiah lii. 4. At the very

hour when the Babylonian army was in the act of surrounding the Jewish capital, the fact of it was revealed of God to the prophet Ezekiel, hundreds of miles away in Babylonia, where, at this time, he had already been in exile since Nebuchadnezzar's earlier deportation of Jewish captives, recorded in 2 Kings xxiv. 11-16. This day, then, which marked the investing of Jerusalem, Ezekiel is told to write down emphatically for observation and preservation—the tenth day of the month Tebeth, 589 B.C. This day has been observed as an annual fast by the Jews ever since. It was this day, the tenth of Tebeth, 590 B.C., which marked the *beginning* of the seventy years' period of the "desolations." The momentous fact to grasp is that from this date down to the date emphasised by Haggai, namely, the twenty-fourth day of the month Chisleu, 520 B.C., was a stretch of 25,200 days, that is, exactly *seventy years of 360 days each*.

That the prophetic year in Scripture is one of 360 days is abundantly shown (see our preceding article, on Daniel's prophecy of the "seventy weeks"). Thus, as we have said, Haggai puts on record for us a *transition-point* in the Divine dealings with Jerusalem.

There are *two* seventy years' periods predicted by the prophet Jeremiah which should not be confused. The one is the seventy years' *servitude* to Babylon; the other is the period of the "*desolations*." The servitude to Babylon began with Jehoiakim's submission to Nebuchadnezzar, in 606 B.C., and ended with the proclamation of Cyrus, in 536 B.C., freeing the Jews to return to their own land. This seventy years' servitude is spoken of in Jeremiah xxix. 10, where, unfortunately, our Authorised Version misleads the reader by putting "*at* Babylon" instead of "*for* Babylon." In the Revised Version the verse reads: "Thus saith the Lord: After seventy years be accomplished *for* Babylon, I will visit you, and perform My good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place." Jeremiah nowhere predicts that the Jews would be *at* Babylon for seventy years; but he *does* say that God had appointed a seventy years' period *for* Babylon, as ruler over the nations, during which period Jerusalem and Judæa, with the other Palestinian peoples, should be in *servitude* to Babylon.

But *besides* this seventy years of servitude, Jeremiah foretells

an epoch of actual "*desolations*" which would come upon Jerusalem and Judæa as a consequence of further impenitence (Jer. xxv. 9-11); and both Daniel and Zechariah understand this as being for seventy years (Dan. ix. 1, 2; Zech. i. 12). This, we repeat, was the period which ended with the prophecy of Haggai on the 24th Chisleu, 520 B.C. The last deep shadow of that night slinks away. A new sun has risen. Here is a word of new hope, heralding good things to come. This is Jehovah's announcement—"FROM THIS DAY WILL I BLESS YOU." Let us get this significant turning-point clearly in mind, for it is the crux of Haggai's message.

Perhaps it scarcely needs pointing out that this little scroll from the hand of Haggai is in four parts. Four times within four months in that notable "second year of Darius," 520 B.C., the "word of Jehovah" came through the lips of this prophet. Each of the four communications is carefully dated, and each has its own clear focus-point; so that we may set the whole down thus—

THE BOOK OF HAGGAI

"FROM THIS DAY I WILL BLESS YOU."

FIRST MESSAGE—TO AROUSE (i. 1-15).

DATE—Sixth month, first day.

CRUX—"Build the House" (verse 8).

SECOND MESSAGE—TO SUPPORT (ii. 1-9).

DATE—Seventh month, 21st day.

CRUX—"I am with you" (verse 4).

THIRD MESSAGE—TO CONFIRM (ii. 10-19).

DATE—Ninth month, twenty-fourth day.

CRUX—"From *this* day will I bless you."

FOURTH MESSAGE—TO ASSURE (ii. 20-3).

DATE—Ninth month, twenty-fourth day.

CRUX—"In *that* day I will make thee . . .".

The Four-fold Message

Let us now briefly consider this four-fold message of Haggai. In his *first* address (i.) his purpose is to reprove the people for their neglect, and to arouse them to immediate action. They were presuming on prophecy, and saying, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." Whatever semblance of reason there may have been in this at first, there is no doubt that it had degenerated into a mere excuse for negligence of religious duty and for the pursuance of selfish interests. "Consider your ways!" cries the prophet. "Is it 'time' for you (you who say the 'time' is not come)—is it 'time' for *you* to dwell in *your* ceiled houses (expensive and embellished houses), while *this* House (of Jehovah) lies waste?" (verse 4).

This reproof through the lips of Haggai has a relevance to our own day. There are those among us today who presume on prophecy, and say, "The time is not come." They mislead or excuse themselves into inactivity on this plea, when they ought to be spending themselves in the effort to win our present generation for Christ. There is a right attitude and there is a wrong attitude to prophecy. We need ever to remember that although inspired prediction is infallible, our own interpretation of it is *not* infallible. The mistake of the returned Jewish exiles is a case in point. We should learn from it. Instead of proving a tonic to them, prophecy had become a narcotic. They had given way to a feeling that there was a hopeless inevitability in things. Present effort was of no use; they must just wait until the clock of prophecy struck the predestined hour. The result was indifference; and the cause of God suffered. The people were getting used to being without a temple; and this would have proved fatal.

We need to be ever on our guard against this attitude. This was the attitude of gruff old Dr. Ryland of Northampton when he overrode young William Carey with the rejoinder, "Young man, sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, He'll do it without your aid or mine." This is the attitude of those today who say, "There's no use hoping for any great revival of Christianity today. The Word of God does not foretell any such great revival toward the end of the present age. Things are just to go from bad to worse until Christ returns." What a paralysing idea this is! It is enough, apart from anything else, to cut the nerve

of prayer and effort. Yet what stupid presuming this is! What of the glorious revivals which have swept through our land in the past? Can we put our finger on chapter and verse in the Bible where any one of them is foretold? Where is there any chapter or verse which says that there *cannot* or *will not* be another great ingathering of souls before Christ returns? "Consider your ways," says Haggai. "Go up . . . and build the House." We must not let any such presuming on prophecy paralyse endeavour for Christ.

Some time ago a number of evangelical ministers met in conference, to discuss the possibility of a co-ordinated nationwide evangelistic effort. Their hearts were heavy because of the deplorable moral and spiritual condition of the country. There were several sessions, at each of which one of the brethren gave an address on some aspect of the subject. There was a marked unanimity of outlook, until the final session, when the introductory speaker pressed the view that all such human organising was really to little purpose unless *God's* predestined time had come to take action, and that when God *did* take action He usually did it independently of human organising. This occasioned a good deal of warm discussion; but eventually the conference voiced its united conviction that *while regeneration and revival are the sovereign act of God, evangelism is the constant obligation of the Church*. It is well always to remember that. The fallacy of the last speaker at that conference was that he was making antitheses of two things which are not antithetic. The Divine sovereignty and human endeavour are not mutually exclusive; they are meant to be co-operative. It is not a case of "either . . . or. . . ." It is not a case of *either* "waiting on God" or "working for revival"; it must be the two together—"waiting" and "working." It is not a choice between agonising in prayer or organising an effort. Agonising and organising are to go together. We must never allow the truth of the Divine sovereignty or the fact of Scripture prophecy to dull our perception of human responsibility. This great fact, perhaps more than any other, is brought home to us today by this prophecy of Haggai.

Haggai's *second* message is a striking one. Its purpose was to encourage. Some of the older Jews who remembered the former temple were downcast at the contrast between it and that which was now being built. Haggai therefore heartens them by a

declaring of three great facts. First, Jehovah's covenant with Israel still stands, and Jehovah's faithfulness thereto continues (verse 5); second, the Spirit of God still remains among them (verse 5); third, God's promise is that there shall yet be a great shaking, that One shall come who is the Desire of all nations, and that "the glory of this latter House shall be greater than of the former" (verses 6-9). These are the three great things, also, which must ever inspire *ourselves*—the covenant, the Spirit's presence, the promised return of the King. A shaking—an advent—a glory-filled temple; this is the landscape of promise. See Hebrews xii. 26, 27 for a striking comment on this part of Haggai.

We have already mentioned the significance of Haggai's *third* message, on the twenty-fourth day of the month Chisleu. The people had expected a return of material prosperity from the very first day that they had responded to Haggai and recommenced work on the temple, three months earlier (i. 15); but Haggai now points out that they certainly must not view their renewed work on the temple as giving them a pious merit which, so to speak, put God under obligation to them. Nay, it was far otherwise. If a person ceremonially unclean touched some article, that article also became defiled (ii. 11-14), and so, in reality, was it with themselves. Other than having special merit, they were defiled; and it was grace on God's part to accept them. Yet now, none the less, God *would* give them a special sign of His favour, for *from this day* onwards He would bless them (verses 15-19).

The *fourth* message is to Zerubbabel himself, the leader of the returned Jews; and yet, quite evidently, it looks far beyond him to the ultimate consummation of the Davidic line in the coming reign of Christ. It should be clearly grasped that Zerubbabel is here addressed as the *representative* of the Davidic line. Once more God speaks of the great shaking which is to come, but adds that "in THAT DAY" Zerubbabel shall be "*as a signet*" (the sign of authority). It is peculiarly noteworthy that this figure of the signet should be used here of Zerubbabel, for it was used of his grandfather, king Jeconiah, in a tragic way, to express God's rejection of him—"As I live, saith the Lord, though Coniah (Jeconiah) the son of Jehoiakim King of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence" (Jer. xxii.

24). In the last great victory of the Divine purpose, Christ, the greater Son and wonderful Antitype of David and Zerubbabel, will be Jehovah's signet whereby He shall impress and imprint upon all nations His own majesty, His own will and ways, His own perfect ideal, and His own very image.

THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH (I)

Lesson Number 101

NOTE.—For this study read the whole Book of Zechariah through at one sitting. Then read the first eight chapters again twice, using the Revised Version.

Hebrew prophecy will be acknowledged by most to be a perfectly unique phenomenon in the history of religions. Whatever the etymology of the name (*Nabi*) the prophet himself stands clearly out as one who is conscious of receiving a message directly from Jehovah, which he is commissioned to impart to men. . . . It was certainly an error of the older apologetic to place the essence of prophecy, as was often done, in prediction. The prophet was in the first instance a man speaking to his own time. . . . It must be put to the account of modern criticism that it has done much to foster this better way of regarding prophecy, and has in consequence greatly vivified the study of the prophetic writings, and promoted a better understanding of their meaning. On the other hand, the modern view, in its desire to assimilate prophecy as much as possible to the utterances of natural human genius, does palpable violence to Scriptural teaching in denying, or making light of, this element of prediction.

James Orr, D.D.

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH (I)

AFTER the short, forthright message of Haggai, this Book of Zechariah may seem discouragingly complicated; yet it is not so in reality, as we shall see. To an observant reader it quickly sorts itself out; and it is full of good things. Zechariah was contemporary with Haggai (Ezra v. 1). The prophecies of the two men relate primarily to the same point of history, which, as we have seen in our study of Haggai, was a *turning-point* in the Divine dealings with Jerusalem and the covenant nation. If we have really grasped the crucial significance of that emphatic key-word in Haggai—"From this day will I bless you" (ii. 15-19), we shall not be long in getting to the crux of Zechariah's message; for these prophecies of Zechariah take up from this same point, supplementing, developing, and amplifying the message of Haggai. So really is this true, in fact, that the little scroll of Haggai might almost be an *introduction* to this larger work from the pen of Zechariah.

Zechariah both priest and prophet.

With Zechariah, then, as with Haggai, we begin in the year 520 B.C., in "the second year of Darius" of the Medo-Persian empire (i. 1), and we are among the fifty thousand or more of the Jewish "Remnant" who have returned (sixteen years earlier) from their Babylonian exile, to repeople and rebuild Judæa and Jerusalem. These two men, Haggai and Zechariah, have been raised up of God, and inspired to animate the flagging zeal of the Jewish leaders and people. Zechariah was both a priest and a prophet. He was "the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo" (i. 1). This Iddo was one of the priests who returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Neh. xii. 4). This means that Zechariah was of the family of Aaron. We are told that he exercised his sacerdotal office in the days of Joiakim, the son of Jeshua (Neh. xii. 12, 16).

There was a special suitability that the ministry of both prophet and priest should be united in the one person at that juncture.

Only too often in earlier years had prophets been obliged to stand in sharp antagonism to the priests. When the priest was a mere formalist, and callous to the inner meaning of the holy rites which he administered, the prophet had needed to recall the minds of his countrymen to the vital truths enshrined in the outward ritual. Zechariah united in himself all the sacerdotal traditions of the Aaronic priesthood with the zeal and authority of the prophet. Nothing could have been more timely than that the one voice should have this double appeal. Nothing was more fitted to hearten the people amid discouraging setbacks, and at the same time to arouse them from their apathetic dilatoriness in the rebuilding of the Lord's House.

It is worthy of note that from this time the priesthood takes the lead in the nation. As to government, the history of the covenant people falls into three main periods. First, from Moses to Samuel we have Israel under the *Judges*. Second, from Saul to Zedekiah we have Israel under the *Kings*. Third, from Jeshua and the repatriation of the "Remnant," down to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, we have Israel under the *Priests*.

About Chapters ix. to xiv.

Perhaps before we come to examine and analyse this Book of Zechariah we ought just to notice that chapters ix. to xiv. have been called in question by some of our more recent Bible critics. It has been argued, with more confidence than reason, that these chapters are not from the hand of Zechariah, but from a writer (or writers) who lived, according to some, as early as 770 B.C., or, according to others, as late as 330 B.C. One scholar sees a difference of authorship in the fact that while the style of the first eight chapters is prosaic, feeble, poor, that of the remaining six is *poetic, weighty, glowing*; but another scholar bases his contention on "the *lifeless* language" of these later chapters! We cannot resist the observation that there surely must be something strangely faulty with a system of Biblical criticism which from the same data, leads to such contradictory extremes, both as to date and style.

We need not stay here, however, to discuss the attack on these chapters. The critics have been answered, and the integrity of

the book demonstrated, again and again, by scholars of a sounder calibre. An able treatment of the question, in small compass, is easily accessible in C. J. Ellicott's *Commentary*, also in the introduction to the Book of Zechariah in the *Pulpit Commentary*. In earlier studies in this series we have examined the Modernist attacks on the Books of Jonah, Isaiah, and Daniel, and have shown how fallacious are the arguments against those scriptures. The attempt against these later chapters of Zechariah falls into the same category and reveals a similar result, namely, that the scholarly "blitz" spends itself, only to prove more clearly than before the thorough genuineness of the precious old Book.

Contents and Analysis

If we pick our way carefully through this Book of Zechariah two or three times, we soon find its arrangement becoming clear to us. We are sure to see, first of all, that there is a major break between chapters viii. and ix., which divides the book into two main parts. There can scarcely be any mistaking this, for the characteristics of the two parts are markedly different from each other. The first eight chapters are mainly *vision*-prophecies; the remaining six chapters are wholly *direct* prophecies. The first eight chapters were written during the rebuilding of the temple; the remaining six chapters were written considerably *after* the temple was rebuilt. The first eight chapters have a *particular and immediate* reference to the Jewish "Remnant" now back in the land; the remaining six chapters have a *general and far-reaching* reference to Israel as a whole, to the ultimate future, and to the Gentile nations. The contents of the first eight chapters are carefully dated (i. 1; i. 7; vii. 1); the contents of the remaining six chapters are *nowhere* dated.

The Two Parts.

In the first part (i.-viii.) we have *seven visions* (i.-vi.) with a follow-up message of application to "all the people of the land" (vii. 5; viii. 9, 11, 12). There are those who make the number of the visions eight, by making the symbol of the "ephah" in chapter v. a separate vision in itself; but a careful reading of that chapter, we think, will show that it is to be understood as essentially one

vision in three dissolving views—the scroll, the ephah, the women. Verse 6 shows the connection of the ephah with what goes before. Certainly there are not *ten* visions in these chapters, as the Scofield Bible makes out by artificially splitting the vision of the four horns and carpenters into two (i. 18–21), and the vision of Joshua likewise (iii.), as well as that of the scroll and the ephah (v.). Check these seven visions off carefully, and see how aptly Zechariah's *spoken* message in chapters vii. and viii. follows them up.

The *second* part of the book (ix.–xiv.) consists of one continuous, unfolding prophecy which looks beyond the prophet's own time to the conquests of Alexander the Great, and the sway of the Greek empire, and the heroic struggles of the Maccabees, and the coming of Israel's Shepherd-King, the Messiah. It trumpets the King's first advent, then, in veiled, mystic phraseology, tells of His rejection, and then sweeps on to His second advent, over-leaping the present age and depicting the final travail and triumph of Zion, when the bells on the horses and the pots in the kitchens shall be "holiness unto the Lord." It is not the easiest of passages for the average reader of our Authorised Version to get hold of, but this is due in part to translation difficulties. When once we appreciate its three main movements, and clear up translation obscurities here and there, we quickly grasp that it is one of the most amazing prophecies ever written. It runs in three movements. First, in chapters ix. and x., we have the coming Shepherd-King, and Zion's consequent blessing. Second, in chapter xi., we have the offending of the Shepherd-King, and its tragic results. Third, in chapters xii. to xiv., we have Zion's final travail and triumph, and Jehovah's ultimate victory.

What is the *key-word* to this prophecy of Zechariah? In our study of Haggai we saw that the key-word there was, "From this day will I bless you" (ii. 19). Jehovah had turned to Jerusalem again in blessing, after the seventy years of the "desolations." Following this up, the key-word here in Zechariah is, "I am (become) jealous for Zion (again); I am returned unto Jerusalem with mercies" (i. 14–16; viii. 1–3, R.V.). This thought, that Jehovah has now become jealous again for Jerusalem, runs right through the book, as we shall see presently, when we glance through the chapters in turn. But let us, at this point, set down our findings in flat analysis:—

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

"I AM JEALOUS FOR ZION"

EARLY PROPHECIES: TEMPLE BEING REBUILT

(i.-viii.).

A sevenfold vision: the four horses (i. 8-17), the four horns and smiths (verses 18-21), the measuring line (ii.), the reclothing of Joshua (iii.), the golden candlestand (iv.), the roll, ephah, and women (v.), the four chariots (vi.).

A fourfold message: vii. 1-7, 8-14; viii. 1-17, 18-23.

LATER PROPHECIES: AFTER TEMPLE REBUILT

(ix.-xiv.).

The coming Shepherd-King, and Zion's consequent blessing

(ix.-x.).

The offending of the Shepherd-King, and its tragic results

(xi.).

The final travail and triumph of Zion: Jehovah's victory

(xii.-xiv.).

The Seven Symbolic Visions

The seven visions described in the first part of the book are really seven in one, for they all came, so it would seem, in the one night, that of "the four and twentieth day of the eleventh month (Sebat), in the second year of Darius" (i. 7). This was exactly five months after the rebuilding of the temple was resumed (Hag. i. 15). What were these symbolic vision-scenes meant to convey to Zechariah and the Jews? I think we need not be left guessing for long as to their central significance. Let us run through them and try to pick out the essential point in each.

Take the first of them, that of *the four horses and their riders* (i. 8-17). Zechariah sees an angel patrol drawn up among the myrtles in the vale. Our Authorised Version gives the impression that behind the first rider, the man on the red horse, there were a goodly number of horses; but the Revised Version rightly corrects this, showing that there were but four in all. These heavenly

"scouts" (verse 10) report to the Angel of Jehovah the result of their survey of world conditions; the nations are "at ease" (compare verses 11 and 15). Zechariah is intended to grasp that although the surrounding nations are at careless ease while Jehovah's "remnant" suffer hardships, and although there may seem little sign that judgment is about to fall on these wicked nations, according to Jehovah's word through Haggai (Hag. ii. 22), yet in the invisible realm, God is watching, and the heavenly powers are already preparing for the stroke of retribution. That such is the meaning is put beyond question by what now follows in the vision. The Angel of Jehovah asks, "O Jehovah of hosts, how long wilt Thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which Thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?" The answer is, "Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. And I am very sore displeased with the nations that are at ease, for I was but for a little (while) displeased (with Jerusalem and Judah) and they (the nations) helped forward the affliction (lit. 'they helped for evil'). Therefore, thus saith Jehovah: *I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: My house shall be built in it, saith Jehovah of hosts, and a line (a measuring-line for its rebuilding) shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem.*" Clearly, then, the essential point in this first vision-picture is that Jehovah has now become jealous again for Jerusalem, and is about to punish the nations for their abuse of His covenant people.

The second and third visions re-express this very same fact under different symbols. In the *second* vision (i. 18-21) Zechariah sees "four horns" and then "four carpenters" which come to "fray" them. The four horns are the nations which have "scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem," and the four carpenters are Jehovah's agencies of judgment against these nations. In the *third* vision (ii. 1-13) Zechariah sees "a young man" with a "measuring line" going to "measure Jerusalem." But a heavenly messenger runs to this young man, saying, "Jerusalem shall be inhabited as *towns without walls*, for the multitude of men and cattle therein" (that is, it would exceed all the wall measurements which this young man was intending taking, so great would be its prosperity). Jehovah Himself should be Jerusalem's wall, as the fifth verse continues—"For *I*, saith Jehovah, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in

the midst of her." Here again, then, in the second and third visions, we have the judgment of the nations, and the return of Jehovah's favour toward Jerusalem (see especially verses 6-13). Once again Jehovah has become "jealous for Zion."

Next, in the *fourth* vision-scene (iii. 1-10), Zechariah is shown "Joshua the high priest (of the returned remnant) standing before the Angel of Jehovah, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him." There is no need to go into the minor details: the main purport of this symbolic reclothing of Joshua is too clear to miss. During the period of the "desolations" Jerusalem has been rebuked and chastised, and her priests and people have suffered Jehovah's indignation. But now there is a change. It is shown in this reclothing of Joshua, who is here the representative of the covenant people. Instead of rebuke against Joshua, it is now Satan who is rebuked, and Joshua, as representative of the returned Remnant, is "a brand plucked out of the fire." Joshua's filthy garments are removed (verse 4), the symbolic meaning of which we are plainly told is *the removing of iniquity* from him (as representing his people). Joshua is then clothed with "rich apparel"; and a "diadem" is set on his head (see verse 5, R.V.); and a new commission and promise for the future are given him. If this is not a symbolic expression of the same fact which has been expressed through the earlier visions, then it means nothing. Quite clearly the meaning again here is Jehovah's return of favour to His people and city. Once again Jehovah has become "jealous for Zion."

The *fifth* vision, that of the golden candlestick and two olive trees (iv. 1-14), is a special encouragement to Zerubbabel, the *civil* leader of the Remnant (verses 6-10), as the preceding vision was to Joshua, the *religious* leader. The mountain should become a plain before him, and he should certainly complete the rebuilding of the temple. Verse 10 is the crux (see R.V., as A.V. obscures the sense). It should read: "Who hath despised the day of small things (the poor-looking beginnings of the rebuilding)? For these seven eyes of Jehovah (the seven lamps of the candlestick) which run through all the earth *shall behold with joy the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel.*" Once again, therefore, the meaning is that of Jehovah's new pleasure and favour toward Zion. See also verse 12, which should read: "What be these two olive branches which through the two golden spouts (or tubes) pour out from

themselves the golden oil?" (the oil dropped of itself from the fruit-bearing branches into two "spouts" or channels which conveyed it to the central reservoir). The answer is, "These are the two sons of oil which stand by the Lord of the whole earth" —Joshua and Zerubbabel (though there may be latent further meanings), as representing the covenant people, and through whom the Spirit of Jehovah was now flowing again to bless. Once again Jehovah has become "jealous for Zion."

In the *sixth* vision (v. I-II) Zechariah sees a huge scroll, twenty cubits long and ten cubits wide (thirty feet by fifteen), passing through the air, and is told that this is "the curse" which "goeth forth" against wickedness in the land. When God sets up His House in the land (as in the preceding vision) His word goes forth (as in this new vision) to judge and sentence all that is not in harmony with that House. There cannot be a restoration of Jehovah's blessing without the expulsion of that which is evil. That large, floating scroll, open for all to read, explained why, up to that juncture, there had been such adversity among the Remnant: it was Jehovah's curse upon the evil which was still permitted. But now, Zechariah is shown what is to be done with the evil. He sees an "ephah" (the largest of the dry measures in use among the Jews, equal to six or seven gallons), in some large container, and is told that this represents the wicked of the land. Verse 7 should be read in the Revised Version. A leaden disc is lifted from the mouth of the ephah, and there, inside, is a woman. The interpreting angel says to Zechariah, "This is wickedness." Then he casts the woman down into the ephah, and the leaden weight on the mouth of it. Suddenly, now, two other women, each with the wings of a stork (an unclean bird) appear, with the wind in their wings, and bear away the evil ephah to Babylon. Whatever latent meanings may lie in the peculiar details of this sixth vision, its salient point is plain enough. Let the false-swearing and thieving which were execrated on the flying scroll (verse 3) go where they properly belong, even to Babylon, the seat of anti-Godism right from the days of Nimrod (Gen. x. 10). If the "ephah" was the old-time Jewish symbol for *trade*, then the woman in the ephah would represent Babylonian corruption which was leavening commerce among the returned Remnant. The proper home for such corruption is not Jerusalem, the city of Jehovah, but Satan's rival city, Babylon.

The very fact of Jehovah's new jealousy on behalf of Zion means a renewed intolerance of that which is unholy.

Finally, in the *seventh* vision (vi. 1-8), and the symbolic *crowning of Joshua*, which follows it (verses 9-15), we see again Jehovah's coming judgment on the Gentile nations, and His return of favour toward Jerusalem. There can be little doubt that the four war-chariots of this vision represent swift-coming Divine judgment. The four angel drivers are "the four spirits of the heavens which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth" (verse 5)—thus corresponding with the "four angels" of Revelation vii., as Jehovah's agents of *judgment*. Special judgment is meted to "the north country" from where the great Gentile invaders had come (verses 6, 8). But in marked contrast with this, there comes to Zechariah—apparently at dawn—the instruction to enact a remarkable *coronation ceremony* (verses 9-15). He was to receive silver and gold from certain Jewish visitors who were present from Babylon, and to make a composite diadem wherewith to crown Joshua, the new high priest at Jerusalem. Then he was to say: "Behold the man whose name is the BRANCH, and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of Jehovah. . . ." There is a type-reference to Christ, of course, here. But the *immediate* meaning of it, none the less, and once again, is that Jehovah, besides sending forth his chariot-judgments on the surrounding Gentile powers, has "returned with mercies" and gracious promises to the remnant of His people.

These, then, are Zechariah's seven visions; and we think it will now be clear that the key thought or unifying idea running through them is that which is uttered in connection with the first of them—"I am jealous (*again*) for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy; and I am very sore displeased with the nations that are at ease; for I was but a little while displeased, and they helped for evil. Therefore, thus saith Jehovah: *I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies*" (i. 14-16). If final corroboration is required for this we need only read on through the remaining two chapters of this first part of the book (vii. and viii.). See chapter viii. 1-3 and 9-15 (R.V.).

Of course, we must not pass from these chapters without recognising that here and there they look beyond the immediate and local, to an ultimate fulfilment at the second coming of Christ. See ii. 10-13; iii. 8-10; vi. 12-14. The *reason* why the

full realisation of such passages is even yet future is that when the Messiah-King came and offered Himself to His people, they rejected and crucified Him, thus suspending the promised age of blessing. We shall touch on this again, however, in our next lesson, when we examine Zechariah's great prophecy in chapters ix. to xiv.

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH (2)

Lesson Number 102

NOTE.—For this study read again chapters ix. to xiv. It is really important to master them. Read them carefully in the Revised Version or some modern translation; and read them through at least twice at one sitting.

“In the volume of the Book, it is written of Me” (Ps. xl. 8). The Holy Scriptures and the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ are so inseparably bound together, that whatever impairs the integrity and authority of the one correspondingly affects the other. The written Word is the Living Word enfolded: the Living Word is the Written Word unfolded. Christ is the Cornerstone of all faith, but that Cornerstone is laid in Scripture as a bed-rock, and to disturb the Scripture authority unsettles the foundation of the believer’s faith and of the church itself.

Arthur T. Pierson.

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH (2)

WE ARE now at chapters ix. to xiv. As we have said, they constitute one of the most remarkable prophecies ever penned. The whole passage, however, may seem rather complicated at first, but if we pick out its three main movements, and then clear up obscurities of translation here and there in our English version, it opens up grandly to us. Its meanings are lit up by other Old Testament predictions which we have now studied, and even more so by what transpired during the first advent of the Lord Jesus, Israel's Messiah. It is really important to master the meaning of this great Messianic prophecy; and, therefore, we here submit a considerable part of it in a translation and presentation which will help to simplify it, with brief explanations in brackets where we think needful, and comments between some of the paragraphs.

PART I

THE COMING SHEPHERD-KING, AND ZION'S CONSEQUENT BLESSING (ix.-x.)

The burden of a word of Jehovah is against the land of Hadrach, and Damascus is its goal (for Jehovah hath an eye on mankind and on, all the tribes of Israel); also (it is) against Hamath which bordereth thereon [*note: these were cities of Syria*]; also (against) Tyre and Sidon, though very wise (as they think), and Tyre doth build a bulwark to herself, and heapeth up silver as dust, and gold as the dirt of the streets: behold, the Lord will dispossess her, and strike her power in the sea, and she shall be consumed with fire [*note: these were cities of Phoenicia*]. Ashkelon shall see it, and fear; Gaza also, and shall be sore pained, Ekron also, for her confidence shall shrivel up: and the king shall perish from Gaza; and Ashkelon shall lie deserted; and a bastard people shall dwell in Ashdod; and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines [*note: these were cities of Philistia*]. And I will take away his (the Philistine's) blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth [*a reference to Philistine idolatrous sacrifices*]; and even he shall be a remnant for our God, and become like a clan in Judah, and Ekron as the Jebusite [*the Jebusites, it will be remembered, were allowed to dwell with the children of Judah in Jerusalem as equals, and not as a conquered race: see Joshua xv. 63*]. And I will encamp about

Mine house as a garrison (saith Jehovah), that none pass through or return: and no oppressor shall pass through against them ever again: for now do I watch it with Mine eyes.

So much for verses 1 to 8. But now, at verse 9, in contrast with this prelude of predicted judgments on the Gentile nations, Zechariah breaks out in rhapsody over the coming King and the coming blessing of Zion.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion;
 Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem:
 Behold thy King cometh unto thee,
 Vindicated and victorious;
 Lowly, and riding upon an ass,
 Even upon a colt the foal of an ass.

And I will cut off the chariot from (against) Ephraim, and the horse from (against) Jerusalem, and the battlebow shall be cut off: and He (the coming King) shall speak peace to the nations; and His rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.

As for thee (Zion) also, because of the blood of the covenant with thee [*Jehovah's covenant with the nation*] I have set free thy prisoners from the pit (Babylon) wherein is no water [*here Zechariah returns for a moment to the more immediate circumstances*]. Return to the stronghold (that is, to Zion) ye prisoners of (such a) hope [*this is an appeal to the Jews who had chosen to stay on in Babylon after the term of the exile was over, instead of returning to Judæa with the Remnant*]; even today do I proclaim that I will render double unto thee [*that is, a double recompence of blessing to Zion for all her chastisements*]. For I have drawn Judah for My bow, and filled it with Ephraim; and I will stir up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and will make thee as the sword of a mighty one [*note: this striking reference to Greece looks beyond the prophet's own time, to the coming conquests of Alexander the Great, and the sway of the Greek empire, and to the later heroic victories of the Maccabees: though the verses which now follow look on, also, to a mightier victory which is yet to be, and which was suspended through Jewish unbelief when Christ came and offered Himself as their promised Messiah-King, nineteen hundred years ago*].

Then shall Jehovah appear over them,
 And his shaft shall go forth like lightning;
 And the Lord Jehovah shall blow the trumpet,
 And shall go with whirlwinds of the south.

Jehovah of hosts shall cover them,
 And they shall devour and trample (their enemies like) spent sling-stones;

Yea, they shall drink and make noise as by wine;
And shall be filled as a bowl, like the corners of the altar.

And Jehovah their God shall save them in that day as the flock of His people;

For they shall be as the stones of a crown glittering on His land.

For how great their goodness and their beauty!

Corn shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the maidens.

It will have been noticed, perhaps, that in the foregoing passage (chapter ix.) the central idea is that which we found in the first part of the book, namely, that Jehovah is now about to punish the nations, and that now again He has become "jealous for Zion." We shall find this yet again in chapter x. which now follows. But before we read the tenth chapter we ought to realise that the period of the Maccabees, which we have found predicted in chapter ix., and which led up to the first coming of Zion's King (ix. 9), *could* have led right on to the final struggle and victory of Zion which is now depicted in this tenth chapter, had it not been for the unbelief and sin of the Jews. As a result of what happened when Zion's King first came and offered Himself, nineteen hundred years ago, the final struggle and victory now depicted in chapter x. are postponed, and the present age intervenes (as it does between verses 9 and 10 in chapter ix). Zechariah, like the other Old Testament prophets, is not enlightened as to the present long interval of the "Church" age (Eph. iii.). It may be asked: Why did not God reveal this in advance since He foreknew that it would come to pass? The answer is two-fold. First, if God had plainly revealed this beforehand, then the Lord Jesus could never have come and made a real, *bona fide* offer of Himself as Messiah; and God could never have tested the Jews in relation to Him. Second, God *has* been pleased to foreshow the rejection and crucifixion of Christ again and again in Old Testament prophecy, so that we ourselves, in this present age, both Jew and Gentile, may know that He had anticipated and graciously overruled the unbelief and sin of the Jews when Christ first came to them. And now (in part) we give chapter x., which simply carries on from the end of chapter ix.

Ask ye of Jehovah rain in the time of the latter rain. Jehovah shall make lightnings, and shall give them rain in showers, to every man herbage in the field. For the teraphim have spoken emptiness,

and the diviners have seen falsehood, and the dreamers speak vanity, they comfort in vain: therefore they (the covenant people) have wandered like a flock; they are afflicted because there is no (true) shepherd. My wrath burns against the (false) shepherds [*that is, the surrounding kings, as we shall see again later: see also Isaiah xliv., where king Cyrus is called a shepherd*], and I will punish the he-goats; for Jehovah of hosts hath visited His flock, the house of Judah [*note that Judah is here called Jehovah's "flock": it will guide us later*], and shall make them as His goodly horse in battle. From him shall come forth the corner-stone, from him the stay, from him the battle-bow; from him shall go every exactor together . . . [*now at verse 9*] And though I sow them among the peoples they shall remember Me in far countries, and bring up their children, and return. I will bring them home from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria, and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon, and place shall not be found for them. And He (Jehovah) shall pass through the sea of affliction and smite the sea of waves, and all the depths of the Nile shall dry up, and the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the sceptre of Egypt swept away. And I will make them mighty in Jehovah; and in His name shall they walk up and down, saith Jehovah.

PART II

THE OFFENDING OF THE SHEPHERD-KING, AND ITS TRAGIC RESULTS (xi.)

This part begins, like the former, with an outburst of calamities on the surrounding powers—"Lebanon" and "Bashan" and "the pride of Jordan" denoting areas north and north-east and east, just beyond the bounds of the area which was now occupied by the Jews. Then Zechariah tells us how Jehovah instructed him to "feed the *flock of slaughter*" (Judah, as seen above), and how he did so (emblematically), and what eventuated.

Open thy doors, O Lebanon,
That the fire may devour thy cedars!
Howl, O fir tree, for the cedar is fallen,
For the goodly ones are destroyed!
Howl, ye oaks of Bashan,
For the mighty forest is come down!
Hark to the howling of the shepherds,
For their glory is destroyed!
Hark to the roaring of the young lions,
For the pride of Jordan is blasted!

Thus said Jehovah, my God: Shepherd the flock of slaughter (the covenant people) whose buyers slaughter them without any sense of guilt, and whose sellers say, Blessed be Jehovah, I am become rich, and whose shepherds have no pity on them: for neither will I have pity any more on the inhabitants of the earth, saith Jehovah. For behold, I am going to hand over mankind, each into the hand of his neighbour and into the hand of his king: and they shall smite the earth, but I will not give deliverance from their hand.

So I shepherded the flock of slaughter—even you, most afflicted flock. And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Grace, and the other I called Union; and so I shepherded the flock. And I cut off the three (false) shepherds in one month. But my soul was grieved with *them* (Jehovah's own flock), and they on their part abhorred *me*. Then I said: I will not shepherd you: that which dieth, let it die; and that which perisheth, let it perish; and those which survive, let them consume each other's flesh. And I took my staff, Grace, and cut it asunder, to make void my covenant which I had made with all the peoples [*i.e. the purpose or covenant of judgment above-mentioned, whereby Jehovah's flock were to be succoured, and their afflictors requited*]. So it was broken in that day; and they of the afflicted flock who watched me knew that it was Jehovah's word. And I said to them: If it be good in your sight, give me my hire; and if not, forbear. So they weighed out for my hire thirty pieces of silver [*the price merely of a foreign slave: Exodus xxi. 32*]. And Jehovah said to me: Throw it to the potter [*so contemptible is the price that it is flung to the meanest of craftsmen*]. O the magnificence of the price that I was appraised at of them! [*said ironically*]. So I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter, in the house of Jehovah. Then I cut asunder my second staff, Union, so as to break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

Thus the true Shepherd is despised and rejected, with tragic consequences. The remaining few verses of this chapter, which we need not re-translate here, tell of a *faithless* shepherd who should exploit the flock. The big fact to grasp in the foregoing passage is that the transaction of the thirty pieces of silver, in the light of Matthew xxvii. 9, 10, clearly has reference to *Christ*. As a result of His humiliation the Jews have been under false shepherds ever since; and the falsest of all shepherds is yet to exploit them as the present age draws to its close. No wonder our Lord wept over Jerusalem, on the very day when He fulfilled Zechariah ix. 9, "If thou hadst known in this day, even thou, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes" (Luke xix. 42).

PART III

THE FINAL TRAVAIL AND TRIUMPH OF ZION:
JEHOVAH'S VICTORY (xii.-xiv.)

In this third part of Zechariah's great Messianic prophecy, we need only to translate snatches here and there by way of guidance. The language makes it clear that this passage passes over the present "Church" interval, right on to that culminating epoch at the end of the present age, when, after all the tragic delay caused through the rejection of the true Shepherd-King, Jehovah shall again take up and complete His grand purposes with and for and through Israel.

The burden of a word of Jehovah on *Israel* [*note, then, that this passage specially concerns Jehovah's own people*]. Thus saith Jehovah, who stretched out the heavens, and founded the earth, and formed the spirit of man within him; Behold I will make Jerusalem a cup of reeling to all the peoples round about; and even over Judah, too, shall it (the cup of reeling) be, in the siege against Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in that day that I will make Jerusalem a burdensome stone to all the peoples; all who burden themselves with it shall be sore wounded; and all the nations of the earth shall be gathered together against it [*such language, of course, transcends any past fulfilment, and looks on to the end-time, to the gigantic world-drama yet to be, of which Jerusalem will be the storm-centre, and which will precipitate the second advent and world-empire of Christ: pass now to verse 10*].

And I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplication; and they shall look unto ME whom they have pierced [*we know from John xix. 37 that this refers to Christ*], and they shall lament for HIM as one lamenteth for an only son, and grieve bitterly for Him as with grief for a firstborn [*note the "ME" and the "HIM."* However much this may have perplexed the first readers of this prophecy, we ourselves now know how truly both pronouns apply. Jehovah Himself was "pierced" when Jesus Christ was crucified: see Rev. i. 7]. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem. . . . [*pass now to xiii. 1*].

In that day a fountain shall be opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness. And it shall be in that day, saith Jehovah of Hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no more be remembered. And also I will expel the (false) prophets and the unclean spirit from the land. And it shall be that if any man prophesy (falsely) again, his father and mother who begat him shall say to him: Thou shalt not

live, for thou speakest falsehood in the name of Jehovah: and his father and mother which begat him shall thrust him through when he (thus) prophesieth [*so great the zeal for Jehovah's honour!*]. And it shall be in that day that the (false) prophets shall be ashamed, each of his vision when he prophesieth; nor shall they wear a hairy garment to deceive; but he shall say: I am no prophet, I am a tiller of the ground, for the ground is my occupation from my youth. Even so [*super-tragedy that the true Prophet-Priest-King Himself should be treated actually in the same way as these false prophets!*], it shall be said to HIM [*the "Him" looking back to xii. 10—"they shall mourn for HIM"*]: What are these wounds in *Thine* hands? And He shall reply: Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends. (Yes!) Awake, O sword, even against My Shepherd, and the Man that is My Fellow, saith Jehovah of Hosts. Smite the Shepherd, and the flock shall be scattered [*our Lord Jesus refers this prophecy to Himself at His first coming: see Matthew xxvi. 31. The time when it will be asked: What are these wounds in Thine hands? is His second coming: see Revelation i. 7*]; but I will turn mine hand toward the little ones (a remnant), and it shall be, saith Jehovah, that although two parts throughout the land shall be cut off, and die, a third shall be left therein; and I will bring the third part (the remnant) through the fire, and refine them as silver is refined, and try them as gold is tried. They shall call upon My name, and I will hear them: I will say: This is my people; and they shall say: Jehovah, my God! [*that remnant still exists, and that promise will yet be fulfilled*].

Chapter xiv. now continues. The following verses are enough to show that it looks right on to the end of the present age.

Behold a day of Jehovah cometh when thy spoil (O Zion) shall be divided in thy midst. For I will gather all nations to besiege Jerusalem. . . . (now verse 3). Then shall Jehovah go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle. And His feet shall stand in that day on the Mount of Olives which is over against Jerusalem on the east: and the Mount of Olives shall split into halves, from east to west, by a huge ravine; and half the mountain shall slide to the north, and half to the south. . . . And Jehovah, my God, shall come, and all the holy ones with Thee (the change into the second person here denotes the prophet's own joyous anticipation) . . . (now verse 9) And Jehovah shall be King over all the earth in that day. . . . (now verse 11). And there shall be no more curse; but Jerusalem shall dwell safely. . . . (now verse 20). In that day there shall be "Holy to Jehovah" even on the bells of the horses, and the very pots in the house of Jehovah shall be as the (sacred) bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holy to Jehovah of Hosts; and all who sacrifice shall come and take of them and cook therein. And in that day there shall be no more any trafficker in the house of Jehovah.

Such, then, is the Book of Zechariah. It is like some unique masterpiece of music, with simpler movements in the first part, followed by a final, riotous rhapsody, with crashing chords and lightning runs and sudden alternations between major and minor, and a triumphant finale. Yet both in the *earlier* movements (i.-viii.) and in the *later* (ix.-xiv.) we hear the same recurrent key-note all the way through—Jehovah is “jealous for Zion.” The *Pulpit Commentary* remarks on chapter ix. 13, “*Nothing but inspiration* could have enabled Zechariah and Daniel to foresee the rise of the Macedonian dynasty, and the struggle between the Jews and the Syro-Grecian power in Maccabean times, which is here announced.” What then shall we say about those passages in Zechariah which look right on to the Messiah’s first and second comings—to His public entry into Jerusalem in lowly dignity, riding on an ass; to His being “wounded” in the house of His own kinsmen; to the “smiting of the Shepherd and the scattering of the flock;” to the preservation of the “remnant” even as at this very day; to the “mourning” for Him, which is yet to be, when the Jews “look on Him whom they pierced”; to the last super-conflict and the final kingdom-glories? Yes, what shall we say to all this? Is it not a marvel of inspiration? Oh for that final triumph which Zechariah has predicted! “*Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*”

THE PROPHET MALACHI

Lesson Number 103

NOTE.—For this study read Malachi's short prophecy through at least twice at one sitting, and then in a modern translation of it.

In the New Testament, every book of the Old Testament is quoted from, except Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Canticles, and Lamentations. Or to take that mathematically, in another way: In the New Testament there are 260 chapters; 209 have references to the Old Testament, leaving only fifty-one chapters with no reference. Thus the Old and the New Testament are interwoven with the weave of constant reference, allusion, and quotation; and no single reference in the New contradicts the Old, or undermines its authority. They all accept its full authority and its Divine nature.

G. Campbell Morgan, D.D.

THE BOOK OF MALACHI

MALACHI calling!—the last call of the Old Testament before the voice of prophecy dies into a silence of four hundred years. One great phase of Divine revelation is now to close. The last spokesman utters his soul, and retires behind the misty curtains of the past. A peculiar solemnity clings about him. What does this last speaker say? What is the final message? What is the parting word?

We need spend no time here replying to those moderns who would tell us that Malachi was not a real person. They cannot produce a shred of positive evidence; and they have been ably answered elsewhere. Some of them give us the impression that they love to differ from the older views just for the sake of differing. They strain at gnats and swallow camels. Their arguments here, as in not a few other connections, are as weighty as feathers. For short but good synopses of the question we refer to the introductory articles on Malachi in Ellicott's *Commentary* and the *Pulpit Commentary*, which, although not the latest-written, remain thoroughly sound today.

Our first step toward appreciating the message of Malachi is to see him amid his own times. He does not date his prophecy, but there are pointers to the approximate time of it. All agree that it is post-exilic, and later than the other two post-exilic prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. The likelihood is that it was written *a little later than the days of Nehemiah*. It is well to fix in mind the main dates and events relating to the Jewish Remnant, from the time of the return, down to the ministry of Malachi. They are as follows:

- B.C. 536. At the decree of Cyrus, the 50,000 return to Judæa, under Zerubbabel (Ezra i. and ii.).
- 534. The foundations of the new temple are laid (Ezra iii.) —but the rebuilding is held back.
- 520. Ministry of prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Temple rebuilding resumed (Ezra v.; Hag. i. 15).

- 516. Restoration Temple completed (Ezra vi. 15), just twenty years after return of the 50,000.
- 457. Return of the further 1,800 (plus wives, daughters and servants) under Ezra (Ezra vii.).
- 445. Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem by royal edict, as Governor, to rebuild *the city* (Neh. ii.).
- 430. (approx.) Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem after absence on visit to Artaxerxes (Neh. xiii. 6, 7). Malachi prophesies sometime after this.

When did Malachi write?

Now the likelihood, we say, is that this little Book of Malachi belongs to the period following the days of Nehemiah. We think this because it does not easily fit any earlier juncture. To begin with, it does not fit the early days of *Ezra* in Judæa. The offerings and sacrifices and other observances of the temple service have become perverted and profaned when Malachi prophesies (i. 7, 8, 12; ii. 8), but despite the other evils which *Ezra* had to encounter, we nowhere find his having had to reform such abuses in connection with the new temple service. Moreover, in *Ezra*'s days all the necessities for the temple services were provided from the royal revenues (*Ezra* vi. 9, 10; vii. 17-20), so that Malachi's rebukes of the people for their niggardliness toward the temple (i. 13; iii. 8-10) would scarcely apply. Still more, Malachi's opening words about the desolate state of the land of Edom (i. 3-5) would have been of little comfort to the Jewish Remnant if at the same time their own Jerusalem was still "lying waste, and the gates thereof consumed with fire." No, the city has been rebuilt when Malachi prophesies; and this brings us on to the days of Nehemiah.

Did Malachi prophesy, then, in the days of *Nehemiah*? Well, he certainly did not prophesy during Nehemiah's *first twelve years* as Governor of Jerusalem, when such grand restorations were effected (Neh. vii.-xii.). Did he prophesy, then, during the brief *interval* that Nehemiah was away at the Persian court (Neh. xiii. 2)? Scarcely, for there is a settled attitude and behaviour, and a state of callousness and defiant hostility, indicated in the time of Malachi which were not the product merely of a sudden collapse all within a couple of years, but a growth

through a longer period (i. 6, 7, 10, 13; ii. 8, 9, 17; iii. 7). Certainly, Nehemiah found, on his return, that certain abuses had already reappeared (xiii.), but it is just as clear that they did not represent the whole nation, as was the case when Malachi prophesied (iii. 9). Again, if the extreme of corruption denounced by Malachi all developed in the short absence of Nehemiah, then it says very little for Malachi's effectiveness if he prophesied *then*!

Did Malachi prophesy, then, during Nehemiah's *second* term at Jerusalem? Hardly, for it is difficult to think that such a condition of things as Malachi exposes would develop while Nehemiah was still in control, and while Ezra possibly still lived. Also, there is a reference to "the Governor" in Malachi i. 8 which surely seems inexplicable if Nehemiah was Governor at the time. Would Malachi have referred thus namelessly to such an one as Nehemiah? It is possible, of course, but is it likely? Moreover, this verse speaks of "offerings" for the Governor; but Nehemiah expressly tells us that *he* made it his practice to maintain himself *apart from such Governors' dues* (Neh. v. 14, 15); and it is not likely that he changed later!

We conclude, therefore, that Malachi prophesied *after* the days of Nehemiah—and long enough after for the settled, corrupt condition of things to have developed which he deplors and denounces. The Book of Ezra *does* refer to the two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, who prophesied during the period covered by that book: but the Book of Nehemiah nowhere suggests the presence of Malachi; and in this, again, we see a further, slight corroboration of our conclusion that Malachi came on the scene somewhat later. Nehemiah, it will be realised, may have lived for a considerable time beyond the last event recorded in the book which bears his name; and so long as he lived he would exert a strong influence for moral and religious purity: but the conditions described by Malachi suggest a deterioration which had come about *after that influence was withdrawn*. Not only had the earlier zeal of people and priests cooled down; it had given place to a complex of slovenly formalism (iii. 14) and even deceitful evasion (i. 14). Our last glimpse of Nehemiah in Jerusalem is at about 430 B.C., but he probably continued there for some years after that; so we put the ministry of Malachi somewhere between 420 and 397 B.C.

Daniel's First "Seven Weeks"—and Malachi

This brings us to a most noteworthy consideration. It has to do with Daniel's prophecy of the "seventy weeks" (Dan. ix). Daniel was told that from the date of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem, to the cutting off of the Messiah, was to be "seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks." The date of the decree, most definitely, was 445 B.C. (see our earlier study on Daniel). Why should the sixty-nine weeks from then to the cutting off of the Messiah be divided into "seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks"? Clearly the Scripture has some important boundary-point in view at the end of that first "seven weeks," or forty-nine years; and it is hard to resist the conclusion that this boundary-point was *the ceasing of prophecy with Malachi*. This would make Malachi's ministry *end* at 397 B.C., a date which, in fact, well suits the circumstances. Thus Malachi bounds the forty-nine years, or "seven weeks" of the predicted "troublesome times" (Dan. ix. 25). In a special way God now waits to be gracious. In the light of this, how significant is that great, final promise of Jehovah through Malachi—"BRING YE ALL THE TITHES INTO THE STOREHOUSE, THAT THERE MAY BE MEAT IN MINE HOUSE; AND PROVE ME NOW HEREWITH, SAITH JEHOVAH OF HOSTS, IF I WILL NOT OPEN YOU THE WINDOWS OF HEAVEN, AND POUR YOU OUT A BLESSING, THAT THERE SHALL NOT BE ROOM ENOUGH TO RECEIVE IT" (iii. 10)!

The Meaning and Message of the Book

And now, what is the special purpose, the central message, the key thought, of the book? We need not make any close analysis to find this. If we mentally place ourselves in the ring of Malachi's first audience, and read through the book at speaking pace, letting it speak to us as though it were the living voice of the prophet himself ringing in our ears, we simply cannot miss seeing that from beginning to end this little book is AN APPEAL—a powerful, passionate, pleading appeal—an appeal to *repent* of sin and to *return* to God—an appeal accompanied by rich *promise* if the people respond, and by stern *warning* if they refuse. Read the little book through again, and get into the eager, urgent flow of the prophet's thoughts and words, and see if this is not so—"If I be a Father, where is mine honour? and if I be a Master,

where is my fear?" (i. 6); "I pray you, beseech God that He will be gracious unto us" (i. 9); "Have we not all one Father? hath not one God created us? Why then do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?" (ii. 10); "Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from Mine ordinances, and have not kept them. RETURN UNTO ME, AND I WILL RETURN UNTO YOU, SAITH JEHOVAH OF HOSTS" (iii. 7); "BRING YE ALL THE TITHES INTO THE STOREHOUSE . . . AND PROVE ME NOW HEREWITH, SAITH JEHOVAH OF HOSTS" (iii. 10); "REMEMBER (GIVE HEED AGAIN TO) THE LAW OF MOSES . . . WHICH I COMMANDED" (iv. 4).

Now we need not try to analyse this little book into five or six or seven parts which burden the mind to remember. The simple fact to note is that this APPEAL of Malachi quite naturally falls into *TWO PARTS*. In chapters i. and ii. the appeal is made in view of the *present sin of the nation*. In chapters iii. and iv. it is in view of the *coming "Day of Jehovah."*

Glance again, now, through chapters i. and ii. After the few verses by way of introduction (verses 1-5) it is the *priests* who are first addressed (see i. 6; ii. 1, 7). It will be noticed that *Jehovah Himself* addresses these priests directly, and that all the way through, to chapter ii. 9, the verses are in the first person. Then, at chapter ii. 10, there is a change. It is the *prophet* now, who speaks *on behalf of Jehovah*. It is no longer the priests who are addressed, but *the people generally*. The prophet puts himself among them, and asks: "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us? . . ." And from this point all the verses are in the *third person*. So much, then, for chapters i. and ii.

Now glance through chapters iii. and iv. A new note is struck. The prophet views the present *in the light of the great "Day of Jehovah" which is to come*. It will be noted that beginning with the first verse of chapter iii. it is Jehovah Himself who speaks directly again, using the first person, "I," "Me," "My," right to the end of the book. First, in verses 1 to 6, we are told that *the coming One* who was the nation's hope of future blessing was coming to *judge* (not merely, as was being presumed, to bless the nation indiscriminately!); and arising from this there is *renewed appeal* to the people to "return" and to "bring all the tithes" and to "prove" Jehovah's present offer of blessing (verses 7-12).

Then, from verse 13 to the end of the book, there is a further addition about this coming "Day of Jehovah"—not only will it judge the guilty (as just said); it will *vindicate the godly minority* (iii. 13–iv. 3); and arising from this is the closing appeal of the book, to "give heed" again to "the Law of Moses" (iv. 4–6). This final section of the book which runs from chapter iii. 13 is not brought out clearly enough in our English version. There is a contrast between two classes—between the larger number who *resisted* Jehovah and "spake together" (verse 13), and the minority who "*feared*" Jehovah, and "spake often one to another" (verse 16). There are *only two tenses* in the Hebrew language, and the *context* must decide which tense they are given in our *English* translation. Verses 13–16 should read—

"Your words are stout against Me, saith Jehovah; yet ye say, What do we speak in our conversation together against Thee? Ye say, It is a vain thing to serve God. . . .

But those also who fear Jehovah speak one to another, and Jehovah doth attend and hear. And a book of remembrance is being written before Him, of them that fear Jehovah, and that esteem His name. And they shall be to Me a peculiar treasure, saith Jehovah of Hosts, in the day that I am preparing. . . ."

This Book of Malachi should be read in the Revised Version. Young's *Literal Translation*, also, is a great help here, as in many other places. A careful reading in either of these will bring out clearly the arrangement of the book as shown in this study.

"Behold, He shall come . . . but"

The key thought of Malachi is found in chapter iii. 1, 2—"Behold, He shall come, saith Jehovah of Hosts; but who may abide the day of His coming?" In our study of Haggai we saw that the Jewish Remnant had become indifferent to the rebuilding of the temple through a wrong attitude to prophecy. On the strength of Jeremiah's prediction that seventy years of "desolations" were determined on Jerusalem, the leaders and people were saying, "The time is not come, the time that Jehovah's House should be built" (Hag. i. 2). Thus they excused themselves into blameworthy indolence—and were rightly rebuked for

it. A hundred years later, in Malachi's time, there is *a wrong attitude to Divine PROMISE*. The earlier prophets had foretold of the coming One who should bring final deliverance and age-long blessing to the covenant nation; Ezekiel and Daniel had continued the strain; the post-Exile prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, had carried it still further; the time was now surely drawing nearer, and the promised One would come to exalt the nation in untold dignity and prosperity. All would then be well, so the leaders and priests and people told themselves, and the present did not very much matter. Thus they sank into a non-chalant formalism, and even into unblushing hypocrisy in their dealings both with God and with each other. Malachi now shows them that the Divine promise is a two-edged sword. Not only will the coming "Day" slay the enemies *outside* the nation, but also the wicked *inside* the nation. The "Messenger of the Covenant" in whose promised coming they were "delighting" (iii. 1) should surely come, as promised; *but* (let them mark it well, this very big "but")—who should "abide the day of His coming"? for He would come as a "refiner's fire" and would be a "swift witness" against all the evildoers (verse 5). Yes, there is a "but" in the promise. "Behold, He shall come . . . *but*." That is the centre-thought in Malachi. Let us now set out our findings in a simple, flat analysis.

THE BOOK OF MALACHI

"BEHOLD, HE SHALL COME . . . BUT"

APPEAL (A)—IN VIEW OF THE PRESENT SIN (i.-ii.).

JEHOVAH THE SPEAKER: the priests are appealed to
(i. 6-ii. 9).

MALACHI THE SPEAKER: the people are appealed to
(ii. 10-17).

APPEAL (B)—IN VIEW OF THE COMING "DAY" (iii.-iv.).

THE DAY WILL JUDGE THE GUILTY (iii. 1-6)
therefore appeal (verses 7-12).

THE DAY WILL BLESS THE GODLY (iii. 13-iv. 3)
therefore appeal (iv. 4-6).

Closing Observations

This last fragment of Old Testament Scripture is richly full of vital truths and living applications to our own days. In these closing paragraphs we can merely mention a few of them.

First, we note that the Old Testament leaves us with *a final promise of the coming of Christ*. Thus the very first promise and the very last, in the Old Testament, are concerning *HIM*. But what a wealth of development lies between Genesis iii. 15 and Malachi iv. 6! The united voice of the Old Testament Scriptures is, "Behold He comes!" We note, also, that the coming of Christ which is described in Malachi is that which even to ourselves is yet future. Our Lord's first coming as the suffering Servant is most certainly a fact of *history*: and His second coming as King and Judge is just as certainly a fact of *prophecy*. The present interval between the first coming and the second was not revealed to Malachi, nor to any other of the Old Testament prophets. This we have noted again and again. And yet, none the less the *two aspects* of His coming—as suffering Servant and as universal Sovereign—are unmistakably present to the eye of Old Testament prophecy. There is a real sense in which John the Baptist was Malachi's Elijah-forerunner (Mal. iv. 5 with Matt. xvii. 12, 13); yet it is equally clear that, as a result of our Lord's rejection there is to be a more dramatic, *final* fulfilment of Malachi's Elijah prediction (Matt. xvii. 11, "shall"; and Rev. xi.).

We must make a sharp distinction always between Divine foreknowledge and Divine fore-ordination. God foreknew the Jewish rejection of Christ; but He did not fore-*ordain* it. God never predestinates to *sin*! In His government of this world God does not allow His larger purposes for the human race to rest upon the uncertain behaviour of the human will; yet He does leave enough scope for the free action of the human will to make men conscious at all times that they are acting of themselves, and by their own intelligent choice. Thus He permitted even the crucifixion of Christ. But He foreknew it, and fore-provided against it, so that *the crucifixion of Israel's Messiah became the coronation of the world's Saviour*, and from the ugly debris of Jewish failure there emerged God's further purpose, that is, the *CHURCH*, and the proclaiming of a *WORLD-EMBRACING GOSPEL* of personal salvation throughout the

present age. God could not reveal all this, however, to the Old Testament prophets; for, had He done so, Christ could never have come and made a *bona fide* offer of Himself as Israel's Messiah. We have touched on this before; but it is so important to grasp it clearly that we think it wise to speak of it again.

Then again, with this little scroll of Malachi before us, we should ever guard against a *wrong attitude to Divine promise*. We have seen how this wrong attitude cursed Malachi's generation. It is also in evidence today. There are those whose attitude to the hope of Christ's return begets complacent indifference. "Thou wicked and slothful servant!"—will those awful words ever fall on some of *us* who have been believers in the Lord's second coming? Oh, may the dear prospect of His coming ever be an incentive to holiness, and an urge to the winning of other souls to Him!

Again, if we have read Malachi observantly, we cannot have missed seeing that the two besetting evils of his day were *formalism* and *scepticism*. In these we see the beginnings of the Pharisaism (formalism) and the Sadduceeism (scepticism) which later reached their harvest-whiteness in our Lord's days. How these two things curse us today! And how they cause men to argue back against God! Seven times the priests and people of Malachi's time are faced with the vital issues of real heart-religion; and seven times they answer back with that word, "wherein?" "Wherein hast Thou loved us?" (i. 2). "Wherein have we despised Thy name?" (i. 6). "Wherein have we polluted Thee?" (i. 7). "Wherein have we wearied Him?" (ii. 17). "Wherein shall we return?" (iii. 7). "Wherein have we robbed Thee?" (iii. 8). "Wherein have we spoken against Thee?" (iii. 13). The formalist does not like to have his formalism *disturbed*. The sceptic does not like to have his scepticism *disproved*. Both will evade the real issues of heart-religion by self-justifying counter-argument. Verily, "they have their day"! But "the day cometh that shall burn as an oven" (Mal. iv. 1); and, as D. L. Moody put it, "A cloak of false profession will make an awful blaze when God burns up the stubble!"

And finally, in Malachi we see how precious to God are the godly minority in times of declension. A "book of remembrance" is kept; and they, God's remnant, are to be Jehovah's "peculiar treasure" in the "day" which He is "preparing." Thus, as the

Old Testament closes, we see the godly remnant speaking softly to one another of a great hope—"He is coming!" Then, for four hundred years they disappear from sight, until they reappear from obscurity in New Testament times, in the aged Simeon and Anna, who are found in Jerusalem, "waiting for the Consolation of Israel" (Luke ii. 25). And so it is today. They who tear and love Jehovah-Jesus speak one to another amid the closing decades of the present age, comforting one another with the words, "He is coming!" And God's book of remembrance is being kept. Yes, He is surely coming—for "Unto you that fear My name," saith Jehovah, "shall the Sun of Righteousness arise, with healing in His wings!" And our prayer is, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Yes, comforting, thrilling prospect, He is coming, coming a *second* time. The inviolable guarantee of this is the historical fact of His *first* coming, as vicarious Saviour, which fulfilled scores and scores of greater and lesser Old Testament predictions, with Divine precision. That first batch of fulfilments, two thousand years ago, constitutes the mightiest conceivable guarantee that *all the other* predictions and promises concerning His reign on earth in world-wide empire will similarly be fulfilled. Yes, He is coming! *HE* is coming—the Church's Bridegroom, Israel's Messiah, and God-Man Emperor of all nations!

Jesus, my Lord, Thou art coming!

Thy Spirit assures me within.

Coming, dear Lord, Thou art coming,

To banish the empire of sin.

Jesus, Thy people are yearning;

The world cries unknowing for Thee.

Oh, for Thy promised returning,

Thy face and Thy glory to see!

"EVEN SO, COME, LORD JESUS!"

FOUR QUESTIONS EACH, ON HAGGAI,
ZECHARIAH, AND MALACHI

1. What picture does Haggai give of the moral condition of the returned "Remnant"?
2. What is the crucial turning-point which Haggai puts on record? What is the date of it?
3. What are the two seventy-year periods prophesied by Jeremiah which should not be confused?
4. What, as to their crux or gist, were the four messages of which the Book of Haggai consists?
5. When did Zechariah prophesy—which year, and in which Medo-Persian king's reign? How long had the "Remnant" then been returned?
6. The Book of Zechariah falls into two parts: which are they?
7. What, in simple statement, were the seven parts of Zechariah's sevenfold vision in the first six chapters? And what the meaning of the first?
8. What are the three main parts of the great Messianic prophecy in Zechariah, chapters ix. to xiv.? (Simply give the headings to the three main parts.)
9. What reasons could you give for saying that Malachi prophesied some little time after the days of Nehemiah?
10. Could you mention any possible connection between the date of Malachi and the first seven weeks of Daniel's famous prophecy of the Seventy Weeks?
11. Give a brief outline of the Book of Malachi, and say what is its key verse or idea.
12. How do both Haggai and Malachi warn us against a wrong attitude to prophecy?