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*THE SIX INTERMEDIATE MINOR PROPHETS.  
OBADIAH—ZEPHANIAH.*

EDINBURGH:  
T. & T. CLARK, 38 GEORGE STREET.

PRINTED BY MORRISON AND GIBB,

FOR

T. & T. CLARK, EDINBURGH,

LONDON, . . . . . HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND CO.

DUBLIN, . . . . . GEORGE HERBERT.

NEW YORK, . . . . . SCRIBNER AND WELFORD.

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SIX INTERMEDIATE  
MINOR PROPHETS

BY

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EDINBURGH:  
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## PREFACE.

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I HAVE had one English Bible for more than fifty-one years, and the state of its pages reminds me that I have used it considerably. The Minor Prophets were always a favourite study with me ; and when I was invited to join the Old Testament Revision Company in 1870, the hope immediately rose in my mind that we might give considerable help to the English reader of the Minor Prophets. The courtesy of the authorities of the Universities' Presses has enabled the publishers of this volume to use the Revised Version, and, by doing so, my labour has been much lightened. In my own commentary, however, I use the name *Jehovah*, though in the Revised Version we did not much do so, contenting ourselves with the note on Gen. ii. 4.

It is scarcely necessary to say that the name, the Twelve Minor Prophets, has reference exclusively to the small bulk of their writings, not in any way to an inferiority in importance or value.

I have refrained from adding to the bulk of my volume by prefixing a general Introduction, for several reasons, one of which at present is all that I need give. The last three books, those supposed to be written after the Babylonian Exile, were annotated by Professor Marcus Dods, D.D., in 1879 ; and the first three have been reserved for another volume ; I thought I should needlessly weary my readers by a general Introduction to the intermediate six. But if my book prove acceptable and useful, there are indications that at a later time I might find it desirable to present such an Introduction.

# THE SIX INTERMEDIATE MINOR PROPHETS.

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## OBADIAH.

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### INTRODUCTION.

THIS is the shortest of the prophetic books, and the title also is the shortest, giving no information as to the man, the time in which he lived, or the occasion of his ministry. There has therefore been abundance of room for conjecture; all the more so that Obadiah, which means "he who serves Jehovah," is a name which we find in Scripture many a time, and several of the persons so named have been conjectured to be the prophet.

Of all the various dates that have been assigned to his prophecy, perhaps the most common has been that of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar; and his impassioned utterance against Edom suits very well with passages of Scripture belonging to that date, like Ps. cxxxvii. 7; Lam. iv. 21, 22; Ezek. xxxv., especially ver. 4. Yet it is very noticeable that Obadiah, looking apparently at the whole twelve tribes as one compact body, without a hint that ten of them were in exile, says not a word of the destruction of Jerusalem, nor of the temple being defiled and consumed by fire. Nor does he name the Chaldeans and their city Babylon, which are continually named in the later history, and by the prophets of that time; it is simply "strangers" and "foreigners" who have carried captive Jacob's substance, and entered into his gates, ver. 11. Not an allusion is made to any of the three great monarchies, Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, which more and more come into view from the time of the prophets Micah and Isaiah; the places outside of Canaan which are mentioned, perhaps in connection with captivity, are Zarephath, a Phœnician city between Tyre and Sidon, and Sepharad, which is a puzzle to geographers, though I think the most probable opinion is that which identifies it



with Sardis in the west of Asia Minor (yet possibly it is Sparta, the greatest military city in Greece), anyhow a comparatively distant place, towards the north-west or west. On account of these peculiarities, I agree with those who prefer an earlier date for this prophet.

There is a curiously close relation in which Obadiah stands to two other prophets, which has been also used to help in determining his age, namely, Jeremiah and Joel. (1) There is such a connection between Jeremiah, xlix. 7-22, and Obadiah, that almost all readers have come to the conclusion that the one has borrowed from the other; and the fact that Jeremiah makes large use of several of the other prophets, more or less altering them to suit his own style and object, has led to the prevailing opinion that Obadiah is the original writer, which conclusion is often said to be confirmed by the more natural order of the topics, and by the somewhat more rugged language of Obadiah, such as an original might present. This does not, however, make it certain that the two prophets were not contemporaries. (2) There is a connection, very remarkable, varied, and sustained, though not consecutive, between Joel and Obadiah. Professor A. B. Davidson, in his article on Obadiah in Fairbairn's *Bible Dictionary*, says: "Both call the treatment of Judah by Edom *violence*, Joel iv. (in English it is iii.) 19, Obad. 10, compare Amos i. 11; both complain of the carrying off a great spoil from Jerusalem, Joel iv. 5, Obad. 11; both say it was done by *strangers*, Joel iv. 17, Obad. 11; both use the formula, *cast lots on Jerusalem*, Joel iv. 3, Obad. 11, again in Nah. iii. 10; both speak of the *day of the LORD*, Joel iv. 14, i. 15, Obad. 15; both make prominent the idea of *requital* in that day, Joel iv. 4, 7, Obad. 15; both speak of the *remnant* or *refuge* that shall be on that day, Joel iii. 5 (in English ii. 32), Obad. 17; both saying that it shall be on Mount Zion, Joel iii. 5 (ii. 32), Obad. 17; and both that it shall be holy, Joel iv. 17, Obad. 17; both employ the simile of fire for a destroyer, Joel ii. 3, 5; Obad. 18; and both clinch their predictions against Jerusalem's foes and invaders with the formula, *for the LORD hath said it*, Joel iv. 8, Obad. 18." Perhaps additional points of resemblance might be traced, such as the description of the brutal drinking of the enemy in Joel iii. 3 and Obad. 16. This marked agreement in thought and language, and in the conception and representation of the day of Jehovah, which is unfolded much more in its theological aspects by other prophets, has led a class of acute and trustworthy critics to regard these two prophets as closely allied in spirit, and as nearly, or perhaps quite, contemporaneous; and the proclamation of the day of Jehovah is said to have been first made by them, that is to say, not here taking into account Enoch's prophecy from remote antiquity, on which I believe that all of them rested. Their opinion is that Joel and Obadiah referred to the deep humiliation which Judah suffered in the reign of the idolatrous and bloody king Joram, 2 Chron. xxi. 16, 17, when Jehovah stirred up against him "the spirit of the Philistines and of the Arabians, which are beside the Ethiopians; and they came up against Judah, and brake into it, and carried away all the

substance that was found in the king's house, and his sons also, and his wives, so that there was never a son left him save Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons." This suits exactly, since we have Jerusalem taken, and its substance carried off, and by foreign nations not at all connected with Judah by descent, as the Edomites were.

The only difficulty which has been felt is in consequence of the supposition that Joel and Obadiah prophesied at the time that this catastrophe occurred, about a hundred years earlier than those who have been usually regarded as the oldest prophets, like Hosea and Amos. Yet it is not necessary to suppose this. Amos apparently refers to the same event in chap. i. 6, 11, so that here we have evidence how vividly it remained in the memory of the nation; compare the recollections in the German Rhineland of the French invasions, going back not only one, but even two hundred years. In point of fact, Obadiah here concentrates his attention on Edom, whom he charges with hatred to the cause of God; therefore, in vers. 15, 16, denouncing judgement on Edom especially, yet not overlooking other nations to whom Edom acted as leader; later prophets bring this out more fully, that Edom was the leader of heathenism against God as made known in Israel, see Isa. xxxiv., lxiii.

Moreover, there is something deserving of study in the fact that one prophet, though his book is so short, may yet be said to give his whole strength to the case of a single nation, which he regards as the type or representative of the whole enemies of God's people. In accordance with earlier accounts of two opposing interests, from the first description of the enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, when the patriarch Jacob stands forth as the head of the chosen people ranged under his twelve sons, his brother Esau stands forth as his opponent, for reasons which were disgraceful to both. In Isaac's blessing on Esau, however, it was not said that the enmity would immediately and always appear, but rather that it would take time to break out. In the Pentateuch there is scarcely a trace of hostility between the nations, nothing worse than a want of cordiality and trust, Num. xx. 14-21; Deut. ii. 4-7; nay, in chap. xxiii. 7, 8, there is an express command not to abhor an Edomite, but to count him a brother, and to admit the third generation to the full spiritual privileges of Israel. In all the times of Joshua and the Judges there is never once an example of any bad feeling between the two nations, though tempting opportunities must have often occurred. Once Edom is named in a list of enemies with whom Saul fought, 1 Sam. xiv. 47, as if the rise of a kingdom in Israel stirred up the jealousy of the Edomites, who had had kings of their own at a much earlier time, Gen. xxxvi. 31. The fearfully cruel treatment of the Edomites by David and his generals, 2 Sam. viii. 13, 14, suggests that there may have been provocations on their side (as the massacre of the priests of Jehovah by Doeg the Edomite, 1 Sam. xxii. 17-23, may indicate something of his ancestor's "profaneness"); indeed the context, if not the text, implies that David was struggling for his own existence and that of his kingdom,

against a combination of foes all around him; see also Ps. lx. (including the title) and 1 Kings xi. 14-22. The ancient kindly feeling was now all gone, a bitter hatred having taken its place, and made the two nations irreconcilable. But there is no evidence that Edom recovered its independence from the hands of David's successors before the reign of Jehoshaphat, in whose time "there was no king in Edom; a deputy was king," 1 Kings xxii. 47, who appears in 2 Kings iii. as an attendant on Jehoshaphat in his war against Moab. On this account it is quite a fair interpretation of an obscure statement in Amos ii. 1, that the bones of a king of Edom had been burned into lime by a king of Moab, as if he were a traitor to the cause of liberty, and a supporter of Israel. However this one particular case may be decided, it was only after Jehoshaphat's death, during the reign of his son, the ungodly and cruel Joram, that among the various humiliations and losses which Judah underwent (to which attention has already been turned, as throwing light on the topic of Obadiah's prophecy), "Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves;" and, though defeated at first, "Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah unto this day," 2 Kings viii. 20, 22. This was the crisis in the national history of Edom, which restored their kingdom, made them wealthy and powerful, and made them able again and again to inflict disgrace and loss on Judah.

Obadiah had a message, *first*, of destruction to come upon Edom for their pride, vers. 1-9; *secondly*, of requital for wrong done to their brother Jacob, vers. 10-16; *thirdly*, of salvation for Jacob in Mount Zion, when the kingdom should be Jehovah's, vers. 17-21.

King Amaziah had fought with Edom successfully, but had stained his victory by cruelty, 2 Kings xiv. 7; 2 Chron. xxv. 11, 12; though again we may see in this some evidence that there had been provocation, perhaps at the time of the terrible judgements at the end of the reign of his father Joash, 2 Kings xii. 17, 18; 2 Chron. xxiv. 23, 24. Amaziah's son, king Uzziah, built Elath, Solomon's port, below Ezion-geber, at the Red Sea, in the land of Edom, and restored it to Judah after the death of the king, 2 Kings xiv. 22; 2 Chron. xxvi. 2; this implies that somehow Edom was subject to him, or at least not independent of him. In the reign of his ungodly and miserable grandson Ahaz, the king of Syria recovered Elath, and drove the Jews from it, and the Syrians (or, according to another reading, the Edomites) came to it, and continued to dwell in it, 2 Kings xvi. 6. And of his misfortunes it is written, 2 Chron. xxviii. 17, that "again the Edomites had come and smitten Judah, and carried away captives." Such was the relative position of the two countries; and if Judah was at times cruel, we have no reason to doubt that Edom was unspeakably more so; see Ezek. xxxv. 5, 6. But Obadiah's message was not a mere threatening of wrath. The second part, vers. 10-16, is the key to the whole. There has been controversy about the translation of vers. 12-14, whether the verbs ought to be, or can be, translated as perfects, which is done in the Authorized

Version ; certainly the simple and natural rendering is that in its margin, adopted in the Revision, as an entreaty not to do those things against Judah. This is not to deny that such things had been done, and that the prophet and his readers knew the facts. But it was a course of action through successive generations, and in the name of the God of Israel (who swears that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live, Ezek. xxxiii. 11) he urges on Edom their imminent danger, and opens up what he sees and hears in the spiritual world, because he is a seer, and a man admitted to the confidential communications of Jehovah, according to Amos iii. 7. And Jehovah says by him, as by Jeremiah, xlv. 4, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate."<sup>1</sup> If Edom will not be dissuaded, in compliance with the address in the second part of the prophecy, then the doom announced in the first part must take effect : only the Edomites have brought this requital on themselves, and the glory of God shall be advanced, and along with it the good of men, in spite of all that evil-doers have planned and executed. So Amos, ix. 12, places the remnant of Edom in the forefront of the nations, to be possessed when David's kingdom is restored.

<sup>1</sup> Observe similar counsel given in Isa. xvi. 1 to Sela, the capital of Edom ; whereas in this case it is connected with Moab.

## OBADIAH.

VER. I THE vision of Obadiah.

Thus saith the Lord GOD concerning Edom : We have heard tidings from the LORD, and an ambassador is sent among the nations, *saying*, Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle. 2 Behold, I have made thee small among the nations : thou art 3 greatly despised. The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, O 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

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FIRST. The destruction to come upon Edom for their pride, vers. 1-9.

Vers. 1-4. *Thus saith the Lord Jehovah;*" this is a combination of titles to give dignity, found often in Amos. What Jehovah says is not that he has heard tidings from Jehovah, for common sense leads us to understand that it is the prophet who so hears. Ver. 2 shows that the words of Jehovah begin there and go right on. This is what he says concerning Edom : "*We have heard tidings,*" a more suitable rendering than "rumour" in the Authorized Version, or "report," though both are used from time to time ; in the Revision, at Isa. xxviii. 9, it is "message:" literally, it is something heard. "*An ambassador is sent among the heathen,*" as in Isa. xviii. 2, lvii. 9, a word also occurring twice in Proverbs, and as a verb in one reading of the account of the Gibeonites, Josh. ix. 4. The prophet's ear, perhaps, hears something stirring the nations, which can be heard by no unaided ear of man, as the plot is formed, and they encourage one another to rise against Edom in battle. "*Behold, I have made thee small among the nations : thou art greatly despised,*" manifestly in contrast with what Edom had been, and had reckoned itself ; Amos, indeed, afterwards speaks of a mere remnant, chap. ix. 12. Hence "*the pride of thine heart hath deceived thee.*" Pride, a most self-deceiving disposition, was the first sin, the first snare of the devil : and at the beginning of Israel's national history, Jethro had observed how it ruined Egypt, Ex. xviii. 11 ; as again, at the end of the national history, Jeremiah, l. 29, 31, 32, gives emphasis to it in Babylon. This pride was connected with their position, "*thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock,*" which are named again only in Song ii. 14 as the abode of the dove : here in ver. 4, however, Edom

4 ground? Though thou mount on high as the eagle, and though  
 thy nest be set among the stars, I will bring thee down from  
 5 thence, saith the LORD. If thieves came to thee, if robbers by  
 night, (how art thou cut off!) would they not steal till they had  
 enough? if grapegatherers came to thee, would they not leave  
 6 some gleanings? How are *the things of Esau* searched  
 7 out! how are his hidden treasures sought up! All the men of  
 thy confederacy have brought thee on thy way, even to the  
 border: the men that were at peace with thee have deceived  
 thee, and prevailed against thee; *they that eat thy bread* lay a  
 8 snare under thee: there is none understanding in him. Shall I

is addressed, "*though thou mount on high as the eagle,*" the king of birds. Indeed, beyond this, "*though thy nest be set among the stars,*" approaching the blasphemous assumption of the king of Babylon, Isa. xiv. 12, 13, whose security Edom rivals in ver. 3. Such loftiness of aim had characterized the defiant ungodly powers so early as the building of the tower of Babel, Gen. xi. 4; but the discomfiture of Edom should not be less thorough and disastrous than theirs had been. The Hebrew verb in ver. 3 for "dwelling" is much the less common and the more emphatic; it is, for instance, the word habitually employed to express the dwelling of Jehovah in His house and among His people. The picturesqueness and strength of the rock-dwellings of the Edomitic capital, named Sela in Hebrew and Petra in Greek (both words meaning "a rock"), have been celebrated by all travellers who have visited them since they were discovered by the German explorer Burckhardt in 1812. Sela was taken by Amaziah king of Judah with circumstances of cruelty, 2 Kings xiv. 7, 2 Chron. xxv. 11, 12, when he named it Joktheel, which is explained to mean, either "reduced to servitude by God," or "God's prize of victory." No doubt Edom might put the question, Who shall bring me down to the ground? We may think of Jehovah Himself answering the proud occupant of the eyrie, I myself will bring thee down from thence.

Vers. 5, 6. Illustrations are given of the rapid and complete ruin which was to overtake Edom; but they are so plain that there is no need for explanation. Robbers and grape-gleaners would have left something behind, but in Edom's desolation it should not be so; see the dreary desolation as set forth in Isa. xxxiv. *Searched out*; see at Zeph. i. 12.

Vers. 7-9. The prophet lets us mark the stages in this road to ruin. "*All the men of thy confederacy:*" Edom had not been solitary and unsupported, but had a body of allies, not improbably it had been at their head. They "*have brought thee on thy way, even to the border.*" Edom perhaps had had some suspicions of the coming danger, pointed at in ver. 2, and had also sent ambassadors to sound the mind of the allies, and to secure promises of assistance. And these ambassadors had been received with outward marks of respect and regard, and had been conducted to the border of the particular

not in that day, saith the LORD, destroy the wise men out of  
9 Edom, and understanding out of the mount of Esau! And thy  
mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed, to the end that every

country, or to the border of Edom itself, with assurances of all needed support.<sup>1</sup>

"*The men that were at peace with thee have deceived thee,*" after Edom had first deceived itself through pride, ver. 3. And since David, in his typical psalms, had to express the endurance of all evil such as came on Christ, he says, Ps. xli. 9, "Mine own familiar friend" (in Hebrew, "the man of my peace"), "in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me:" comp. also Ps. lv. 20, 21. We are not surprised at what is added, that they have "*prevailed against thee;*" since all the men of Edom's confederacy, without exception, had turned against it in this treachery. As in the psalm just quoted, "*They that eat thy bread lay a snare under thee.*" The noun here is so rare, that there is much difference of opinion regarding it. In Jer. xxx. 13 it is rendered, "that thou mayest be bound up," and in the margin, "for closing up, or pressing;" and it occurs again only in Hos. v. 13, twice, where it is rendered "wound," as in the Authorized Version and the Revised margin here. In fact, there are words supplied in the textual rendering; but it is quite possible to give a good rendering without supplying any word, as is done in the margin, "thy bread they make a snare for thee." In whatever way we treat this obscure clause, it is somehow a part of the description of the perfidious dealing of the old friends of Edom. The prophet adds, "*There is none understanding in him,*" turning from Edom, to whom he had been speaking, but now speaking of him as hopelessly bewildered amidst the attacks of open foes and the treachery of supposed friends. Thus ver. 8 declares that the understanding of Edom may well perish, since Jehovah makes wise men perish, for whom Edom had been famous; comp. Jer. xlix. 7, and remember Eliphaz the Temanite in the Book of Job. And ver. 9 completes the picture of desolation, by announcing that dismay makes the mighty men of Teman powerless, in order that every one may be cut off from the mount of Edom, it would seem, by some such butchery as is recorded in 1 Kings xi. 15, 16, and 2 Chron. xxv. 11, 12. Teman appears as the eldest son of Esau, and as giving his name to a part of the country of Edom in Gen. xxxvi. 11, 15, 42; and the name occasionally alternates with that of Edom in the parallelisms of the prophets. The peculiar expression in ver. 8, rendered inadequately "*saith Jehovah,*" will be noticed at length on Micah iv. 6.

<sup>1</sup> If the marginal rendering be adopted, they "have driven thee out," it means that the embassy had been unsuccessful, and had been dismissed in a manner that foreshadowed how the strength of the allies was to be turned against Edom; but I prefer the rendering in the text, though both are perfectly good translations; see the verb used both in a favourable and in an unfavourable sense in Gen. xxvi. 27, 29, 31.

10 one may be cut off from the mount of Esau by slaughter. For the violence done to thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee,  
 11 and thou shalt be cut off for ever. In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that strangers carried away his substance, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots  
 12 upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them. But look not thou on the day of thy brother in the day of his disaster, and rejoice not over the children of Judah in the day of their destruc-

SECOND. The requital to Edom for wrong done to his brother Jacob, vers. 10-16.

Vers. 10, 11. The extreme danger in which Edom was, namely, that of coming under the curse of Jehovah, arose from this, that they had to a great extent identified themselves with the enemies of his people. "*For the violence done to thy brother Jacob*" (comp. Joel iii. 19), forgetting the ties of natural affection, or ignoring them; or possibly crushing them out of existence, through jealousy of the spiritual privileges which the house of Jacob enjoyed. "*Shame shall cover thee;*" the very opposite condition to that of "Israel my glory," as often described in Isaiah. The two sides are set forth in Ps. cxxxii. 18, speaking of the house of David, the head of Israel, "His enemies will I clothe with shame; but upon himself shall his crown flourish." And this shame shall find its natural issue or consummation in their being "*cut off,*" as had been already announced in ver. 9; but here it is added, "*for ever,*" which is insisted on with terrific energy in Isa. xxxiv. 10, 17. "*In the day that thou stoodest on the other side,*" right opposite, looking on, yet scarcely knowing whether to join in the attack or to forbear. "*In the day that strangers carried away his substance,*" having been successful in battle in the open field, and thus having been enabled to sweep away the possessions of Israel. The noun rendered "substance" here and in ver. 13 may equally well have a personal meaning, as in ver. 20, where it is rendered "host;" hence, according to the margin, we might translate, "in the day that strangers carried captive his forces." "*And foreigners entered into his gates,*" forcing their way into what had now become the defenceless cities of Judah, and, as the next clause proves, into the capital itself. "*And cast lots upon Jerusalem,*" according to the brutal practice of the soldiery with the spoil of the conquered inhabitants; see Joel iii. 3; Nah. iii. 10. "*Even thou wast as one of them.*" Edom had begun by attempting to stand neutral; but ere long their plundering habits, combined with their unbrotherly, hostile feelings, led them to take their place amongst the enemies of Israel. Was there then no hope for Edom? Had they committed an unpardonable sin? The language of the following verses, tenderly and urgently dissuading them from the evil course on which they had entered, suggests the belief that their peril was exceedingly great, but that hope might still be entertained.

Vers. 12-14. The dissuasive in these three verses names acts more and more unbrotherly, in which it is at least hinted that they had



- 13 tion ; neither speak proudly in the day of distress. Enter not  
 into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity ; yea, look  
 not thou on their affliction in the day of their calamity, neither  
 14 lay ye *hands* on their substance in the day of their calamity. And  
 stand thou not in the crossway, to cut off those of his that escape ;  
 and deliver not up those of his that remain in the day of distress.  
 15 For the day of the LORD is near upon all the nations : as thou  
 hast done, it shall be done unto thee ; thy dealing shall return

taken part. First, it is the day of thy brother's "*disaster*," a reverse which has strangely come on him (rather than as in the Authorized Version, "the day that he became a stranger," see the Revised rendering of Job xxxi. 3), the day of the "*destruction*" of the children of Judah, the day of "*distress*:" thy temptation is to "*look on*" it (the expression in Hebrew implies looking on it with pleasure, almost gloating over it, Ps. xxii. 17, liv. 7, cxviii. 7, etc.), to "*rejoice over*" them, to "*speak proudly*" in that day ; but do not do so. Secondly, it is three times spoken of as "*the day of their calamity*," although there is a tender remembrance of Israel as Esau's brother, in the original, when it returns from the plural to the singular the second and third time saying "his" calamity. "*Enter not into the gate of my people*," since thy presence can only give pain to them, and lead thee into temptation ; no ! keep far away, "*look not thou on their (his) affliction*," as had been said in the former verse. Most certainly, at all events, avoid one thing, "*neither lay ye hands on their (his) substance*," the delicacy of the original appearing in the use of the verb in the feminine, as women hanging on about the camp of Edom might be the actual plunderers. Thirdly, two revolting acts are mentioned, common enough in savage warfare. There are always "*those that escape*" from a battle : "*stand thou not in the crossway, to cut off those*," and serve thyself heir to the curse on Amalek for an analogous crime, Deut. xxv. 17-19. Yet, after all, even in this day of distress there will be some survivors : "*deliver not up those of his that remain*," a crime that is charged on the people of Gaza and of Tyre in Amos i. 6, 9.

Vers. 15, 16. Remonstrances and dissuasives are all in vain ; it is for the prophet now to unfold the purposes of God in retribution. In ver. 13, Edom had been reminded by Jehovah that Israel is "*my people* ;" and there must be a reckoning for wrong done to them. "*As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee ; thy dealing shall return upon thine own head*," in accordance with declarations often made, Isa. xxxv. 4, lxi. 2 ; Jer. l. 15, 28, 29, 33, 34, li. 5, 6 ; Zech. ii. 8, 9, etc. This is "*the day of Jehovah*," spoken of here in ver. 15, as by Joel and Amos and succeeding prophets, see in the Introduction ; and, like the others, Obadiah says it is *near*, though prophecy seldom enables us to measure the degree of nearness by any of our standards of time. This day, which no doubt is terrible also to the sinners among God's own people, according to Amos v. 17-20, is pre-eminently revealed as "*near upon all the nations*," who

16 upon thine own head. For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the nations drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and swallow down, and shall be as though they had  
17 not been. But in mount Zion there shall be those that escape, and it shall be holy; and the house of Jacob shall possess their

are looked upon as a collected mass, the body of heathendom, united in opposition to the Church of God; so in Joel iii. 2 and often. Edom is in one sense the object of Obadiah's prophecy; yet, just as in Isa. xxxiv., Edom is regarded as the head of a confederation, the leader of a multitude in the combined attack upon the people of Jehovah. The blow must recoil on those who aimed it; on Edom first, for the nations were represented in the beginning of the prophecy as turning round treacherously on their old ally and leader (compare for this procedure, Rev. xvii. 13 and 16), as we read in ver. 15, but finally, in ver. 16, upon the whole of them. The judgement seems to come upon them in their drunken orgies, as on those who had spoiled Ziklag, the home of David, 1 Sam. xxx. 16, and on Belshazzar at his feast. The figure of a cup of wrath from Jehovah, which they must drink, occurs in the threatening of retaliation upon Edom, Lam. iv. 21, 22; and, more generally, upon all the nations, Jer. xxv. 15-29; see also Ps. lxxv. 7, 8, and Rev. xiv. 10. Inasmuch as the scene of their abominable excesses had been "*my holy mountain*" (that is, Mount Zion, according to Ps. ii. 6 and many other testimonies; see here, vers. 17, 21), thus specially provoking to Jehovah, as is also said of Edom in Ezek. xxxv. 9-11, three circumstances are mentioned in aggravation of their doom. First, they shall "*drink continually*;" the execution of the sentence shall not be once for all, and then be over, but it shall go on unceasingly. Secondly, they shall "*drink, and swallow down*," not able to escape by merely putting the cup to their lips, but as the psalm quoted expresses it, wringing out the dregs and drinking them; unless, indeed, we prefer the marginal rendering (justified by Job vi. 3, where alone the verb occurs again), "*drink and talk foolishly*," the wise men, ver. 8, having lost their reason in this fearful drunkenness, compare Isa. li. 17, 21-23. And thirdly, "*they shall be as though they had not been*," as many a time this emphasis is laid on the utter disappearance of those who had been the most dreaded enemies of the Church of God, Ps. ix. 5; Isa. xxix. 7, 8; Dan. ii. 35.

THIRD. The salvation for Israel in Mount Zion, when the kingdom shall be Jehovah's, vers. 17-21.

Ver. 17. There is first a general statement, to be followed up by three particulars, in each of which Esau (that is, the same as Edom, Gen. xxxvi. 1, 8, and the father of the Edomite nation) is mentioned; namely, ver. 18 twice, ver. 19, and ver. 21. "*In mount Zion there shall be those that escape*," in spite of the cruelties practised on them, of which ver. 14 spoke. And most important is the character of this saved remnant, "*and it shall be holy*;" to the English reader the

18 possessions. And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall burn among them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining to the house of Esau; for the LORD hath spoken it. And they of the South shall possess the mount of

pronoun "it" may seem to come in harshly; but this is due to the fact that "those that escape" is the translation of a Hebrew collective noun which is singular. Both these promises are also given in Joel, by combining chap. ii. 32 and iii. 17, and elsewhere in the prophets; see Isa. iv. 2-4, vi. 13, lii. 1, 2. "*And the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions;*" a noun being used here which is rare, except (in the feminine form) in Ezekiel; though Isaiah has the very word, chap. xiv. 23, when he says of proud Babylon, "I will make it a possession for the porcupine." But not so with God's people; His own shall have their own, and no one shall be able to dispossess them.

**Vers. 18, 19.** It may be questioned whether the expression in ver. 17, "the house of Jacob," took in all the twelve tribes, or whether a prophet of Judah did not look on the kingdom of the Two Tribes as falling heir to all the promises, now that the Ten Tribes had gone, as it seemed, hopelessly astray; see how the expression is used in Isa. ii. 5, xxix. 22. But when it is repeated here, the parallel expression leaves us in no doubt: "*the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame,*" so that the Ten Tribes, of whom Joseph (or the most distinguished tribe among his posterity, Ephraim) was the leader and representative, shall have a fair share in this glorious promise. In Isa. x. 17 the secret of this power in Israel, which is like devouring fire, is traced up to its divine origin; "the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame, and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day." However, Obadiah compares the enemy to something not at all so formidable as thorns and briers: "*and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall burn among them, and devour them.*" This fire sent by Jehovah to devour the enemies of Israel, who are successively named, appears in the judgements denounced in the first and second chapters of Amos. "*And there shall not be any remaining to the house of Esau;*" the Hebrew word is the same as in the entreaty in ver. 14, "deliver not up those of his that remain in the day of distress." Esau had acted cruelly and treacherously to those that remained of Israel, yet was unsuccessful in his attempt to make an end of them; but now the retribution in his own day of distress is, that of his people there shall not be any remaining. "*For Jehovah hath spoken it;*" a solemn form of words to give all possible assurance of the truth and certainty of the threatened vengeance. See the note upon it at Micah iv. 4, where it occurs in a fuller form. "*And they of the South shall possess the mount of Esau, and they of the lowland the Philistines.*" In the description of the land assigned to Judah, the South and the lowland are two great districts, Josh. xv. 21-32

Esau ; and they of the lowland the Philistines : and they shall possess the field of Ephraim, and the field of Samaria : and Ben-

and 33-47 ; the latter stretching westward from the central district, the hill-country, vers. 48-60, which is not named by Obadiah, any more than the comparatively unimportant wilderness, vers. 61, 62, lying on the east, towards the Dead Sea. For those two districts lay as far as possible out of the way of danger from war. But the prophet names the two districts that lay towards the frontier ; and of these he says, that God's people shall not merely hold their own, as he had already promised in ver. 17, but that they shall push forward and take possession of the land of their enemies ; those in the South possessing the mount of Esau, with which his prophecy has chiefly to do, and those in the lowland possessing their bitter and powerful enemies along the Mediterranean sea-shore, the Philistines. Compare the still more comprehensive statements in Isa. xi. 14, of how the reunited Ephraim and Judah are to deal, not only with these Philistines and Edomites on the west and south, but also with the Moabites and the children of the east. "*And they shall possess the field of Ephraim and the field of Samaria.*" This has been often understood as if Judah were not merely to push west and south into heathen lands, but also north, into the country formerly assigned to the Ten Tribes, but now forfeited by them on account of their sins ; although some kindness would be shown to the repenting exiles among them, according to the statement in the next verse. It seems to me simpler to understand the prophet's language to mean that the people of Ephraim and of Samaria shall retain (or recover, if the late date be adopted for the composition of this prophecy) their own possessions, since in the foregoing verse the house of Joseph have their share in executing the judgement on the heathen. The Ten Tribes shall hold their own, as had been already said of the house of Jacob in general at ver. 17 ; but since their religious condition was far below that of the Two Tribes, this holding their own would be all that could for the most part be said of them : the more glorious future, with extension of territory, was a prize reserved for the faithful tribes of Judah and Benjamin. This interpretation is analogous to the more favourable position assigned to Judah, as contrasted with Ephraim, in the passage of Isaiah last referred to. For of little Benjamin it is added, "*and Benjamin shall possess Gilead.*" Their territory, as allotted to them by Joshua, lay between the two powerful tribes of Judah on the south and Ephraim on the north, who wedged them in and cramped them. But now they should spread out not less marvellously than Judah ; they should occupy the territory of Gilead on the eastern side of Jordan, assigned by Moses himself to Gad and Reuben and half Manasseh, but which had been very much lost to God's people from the time of Jehu, in whose reign "Jehovah began to cut Israel short ; and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel, from Jordan eastwards, all the land of Gilead," etc., 2 Kings x. 32, 33. No doubt there was a partial recovery under the warlike king of the Ten Tribes,

20 jamin *shall possess* Gilead. And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel, which are *among* the Canaanites, *shall possess* even unto Zarephath; and the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in

Jeroboam II.; but the ruin of the Eastern Tribes was soon after completed by Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, 2 Kings xiv. 25, xv. 29, 1 Chron. v. 26. All this lost ground should be reoccupied; but the occupant was to be Benjamin, hitherto the smallest of the tribes.

Ver. 20. But was there to be any mercy for those who had been carried captive and exiled from their land? Yes, this verse is for them, although our imperfect knowledge of the geography and some difficulties in the grammatical construction combine to make the details of the interpretation a little uncertain. There are two captivities (or, according to the more exact rendering of the noun, two bodies of exiles, though practically this alteration may not amount to much); one is that "*of this host of the children of Israel,*" and the other is that "*of Jerusalem*"; in other words, they are those who had been taken captive from the two kingdoms respectively, the Ten Tribes and the Two Tribes. How general or how restricted these captivities were, depends very much on the age in which Obadiah lived: for reasons given in the Introduction I prefer the early date, in which case the mass of the people still occupied their own land, and the bodies of exiles or captives were comparatively small. The words describing the captives from the Ten Tribes, "*which are among the Canaanites,*" are peculiar: I think it easier to follow the margin in making the supplied verb govern this clause as well as the next one. I read then, They "*[shall possess] that which [belongeth to] the Canaanites, even unto Zarephath,*" a well-known town on the coast of Phœnicia, nearer Sidon than Tyre; in Scripture, however, it is only once mentioned besides here, on the occasion when it was the scene of gracious and miraculous working by the God of Israel, through Elijah, in those days in which heathenism had assaulted his cause among his people with greater success than ever before. He, who had formerly rolled back that moral invasion from Phœnicia, should now do at least as much for his people; and the very captives from among them should spread farther to the north-west in their conquests and possessions than even Joshua appears to have done in the first brilliant days of the Hebrew commonwealth. And as for the other branch of God's people, the Two Tribes, "*the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the south.*" I leave the geography of Sepharad for a note at the end of this prophecy; but in general the promise takes up and repeats what had been said in ver. 19, only assuring the exiles that they are to have a share in the coming glory. The south, or in its Hebrew form, the Negeb, was that high-lying district, on the soft limestones, in which the patriarchs Abraham and Isaac loved to pasture their flocks and herds. Beersheba was the town in it whose name is most familiar to us. It was given at first to Judah, but seems to have been handed over to the feeble and obscure tribe of Simcon, Josh. xix. 1-9; and

21 Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the South. And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD'S.

much of it may have fallen into the hands of the Edomites. But the whole should yet be possessed by these returning exiles of Jerusalem, who might otherwise have had some difficulty in finding sufficient room for themselves.

Ver. 21. "*And saviours shall come up on mount Zion, to judge the mount of Esau.*" The title "saviour" is repeatedly applied to the judges, as the verb "save" is used to describe their work, Judg. ii. 16, 18, iii. 9, 15, 31, vi. 14, 15, viii. 22, x. 1, xiii. 5, etc., though there are unfortunate variations of rendering in the Authorized Version. The work of these judges consisted sometimes in executing judgement on the enemies of Israel by military exploits; sometimes in the peaceful establishment of justice and judgement at home within the borders of Israel; often, no doubt, both functions were united in the hands of the same person. The prophet, who has glanced back on past dealings of Jehovah in behalf of His people, more distinctly recalls these, and dwells upon them, as seen in the best and happiest events of the age of the judges; an age of liberty, and of glorious enlargement from time to time, in spite of sad falling away when one or other of the judges died. In the Book of Judges we never once meet with Edom as an enemy needing to be chastened; but after the enmity had broken out at the rise of the kingdom in Israel, and had become chronic and inveterate, the mount of Esau must be judged by the saviours whom Jehovah should raise up at His holy hill, mount Zion. "*And the kingdom shall be Jehovah's.*" For "mount Zion" is an expression that points onwards, beyond the highest point ever attained by Israel under the judges, to the kingdom which he established in his holy hill, to be seen in David and his family for ever, Ps. ii. 6-12, cxxxii. 18, etc. The house of David, indeed, had been very disappointing, and the whole scheme of the actual kingdom was faulty, owing to the spirit in which it was asked by a worldly-minded people, who wished to be rid of Samuel: for which reason, I suppose, Obadiah dwells on the grace bestowed before there was any king in Israel. Yet kings had been promised to the patriarchs, Gen. xvii. 16, xxxv. 11, and the full development of the people of God may have required a king. It was the fact that Esau had in outward things the start of Jacob: "these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel," Gen. xxxvi. 31. This, however, was to be an instance of the truth of the proverb, "Soon ripe, soon rotten." The kingdom should flourish in Israel when there was no longer any king in the desolated mount of Esau. And in some way which prophets and their first hearers and readers might not understand, though it is now revealed plainly in the New Testament, the King of the house of David should reign for ever, with unspeakable blessings to His people; and yet it should be Jehovah of hosts Himself reigning in mount Zion and in Jerusalem,

and before His elders there should be glory, Isa. ix. 6, 7, xxiv. 23. See as to the judges being restored, Isa. i. 26 ; and as to the harmony of the two representations, Rev. xi. 15.

CONCLUDING NOTE.—Sepharad, which is mentioned in ver. 20, has been a puzzle to commentators and geographers. It is by some identified with Shaparda, the name of a country, which occurs in the inscriptions of the Assyrian king Sargon (Isa. xx. 1), situated in south-western Media toward Babylonia : this might correspond well enough with the accounts of the place of exile of both the Ten and the Two Tribes. However, for the last half-century the students of the Assyrian inscriptions, from de Sacy to Schrader, are inclined to identify it with Çparda, which occurs repeatedly, and always in immediate connection with Jaunâ, that is, the Ionians or Greeks, in such a way as to make us look for it in Asia Minor ; and if so, it was probably Sardis. This agrees with what is said in Joel iii. 6, "The children of Judah and the children of Jerusalem have ye sold unto the sons of the Grecians."

## JONAH.



FOR many reasons men have been led to study this book with an attention disproportioned to its size. Indeed, the commentary, strictly so called, may be very short, when those topics have been disposed of which are concerned in these discussions.

### FIRST. *The Person and his Book.*

In this book, as apparently in every other book of prophecies, the name of the prophet is given as a guarantee for his message, which professed to be given by God to him that he might give it to men: yet the person of the prophet may sometimes be more, and sometimes less, known to us otherwise than by his book. We have no reason to doubt that we know a very interesting part of Jonah's history from what is recorded of the second king Jeroboam in 2 Kings xiv. 25-27. "He restored the border of Israel from the entering in of Hamath unto the sea of the Arabah, according to the word of Jehovah, the God of Israel, which He spoke by the hand of His servant Jonah, the son of Amittai the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher. For Jehovah saw the affliction of Israel that it was very bitter" (or, perhaps, as the word always elsewhere means, very rebellious); "for there was none shut up nor left at large, neither was there any helper for Israel. And Jehovah said not that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash." The full meaning of this statement will come up for consideration very soon. At present, it is enough to say that it fixes the time at which Jonah prophesied, and also the place to which he belonged, Gath-hepher, a town in Zebulun (see Josh. xix. 13), now the village El Mesh-hed, that is, the monument, namely, the tomb of Neby Yûnas (the prophet Jonah), fully three miles, a little east of north, from Nazareth. It is really too sceptical to doubt whether this Jonah be the Jonah of our book: two prophets of the same name, sons of fathers of the same name, at about the same time, are not to be imagined without clear proof. There are many fabulous stories about Jonah; but this is really all we know of him, except what is written in the book which bears his name. There is no sufficient reason, as will be shown in a note at the end of the book, for asserting that this little book was not written by himself. Other prophets—Isaiah, Amos, notably Jeremiah, and, so far, Ezekiel—give historical



details of themselves in connection with their prophesying ; and there is no proof that any of the other prophets did not write each his own book.

The prophets had their field properly in the Church, although it will be noticed that sometimes they went beyond the Church, as this book tells how Jonah did. But his natural sphere of labour was in Israel ; and the verses quoted from 2 Kings would therefore be the account of his proper and principal work, encouraging and directing king Jeroboam II. in his successful efforts to restore the old glories of the kingdom of Israel. After the completion of this his principal work, his mission to Nineveh came in as in some sense an appendix ; though, in reality, a very important work, and in its permanent results the most important of all, with which, therefore, his name has come to be indissolubly connected. And many Hebrew scholars have found confirmation of this opinion in the opening word of the original, though it is scarcely to be seen in the English translation, "Now, . . . came unto," etc. There is only one of the prophets, Ezekiel, who begins in this way, with a word which links on the prophet's book to something that has gone before, as the Books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel begin, because they are really connected in the great historical records ; even Ruth begins so, as a mere appendix to the Book of Judges ; and, similarly, Esther, as an appendix to the accounts of God's care for collective Israel, showing His equal care for the dispersion. The explanation of the one other case of a prophet beginning thus may be, that Ezekiel the priest, having his visions of the glory of Jehovah in the exile instead of at the temple in Jerusalem, connects this singular experience with the account of the degradation and the destruction of that temple given in the historical books. So Jonah connects his strange mission to the great heathen power of his day, soon to be the scourge of his own people, with his previous ministry to Israel, by which his prophetic character had been made plain to all who had to do with him. This book might very well be an extract from the larger prophetic narrative which told of the work he had already done for Israel ; yet the evidence for this will have different weight with different minds.

SECOND. But while his *principal* work as a prophet no doubt was among his own people of Israel, the most *peculiar* part of his work, which has secured for him a unique place among the writers of Scripture, was his mission to Nineveh.

I. The immediate purpose of this mission surely was to stir up Israel to jealousy, by showing how the message from God affected a heathen nation, according to the principle laid down by our Lord Himself, Matt. xi. 20-24, and by the apostle to the Gentiles, Rom. xi. 13, 14. Something analogous to this is seen in Jer. xxxv., the prophet's dealing with the Rechabites, not heathen certainly, yet of alien blood, by whose faith and obedience his own people ought to have been stirred up. And there may be a reference to Jonah's mission in the words, Ezek. iii. 5, 6, "For thou art not sent to a people of a

strange speech and of a hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, if I had sent thee to them, they would hearken unto thee. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee, for they will not hearken unto me," etc.

It may be asked, Why should Jonah have been so unwilling to go on this mission to Nineveh? Perhaps we need not go farther than to say that it was a most unusual duty which was imposed on him, a duty unprecedented in the past experience of the prophets: and men are often unwilling to work upon entirely new lines. Yet if any one wishes to pursue the subject, there are conjectures which may readily enough occur to us—(1) He might be afraid that he was to be quite unsuccessful, and that he was to be the object of scorn and ridicule on account of the fool's errand on which he had gone. (2) There no doubt was a possibility that he might succeed; but if so, the case was none the better for him as a patriot and a lover of the welfare of Israel, for the Assyrians were plainly the instruments of coming chastisement, or even vengeance, upon backsliding Israel; and the repentance of Nineveh would really strengthen the hands that were to smite his own people. (3) There seems to have been a lurking suspicion in his mind, according to chap. iv. 2, that somehow the graciousness of God would spare Nineveh, whose destruction he was to announce; and in this case he might be reproached as a false prophet, predicting that which did not come to pass.

II. Whatever might be the feelings at work in the prophet's mind, his misconduct in fleeing from the presence of Jehovah (before whom he stood, like his great predecessor, Elijah) was overruled to the manifestation of the divine glory. Instead of going east to Nineveh by a land journey, he had attempted to go to sea and escape westwards to Tarshish, the great Phœnician colony in southern Spain. But the effect of this rebelliousness was to make Jehovah known to those people also as "the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land," chap. i. 9. Compare the lesson given by another prophet to the Syrians, who imagined that Jehovah was a god of the hills, but not of the valleys, 1 Kings xx. 23, 28. And they "feared Jehovah exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice unto Jehovah, and made vows," chap. i. 16.

And, finally, when at last he did go to Nineveh and preach to it with success beyond anything he could have anticipated, he was treading in the path in which he had unintentionally been led when he evangelized the mariners. The duty was laid upon him as much as formerly to go to Nineveh and preach to it. We shall see immediately how he came to its inhabitants with all the prestige that belonged to a messenger brought back from the dead. And for this or other reasons, his mission was an unexampled triumph, and the capital of Assyria bowed in worship before the God of Israel. Thus it was made manifest that the future of the cause of God was assured, however it might fare in the meantime with the people of Israel, to whom this cause of God had seemed hitherto to be almost entirely confined. A noble lesson was given in reference to the calling of the

Gentiles, and the true universalism of those blessings which the seed of Abraham (in the line of Jacob) had been disposed to claim as their private property, forgetting that in him and his seed all the families and the nations of the earth were to be blessed, Gen. xii. 3, xxii. 18. Perhaps it was the mission of Jonah which ripened matters for Isaiah's prophecy (chap. xix. 23-25) of the highway for mutual intercourse between Egypt and Assyria, when these two nations, hostile to each other and to Israel, should unite in worshipping Israel's God; when Israel should be one of three nations, along with these two, all of them blessed by Jehovah in the strongest and tenderest language, and combined to be a blessing in the earth. So high was the position of Jonah, as a preacher to the great world, at the time when the fortunes of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes were about to sink from their delusive, temporary elevation, attained by the victories of Jeroboam II. But it was considerably later, when only the little kingdom of the Two Tribes survived, and it also was tottering on the verge of ruin, that another received a commission wider and more enduring than Jonah's, as Jehovah called Jeremiah, and said to him, "I have appointed thee a prophet *unto the nations*," Jer. i. 5. In some sense it may have been more wonderful still that Ezekiel, the most priestly of all the prophets, should have exercised his ministry entirely in that heathen land which had fallen heir to the empire of Nineveh in general, and, in particular, which had come to be the instrument for chastening Israel.

III. It sometimes pleased God to order events in His dealings with His people, and on their behalf, so that they assumed a particular form, not only for *present* usefulness (which apparently might have been equally well attained in another and possibly a simpler way), but also so as to bring out the unity of His plans of working, and to *foreshadow certain coming blessings* of a higher kind in the times of the New Testament. This is what in theology is called a type. And however much the types have been from time to time misapprehended and misstated, so as to make the very name an object of mockery and offence to many, there is no good reason for denying that Jonah was a type of Christ, as plain readers of our Lord's own words have always been in the habit of believing; see Matt. xii. 38-41, xvi. 4. The traders of Tyre and Sidon, who either were the mariners so deeply impressed by Jonah's abandonment to the sea and his recovery from it, or else were in close connection with them, would have abundant opportunities for spreading the marvellous history far and wide, even to Nineveh. And when Jonah came to that city and preached against it, he would not be an unknown man, an ignorant or mischievous fanatic, to be despised or else put to death; he would be a messenger, as it were, from the dead,—this might even be literally true,—a man brought back from the other world, around whom divine wisdom and power were thrown to protect and guide him. Without something of this kind, one does not see how Jonah could have become a sign to the Ninevites, Luke xi. 30. His fame had preceded him, and the people repented when one rose

from the dead and came and spoke to them ; for these Ninevites were not of the class hardened by neglect of the teaching of the Scriptures to whom our Lord avers that such a preacher would be useless, Luke xvi. 29-31. Now at the time this whole procedure might seem a riddle to the contemporaries of Jonah, nay, even to Jonah himself. To us, however, who look back on it, it is an acted prophecy. Christ the Son of God, in coming for our salvation, took the way of death, quite as voluntarily as Jonah when he bade the mariners lift him up and cast him forth into the sea. Christ came to life again, like Jonah, on the third day (on the fourth day there would have been something in the process of putrefaction to make the return to life different, as in the case of Lazarus, John xi. 39 ; compare also Rev. xi. 11 with Hos. vi. 2), and thus He became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him, who believe on Him with repentance. But while men from all the ends of the earth have looked to Christ and have been drawn by Him, the mass of His own nation refused the offer made through Him, and perished, as did Jonah's countrymen. These essential analogies make Jonah a type of Christ : the fact of Jonah being three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, and the fact of Christ being similarly in the grave, is far from being the whole of the resemblance, nor is it probably the most important part of it ; though it is the part which may first and most powerfully arrest attention, as a similar emphasis is at times laid on similar striking outward things in Christ's history, such as His riding on an ass into Jerusalem.

IV. There was a propriety or fitness, so far as we can trace God's ways of working, in the mission of Jonah to Nineveh, so that the understandings, hearts, and consciences of the people of Assyria might be touched by the message of God's servant before they were let loose upon Israel. For their commission was to chastise the backsliding people of Jehovah ; and it was proper that they should learn in some measure who Jehovah was, and in what relation Israel stood to him ; otherwise they would think that Israel and Israel's God were on a level with the nations and their gods. This actually was the sin of the Assyrians, when they came to execute vengeance, see Isa. x. 5-15, xxxvi. 14-20, xxxvii. 3, 4, 9-27, as it was afterwards the sin of the Chaldeans, Hab. i. 6-17, and as it had been the sin of the Egyptians long before, Ex. v. 1-9. The lesson was carried home to the men of Nineveh by Jonah ; and their repentance, whatever was its nature or extent, was the proof that the lesson had been in some degree understood and learnt, so that afterwards they were without excuse, and the believing remnant in Israel were able to find consolation and support amid their severest trials, Zech. i. 11-21. The lesson which was given to Nineveh by Jonah was given to Babylon by Isaiah and Hezekiah, and later by Daniel ; as the same lesson had been given to Egypt by Joseph, and later by Moses. Probably we may trace the same procedure with two other heathen powers who also scourged God's people, though less severely than did Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. For David and Solomon were brought into

close connection with Tyre before its sin of forgetting the brotherly covenant, Amos i. 9; and Syria had some benefits from the ministry of Elijah and Elisha, and perhaps at an earlier time by the government of David and Solomon, before it was permitted to thresh Gilead with threshing instruments of iron, Amos i. 3, and its king became the man whom Jehovah had devoted to destruction, as Ahab learned to his cost, 1 Kings xx. 42. And this dealing of God through His servants with Tyre and Assyria and Babylon, may very well explain how they are spoken of as "harlots," Isa. xxiii. 15-17, xlvii. (compared with Rev. xvii.), Nah. iii. 4, though this disgraceful term of reproach seems to have its full meaning only in the case of the Church falling away from its Saviour and husband, like Samaria, Micah i. 7, and Jerusalem, Isa. i. 21.

THIRD. If the nature and the purpose of Jonah's mission to Nineveh have been sufficiently brought out, it only remains to notice one or two points which have created difficulty in some minds, and have led in consequence to mistaken views about the book.

1. The miracles have been a stumbling-block to many. The general subject of the miraculous is not to be discussed in connection with this little book, in which we need not wonder that some things are obscure or staggering; it is around the person of Christ, and especially at that tomb from which all true Christians believe that He rose victorious on the third day, that the battle of supernatural religion must be fought. Assuming that I write for those who believe in miracles, and who are not to be shaken on the general subject of this faith of theirs, however they may feel themselves entitled or bound to scan the particulars of any singular miraculous history, I notice that in the Book of Jonah undoubtedly we are in an atmosphere of miracles, though there is room for difference of opinion (as there is elsewhere in Scripture) about the dividing line between the natural and the supernatural, which confessedly are both present. (1) It is idle to make difficulties about a *whale* swallowing Jonah; for there is nothing to justify the use of this special English word; in the Greek of the New Testament it probably indicates some one of the largest fishes, such as the shark, in the margin of the Revised Bible, "sea-monster;" but in the Hebrew of the Old Testament it is neither more nor less than a "fish," with the adjective "great" attached. (2) Besides the fish large enough to swallow Jonah, there is a further miracle; either he was preserved alive in the fish's belly, and vomited out still living; or else, if he died, he was brought back to life. And there is also the gourd which came up in a night, to protect him from the sun. (3) How much of this is miraculous? We cannot answer with certainty. If a shark would not naturally serve the purpose, the Lord's hand was not waxed short that He could not provide what was necessary; see Num. xi. 23. If a gourd could not grow rapidly enough, He who multiplied the loaves and fishes in His hands to feed the thousands would not fail to provide this shade for His servant. And whether He preserved Jonah alive inside the whale, or whether

He brought him back to life, we leave to Him to determine; and in neither case are we troubled. It is, however, to be observed, so far as the mere words go, that the verb "prepared," which is applied to the case of the fish, i. 17, is equally applied to the gourd, the worm, and the vehement east wind in iv. 6-8; some of these cases were surely not miraculous. There is no indication of a miracle in the other passages where this verb is found in the original, 1 Chron. ix. 29; Job vii. 3; Ps. lxi. 7; Dan. i. 5, 10, 11. It is more interesting to notice the divine names used here in connection with the verb. In i. 17 it is "Jehovah;" and in iv. 7, 8 it is "God," the more general name, with or without the definite article; but in iv. 6, it is "Jehovah God," the most peculiar of all divine titles, used in Gen. ii. 4-iii. 23, as if the preparation of this gourd and the misuse of it by Jonah reminded one of the preparation of the earth for the use of man at the beginning, which he polluted and destroyed by sinning. (4) It is to be remembered that the miracles recorded in Scripture occur very much in groups. The most magnificent galaxy surrounds the person of the Lord Jesus during His life on earth; next to this, though far inferior, are the miracles of His apostles in the New Testament, and those of His great type in the Old Testament, Moses; and under this latter group may be included Joshua's miracles. The only other striking group is that of which we read in the singular prophetic ministry of Elijah and Elisha, which include a case of each prophet raising a child to life, and the passage of Elijah from earth to heaven without dying, and which end in the miracle of a man whose funeral was interrupted through fear of a hostile band. "They cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha; and as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet," 2 Kings xiii. 21. Jonah may very well have been one of those sons of the prophets who looked up to Elisha; and his history, so far as it is miraculous, links itself on naturally to the miracles of Elijah and Elisha, and loses anything strange or startling when we look at his ministry as the continuation and conclusion of theirs. In any case Jonah was like a man coming from the dead to Nineveh; in the light of the victories over death by Elijah and Elisha, we feel no surprise even if he actually died in the fish's belly and came to life again.

II. However, men certainly have stumbled at the miraculous history, and they have rushed to the conclusion that the book is no history at all, but a vision or a dream, or perhaps an allegory or a fable. Those who think so acknowledge that every one of these explanations carries us far out of the line of Hebrew prophecy; there is not another prophetic book which presents us with anything else than the real history of a messenger from God, as may be plainly seen in the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel (only he does not stand among the prophets in the Hebrew Bible), Hosea, Amos, Haggai, and Zechariah, and perhaps in others. Nor is any such explanation natural when we look at our Lord's words, recorded both in Matt. xii. 38-41 and in Luke xi. 29-32. If it is a parable or a dream, is it not strange that He should say of the men of Nineveh

who repented at the preaching of Jonah, They shall stand up in the judgement with this generation, and shall condemn it ! And is it not still more strange that He should place these imaginary Ninevites, with their imaginary prophet, side by side with a real witness, in the person of the queen of the south who came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of a real preacher, king Solomon ! The puzzle goes beyond all possibility of explanation when Luke in ver. 30 records an additional saying of our Lord ; not only that Jonah's preaching to the Ninevites, who repented under that preaching, was a sign to the evil generation who listened to the Lord Jesus, yet did not repent ; but further, "Even as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation." Jonah then was a sign to the Ninevites, coming to them as a messenger from the dead, as truly as the Lord Jesus should become a sign to the house of Israel by His rising from the dead, according to the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost, Acts ii. 36.

III. Some circumstances have also been appealed to, which are thought rather to tell against the historical character of the book. (1) The history is said to be most strange, with Jonah standing out so marvellously from first to last. But this is the very purpose of the book ; not to give an account of Tarshish, or of the voyages made to it, or of Nineveh and its surroundings, or of anything in their own history and circumstances that may have led up to the repentance of the Ninevites, or that may have come out of it in other respects. The glimpse into Ninevite history is studiously restricted to the extremely limited portion which bears upon the prophet's work, and this again is the work of a prophet raised up in Israel, where his ordinary and principal sphere of labour lay ; and to have introduced other matters would have been to throw cross-lights upon the canvas, and to confuse the eye of the observer who is meant to look at Jonah from first to last. Other instances of a similarly peculiar view, with everything shut out that does not bear upon the single point of interest, occur in different parts of Scripture ; none perhaps more striking than that of Melchizedek, "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God," Heb. vii. 3. We need not be surprised, therefore, though the repentance of the Ninevites is not recorded in any other history. For the purpose of this book it would make no difference, if it were so that the movement had been as temporary and superficial as many movements, in what is known as "a revival" ; in fact, one instance of a temporary and superficial repentance, such as an ordinary historian might not think of recording, is given in 1 Kings xxi. 27-29, of which, nevertheless, Jehovah took notice ; for it produced a delay in the execution of predicted judgement, very much as in the case of Jonah with the Ninevites. (2) There has been alleged to be exaggeration about "Nineveh, that great city," i. 2, iii. 2 ; "an exceeding great city of three days' journey ;" as "Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey," iii. 3, 4. It is not at all necessary, however,

to interpret this as if one would take three days to walk through the city from the one end to the other: it is at least quite as natural to understand that three days would be required if Jonah were to go through its principal streets, leaving his testimony in suitable places for preaching. But even assuming the other explanation to be correct, the great city no doubt included the group mentioned in the account of Nimrod's exploits, Gen. x. 11, 12: "Out of that land he went forth into Assyria,<sup>1</sup> and builded Nineveh, and Rehoboth-Ir, and Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (the same is the great city)." This strongly situated centre of the Assyrian power lay on the eastern or left bank of the Tigris, from above the present town of Mosul (which, however, is on the western bank) to the place where the great or upper Zab falls into it, say nearly 24 miles; but if we take it to extend as far north as Dur-Sharukin, or Khorsabad (though the existing ruins which have made this spot so famous date only from the time of Sargon, Isa. xx. 1, later than Jonah's time), there might be a distance from north to south of more than 35 miles. How far east the city was built in the angle between the rivers, and how much farther the prophet would have to move, is as yet a matter of conjecture; nor do I venture to calculate how often and how long he would stand still so as to preach.

FOURTH. The date at which the book was written has been commonly supposed to be that of the prophet himself, as in the case of the other prophets' books. Those who make out the book to be a parable, or a dream, or something else that may be used to overthrow its historical truth, are agreed that it is a writing of a later age, probably of an age very much later. Such a later date, however, would be no proof that the book is not historically true; it might, for instance, be an extract from the great book or books of the Kings of Israel and Judah, the prophetic sources of the canonical Books of Kings, in which we have seen that Jonah is mentioned. The proofs alleged for a later age of composition seem to me remarkably indistinct. (1) There are some peculiarities of grammar and of words employed, which are said to indicate a later time of writing. But these words are almost all connected with the seafaring life with which chap. i. is concerned; and we need not wonder that such technical terms do not occur elsewhere in Scripture, though it ought to be noted that they are in themselves quite in agreement with the analogies of the language as otherwise known to us. And the supposed grammatical peculiarities have not been proved to be real, or are found in other places. And something of a provincial Hebrew may possibly have existed in this Galilean prophet's style. (2) More is now made of analysing Jonah's devotional expressions in chap. ii., which are alleged to be a *cento* of thoughts strung together, taken from psalms that were not composed till after Jonah's time. At

<sup>1</sup> It makes no difference if the Authorized Version is preferred, "Out of that land went forth Asshur."



present there is a craze with some well-known students, which leads them to deny to David any share in the composition of the Psalms, at all events a most limited share; and to press down the date of composition to a period after the exile or the return from Babylon, perhaps centuries after it. People will grow tired of this, as of earlier fancies which are now forgotten. But in regard to the whole case, I wish nothing better than the words of the late Principal Fairbairn, in his article on Jonah in his *Imperial Bible Dictionary*, summing up what he had said in his interesting little monograph on Jonah: "The appropriation in question was perfectly natural and proper. The devout breathings of God-inspired men have ever delighted to place themselves in accord with the sentiments of former witnesses of the truth, and to employ the language which is embalmed in their minds by the most hallowed associations. From the time especially that the Psalms began to have a place in the public service of the sanctuary, they were sure to become as household words to all pious Israelites, and could not fail both to influence the spirit and to mould the expression of their devotional utterances," of which he gives examples from the case of the apostles, Acts iv. 24-27, Rom. xi. 33-36, Rev. xv., and of our Lord Himself, Matt. xxvii. 46; Luke xxiii. 36. He goes on to say, "And that Jonah, whose case and circumstances were altogether so peculiar, should throw himself back upon the somewhat similar experience of former saints, and make, as far as possible, their language his own, was so natural and befitting, that instead of calling into suspicion the genuineness of his prayer, it should rather be regarded as a proof of verisimilitude. He found it a relief that even the figurative language of others so exactly suited his case, while the thoughts and language alike became his own, when nothing else would suit. Then the Psalms employed—cxx. 1 [and xviii. 6], for first clause of ver. 2; xlii. 7, for last clause of ver. 3; xxxi. 22, for first clause of ver. 4; lxix. 1 [and xviii. 5], for first clause of ver. 5; cxlii. 3 [or cxliii. 4], for first clause of ver. 7; xxxi. 6, for ver. 8; iii. 8, for the last clause of ver. 9—can with no probability be shown to be later than the time of Jonah (most of them, indeed, belonging to the earliest period of Psalmic literature); and, what is not less important, the language is not slavishly copied, but is used with such slight variations as would naturally be employed by one who was freely adapting to his own spiritual use existing Scriptures, not stringing together a set of passages for a literary purpose. Thus, instead of 'the waters are come in,' Jonah says, 'the waters compassed me about;' instead of 'I am cut off from before thine eyes,' he has, 'I am cast out from before thine eyes;' instead of 'I hate them that observe lying vanities,' he has, 'They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy,' etc. Such things bear on them the impress of reality." It is not possible to trace these resemblances and changes thoroughly except in the original language.

FIFTH. A question has been raised about his prophecy not being fulfilled. This has to do with a wider question, which need not be

discussed at length in connection with this little book. It is enough to note one or two points. (1) The teaching of Scripture in regard to the fulfilment of prediction contemplates two cases. A false prophet, *speaking in the name of other gods* and in the interests of idolatry, might give a sign or a wonder which came to pass; nevertheless this was a case of open revolt from the subjection due to Jehovah, the God of Israel, who was merely letting the fidelity of the people be put to the proof, Deut. xiii. 1-5. On the other hand, when a man came *speaking in the name of Jehovah*, if the thing did not follow nor come to pass, this was the thing which Jehovah had not spoken, it had been spoken presumptuously by the prophet without authority from God, Deut. xviii. 21, 22. (2) All prophecy is not prediction; it may not affirm positively what is to happen; it may be simply instruction in the way of life or of death, setting the true issues of conduct before men for the purposes of warning and encouragement. And this is the very purpose of many a message by the prophets; see Jer. xviii. 1-12. Indeed, a very instructive passage occurs in the history of the sin of the golden calf at Horeb, when Jehovah said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiff-necked people: now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them; and I will make of thee a great nation." The strong faith of Moses finds a foothold in these very words of apparent prediction; since Jehovah addresses him, "Therefore let me alone," he refuses to be let alone, and pleads successfully in connection with the implied condition which he brings into prominence. Jonah's prophecy of the destruction of Nineveh must be taken in the light of what is recorded about Moses and Jeremiah. (3) There is indeed room for doubting whether we actually have the very message which was entrusted to Jonah. We read in i. 2, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me." And in iii. 2, "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." As yet we have not the message. It is only at iii. 4 that we read of his crying and saying, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Is it certain that this is fully and exactly what he was bid to say? Is it not a fragment, the most striking portion? Is it unlikely that there was a condition expressed or suggested, that repentance might perhaps save them? Certainly at i. 9 we have a saying of his very greatly shortened, the essential part being referred to only at ver. 10. (4) Above all, the form of Jonah's statement is peculiar; there is no tense expressed in the original; it is the participle, as if any one might say, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh overthrown!" It certainly comes much short of "Nineveh shall be overthrown;" when for convenience we supply a verb, "will be" might be nearer, pointing to the natural result, if nothing interfered to prevent such a consummation. Observe the very important difference between "shall" in the Authorized Version and "will" in the Revised, Matt. ix. 15; Mark ii. 20; Luke v. 35.

CHAP. I. 1 **N**OW the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the  
 2 son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh,  
 that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is  
 3 come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish  
 from the presence of the LORD; and he went down to Joppa,  
 and found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare  
 thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish  
 4 from the presence of the LORD. But the LORD sent out a  
 great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the

The introduction to the Book of Jonah has been very long, owing to the peculiarities of the book, which have been in this way handled more conveniently than if they had been taken up as occasion was given by the course of exposition. The exposition itself will be shortened in a corresponding degree.

FIRST. The first mission of Jonah, and its results, chap. i.

I. 1-3. *He is sent to Nineveh, but he attempts to flee to Tarshish.* The circumstances in which this command was given to Jonah have been considered in the Introduction, under the first head.

The extreme wickedness of Nineveh is set before us in language parallel to that used of Sodom, Gen. xviii. 21, whose doom, to be "overthrown,"—a word often applied to that catastrophe,—is now to be the doom of Nineveh also; see iii. 4. Jonah's perverse scheme for escaping the call to go eastwards by land to Nineveh, was to go westwards by sea to Tarshish, one of the most important of the colonies of Tyre, Tartessus in the south of Spain, which is often mentioned from Gen. x. 4 onwards; see especially 1 Kings x. 22; Isa. xxiii. 1, etc.; Ezek. xxvii. 12, 25. It would be absurd to imagine that Jonah expected to flee "*from the presence of Jehovah,*" in the sense of escaping from Him who is everywhere present,—a truth familiar to every prophet. But the prepositions are combined in a very full manner in the Hebrew, here twice, and at ver. 10; they might clumsily be translated, yet with an approach to exactness, "from being in the presence of," or "from being at the face of," or shorter, "from being before." It is, for instance, the same expression as that used of Cain (Gen. iv. 16) when he left the presence of Jehovah, who had been speaking with him. It is often used of persons or things which stood in the manifested presence of Jehovah, say at the tabernacle or temple, and went or were taken away, as in Jer. xxxiii. 18. As a prophet Jonah stood before Jehovah; this was the favourite expression of Elijah (1 Kings xvii. 1, etc.), to whose prophetic line Jonah may have belonged; but in his wilfulness and rebellion he went out from that presence.

Joppa was the best harbour on the coast of Palestine south of Tyre: it was natural that he should go there in search of a ship. And Providence seemed to favour him: only we have no right to think of Providence favouring us when we desert the known path of duty.

I. 4-10. *He falls asleep in the ship, is awakened by the tempest,*

- 5 sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god; and they cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it unto them. But Jonah was gone down into the innermost parts  
6 of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy god, if so be that God will think upon us, that  
7 we perish not. And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.  
8 Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; what is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?  
9 And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.  
10 Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, What is this that thou hast done? For the men knew that he fled  
11 from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea grew more and more tempestuous.  
12 And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my

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*and confesses his sin.* Jehovah's presence, though not His gracious presence, was manifested in the great wind He sent out (literally, perhaps, slung or hurled forth), and the mighty tempest that arose. The effect on the mariners, while using all means for their safety (comp. ver. 5 with Acts xxvii. 19, 38), was to send them each man to cry to his god. The worshipper of the living and true God, "the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land," as he at length was brought to declare to the others (ver. 9), was the only person unmoved, his conscience as well as his body being fast asleep; contrast his sleep with that of the Lord Jesus in the storm, Mark iv. 37-41.

Jonah's evil conscience must have forbidden him to fall in with the proposal of the shipmaster to call also upon his God. This may have led the mariners to suspect that he was the cause of the tempest; but even apart from this, the extremity of danger might lead them to appeal to divine guidance by casting lots. He was taken, and immediately he made a clean breast of it, confessing as frankly as Achan in Josh. vii.

I. 11-17. *They reluctantly cast him into the sea, where he is swallowed by a fish, while they are delivered, and express their thankfulness to Jehovah.* Jonah was asked by them what they must do; and he had no hesitation in answering, "cast me forth into the sea;" the verb is the one already used of sending forth the wind (ver. 4), and of casting forth the wares, ver. 5. But this they did only after making every effort to save him, yet without effect; and also after acknowledging the sovereignty of Jehovah, and earnestly entreating

13 sake this great tempest is upon you. Nevertheless the men rowed  
 14 hard to get them back to the land; but they could not: for the  
 15 sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. Wherefore  
 16 they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD,  
 17 we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not  
 upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it  
 15 pleased thee. So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the  
 16 sea: and the sea ceased from her raging. Then the men feared  
 the LORD exceedingly; and they offered a sacrifice unto the  
 17 LORD, and made vows. And the Lord prepared a great fish to  
 swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three  
 days and three nights.

CHAP. II. 1 Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the  
 2 fish's belly. And he said,

Him not to charge innocent blood upon them. The result was such  
 as to assure them that Jonah had spoken truly to them in the name  
 of Jehovah his God: "*They feared Jehovah exceedingly, and offered  
 a sacrifice*" on the spot, and they "*made vows*" for the future;  
 comp. Ps. cvii. 25-32, where alone again at ver. 30 (except in a figura-  
 tive sense, Prov. xxvi. 20) the verb "to be calm" occurs, as here at  
 vers. 11, 12. The "*raging*" of the sea (ver. 15) is an expression not  
 used again; it is as if there had been a person to be checked; comp.  
 our Lord's word on the Lake of Galilee, "Be still," literally, "Be  
 muzzled" (Mark iv. 39), followed by the great calm.

On the miracle of the great fish which Jehovah prepared to  
 swallow Jonah, in whose belly he lay three days and three nights,  
 see the third head of the Introduction, Division I. There seems good  
 evidence that sharks, which are common in the Mediterranean Sea,  
 attain the length of 25 feet, and that a man, and even a horse, has  
 been found inside a shark whole. The miracle, however, remains,  
 after any possible explanations and parallels, that Jonah either lived  
 on, or else died and was brought back to life in the belly of the fish.  
 "*Three days and three nights*" seems at first sight a very precise  
 statement: yet a comparison of Esth. iv. 16 with v. 1 suggests that  
 the expression may have been one not to be more strictly understood  
 than it is to be understood at Matt. xii. 40 in reference to our Lord's  
 stay in the grave for a part of three days.

SECOND. His prayer and his deliverance, chap. ii.

Most naturally we think of the prayer as made in the belly of the  
 fish; yet it is really a thanksgiving without any express confession  
 of sin, because Jonah's earliest exercise of soul is really past and  
 gone: he feels the life in him in this strange prison, and his faith (in  
 Jehovah *his God*, ver. 1) is convinced that he has passed from death  
 unto life, and that in God's good time he must come forth again to  
 the world. We are not to imagine the prayer was composed at some  
 particular moment, but rather that it is the sum of the thoughts and  
 feelings of his mind, when he knew that the worst was now over in

- I called by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD,  
 And he answered me ;  
 Out of the belly of hell cried I,  
*And thou heardest my voice.*
- 3 For thou didst cast me into the depth, in the heart of the seas,  
 And the flood was round about me ;  
 All thy waves and thy billows passed over me.
- 4 And I said, I am cast out from before thine eyes ;  
 Yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.
- 5 The waters compassed me about, even to the soul ;  
 The deep was round about me ;  
 The weeds were wrapped about my head.
- 6 I went down to the bottoms of the mountains ;  
 The earth with her bars *closed* upon me for ever:  
 Yet hast thou brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God.
- 7 When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD :  
 And my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.
- 8 They that regard lying vanities  
 Forsake their own mercy.
- 9 But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving ;  
 I will pay that which I have vowed.  
 Salvation is of the LORD.
- 10 And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon  
 the dry land.

that wondrous condition of existence ; however, the written form of it is no doubt to be dated from a time after his return to the world, just as a poet may leisurely write down a piece which he had virtually composed at an earlier time, in circumstances when he did not or could not write. See what has been said, under the fourth head of the Introduction, as to the connection between Jonah's prayer and the Book of Psalms.

The poem may be divided into four stanzas :—*First*, ver. 2, introductory. *Second*, vers. 3, 4, his sad condition, and his resolution to look toward God's holy temple. *Third*, vers. 5-7, much the same, yet fuller. *Fourth*, vers. 8, 9, the contrast between those who observe lying vanities, and thus forsake their own mercy, to whose condition his rebellion had indeed brought him perilously near, and himself when sacrificing and vowing to the God of his salvation, or religious services which he could not fail to offer, since even the heathen mariners had been led thus to sacrifice and vow to Jehovah, i. 16. In the stanzas of the Psalms we often find their division marked by a refrain, a word, or a phrase returning ; and so the second and third stanzas both end with the same words in Hebrew, "toward (or into) Thy holy temple." Holy men like Jonah, who lived in the northern kingdom of the Ten Tribes, no doubt always kept their eye upon the temple of Jehovah at Jerusalem, though political causes had led to sad corruptions of God's worship in that kingdom.

"*Jehovah spake unto the fish,*" in some way exerted an influence

CHAP. III. 1 And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second  
 2 time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto  
 3 it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto  
 Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was  
 4 an exceeding great city, of three days' journey. And Jonah began  
 to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet  
 5 forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. And the people of  
 Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on  
 sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.  
 6 And the tidings reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from  
 his throne, and laid his robe from him, and covered him with  
 7 sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he made proclamation and  
 published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his  
 nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste  
 8 anything; let them not feed, nor drink water: but let them be  
 covered with sackcloth, both man and beast, and let them cry  
 mightily unto God; yea, let them turn every one from his evil  
 9 way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knoweth  
 whether God will not turn and repent, and turn away from his

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on it, as He can make His voice heard throughout all nature; and the fish vomited out Jonah upon the dry land,"—it has been supposed, not very far from Joppa, where he had embarked; but we have no means of knowing.

THIRD. The second mission of Jonah, chap. iii.

III. 1-4. *He is again sent to Nineveh, and he goes and preaches.* His deliverance from the belly of the fish, as also from the raging sea, and, indeed, from all the consequences of his wilful sinning, brings with it a renewed call to his old duty, which is expressed in the beginning of iii. 2, in the same words as in i. 2, where the verb translated "cry" is the same that is now translated "preach," only the preposition is changed from "against" to "unto;" the two verses differ, however, in the end. On the size of Nineveh and Jonah's journey in it, see the Introduction, under the third head, iii. 2. Possibly he journeyed till near the end of the first day before he began any public preaching; and if so it has been conjectured that this brought him near the royal residence: but all this is left quite undetermined in the text of Scripture, which gives no details. "Forty days" is a period of time often mentioned in God's dealings: the Greek Septuagint Version reads "three days;" but we know of nothing to justify this reading. On the words which Jonah used, and the sense in which it is a prophecy, see the fifth head of the Introduction.

III. 5-9. *The Ninevites repent.* We are struck with the generally favourable reception given to Jonah's message; in fact, we have no hint of any opposition—they "believed God." See the second head of the Introduction for some considerations as to the influence which Jonah might exert, especially as a prophet from the dead sent to them; and also as to repentance being of value for certain purposes

10 fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, which he said he would do unto them; and he did it not.

CHAP. IV. 1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.

in this life, at least though we are unable to say how far it was spiritual and enduring.

This repentance seems to have been quick, general, and spontaneous; so that the people in some parts of the city had "*proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth,*" ver. 5, before the news reached the king, ver. 6; though, when it did reach him, he acted as his subjects had done, and his nobles co-operated with him. The marks of grief, extending to the very animals, surprise us; but parallels have been found in the classical writers. It is the same verb which is used for Jonah's preaching, vers. 2, 4; for the people's proclamation of a fast, ver. 5 (but not the king's, ver. 7); and for the crying mightily to God, ver. 8. The word for the king's decree, ver. 7, differs only in dialectic pronunciation from that which is used often in Daniel and Ezra, and we need not doubt that it was the technical word. Its ordinary meaning is "taste," the kindred verb in this sense occurs in ver. 7; but instead of "taste" being used metaphorically, as by us, in matters of beauty, it seems to have been used in a moral meaning for good sense or discretion, Prov. xi. 22, xxvi. 16, and 1 Sam. xxv. 33, Revised margin; and so it might come that a people living under a despot, whose decree could not be reversed, would reckon the royal decree the very embodiment of good sense. This decree really was sensible; its views in regard to a fast agree surprisingly with the lesson in Isa. lviii. And the faith which rested its repentance on the "who knoweth," in ver. 9, is much akin to that which is set forth in Joel ii. 14, which also is connected with a true fast.

III. 10. *God repents of the evil which He said He would do unto them.* This agreed with the feeling in the minds of the people, according to ver. 9. On the nature of their repentance something has been said under the third head of the Introduction, iii. 1. On the least favourable view that can be taken of it, it showed at least that the people were open to conviction and to religious impressions of faith, hope, and love: individuals surely would be saved; some purification of the national or social life would take place, according to vers. 8 and 10; and Nineveh was shown to be not yet ripe for destruction (like the Amorites in Abraham's day, Gen. xv. 16), as in fact it had a great work to do in the discipline of God's people, before itself should actually be "overthrown." It is to be observed that in all the dealings with Nineveh we read of "God," this more general divine name being suitable; but both before and after we read of "Jehovah" (in the English Bible "the LORD") in the dealings with Jonah, who belonged to the covenant people.

FOURTH. The final dealing with the prophet himself, chap. iv.

IV. 1-4. *He repines at Nineveh being spared.* This feeling certainly



- 2 And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I hastened to flee unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and full of compassion, slow to anger, and plenteous in  
 3 mercy, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me  
 4 to die than to live. And the LORD said, Doest thou well to be  
 5 angry? Then Jonah 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.

did not break out till the forty days, iii. 4, had expired, for till then he could not be certain how God would act; yet it may have been gathering strength all the time that his preaching was working repentance in the city. Of the nature of his feelings in reference to the sparing of the city, something has been said under the second head of the Introduction, Division I. These feelings were not new, they had been in his mind from the first, and had led him astray: "*therefore I was beforehand in fleeing unto Tarshish,*" ver. 2, margin. His convictions rested on the revealed character of Jehovah, as in Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7, with examples of repenting, as in Ex. xxxii. 6. This was taken up by one who might be a contemporary of Jonah, Joel ii. 13, 14, as already observed at iii. 9. See also Micah vii. 18; but this wish to die is expressed in language very much taken from that of Elijah, see 1 Kings xix. 4.

IV. 5-11. *He is reprovèd and instructed.* Jonah must have waited to see whether the overthrow of Nineveh was not merely deferred; and in his booth, placed perhaps on one of the ranges of hills to the east of the city, he could look down and see all that took place. The plant whose shade proved so grateful to him, as it ran over his booth, has been almost universally identified with one or other of two quite different plants. Jerome held that it was the *palma Christi*, *Ricinus*, or castor-oil plant, "a species of shrub, or small tree, having leaves like the vine, and producing a very dense shade, able to support itself on its own stem . . . ; in a wonderful way, if you cast it into the ground and assiduously cherish it, it quickly grows into a tree, and within a few days you suspect that to be a little tree which you had seen as a herb." His view has been very largely followed for a century now. But the Septuagint Greek version has given us the translation "gourd," in the special form of the colocynth: and this is the opinion which long secured general approval, and which is still approved by one so competent to judge as Dr. Thomson in *The Land and the Book*. He says: "It is very commonly used for trailing over temporary arbours. It grows with extraordinary rapidity. In a few days after it has fairly begun to *run*, the whole arbour is covered. It forms a shade absolutely impenetrable to the sun's rays even at noon-day. It flourishes best in the very hottest part of summer. And lastly, when injured or cut, it withers away with equal

6 And the LORD 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 evil case. So Jonah was exceeding glad because of the  
 7 gourd. But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the  
 8 next day, and it smote the gourd, that it withered. And it came  
 to pass, when the sun arose, that God prepared a sultry east wind ;  
 and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and  
 requested for himself that he might die, and said, It is better for  
 9 me to die than to live. And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well  
 to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry  
 10 even unto death. And the LORD said, Thou hast had pity on the  
 gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it  
 11 grow ; which came up in a night, and perished in a night : and  
 should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city ; wherein  
 are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern  
 between their right hand and their left hand ; and also much  
 cattle?

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rapidity." In any case, we can scarcely doubt that there was a miraculous element in its growth. Some remarks on this, on the verb "prepared," and on the peculiar divine name in ver. 6, may be found under the third head of the Introduction, Division I. There are indeed various things to be noted in regard to the divine name used throughout the book. It was observed on iii. 10 that Jehovah is the prevailing name ; but that the least distinctive name, God, is used in the dealings with the Ninevites, as it is in iv. 8 of the wind, and ver. 9 of God, asking Jonah the second time whether he did well to be angry ; which circumstance is the more noticeable, because in ver. 4 the same question is put by Jehovah. In ver. 7 it is God who prepares the worm ; yet the original makes this title somewhat more emphatic by joining to it the definite article. Perhaps we ought to compare the work done by this wind with the work of the wind sent forth by Jehovah at i. 4.

Jonah's anger was pronounced by him to be good ; but he was now condemned out of his own mouth. His sparing pity for the gourd contrasts painfully with his want of this feeling, which Jehovah had, for the great city, "great unto God," iii. 3, Revised margin. Its more than 120,000 children who could not discern between their right hand and their left, have been supposed by some to be all up to three years old ; by others, up to seven ; in the latter case they might be a fifth of the whole population. Such calculations upon the basis of a European city at present are very uncertain. "Jehovah is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works," Ps. cxlv. 9. He does care for oxen, yet unspeakably more for us, 1 Cor. ix. 9, 10. And these closing words, to which Jonah attempted no reply, open up views of His grace in Christ Jesus, which could scarcely be understood in the times of the Old Testament as we may and ought to understand them now.

## M I C A H.

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THE personal history of Micah is unknown to us, except what we learn from the title of the book, chap. i. 1 : namely, that he was a Morasthite, that is, a native of Moresheth-gath, as to which, see on chap. i. 14 ; and that his prophetic ministry was discharged under three successive kings, the second of whom was one of the most daringly ungodly, and the third was one of the best of the kings of the house of David. On occasion of the priests and prophets attempting to have Jeremiah put to death for prophesying of the imminent danger to the city and the temple of Jerusalem, the princes and the people defended him on account of his faithfulness. "Then rose up certain of the elders of the land, and spake to all the assembly of the people, saying, Micaiah the Morasthite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah, saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts : Zion shall be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest. Did Hezekiah, king of Judah, and all Judah put him at all to death ? Did he not fear Jehovah, and intreat the favour of Jehovah, and Jehovah repented him of the evil which He had pronounced against them ?" Jer. xxvi. 17-19. This testimony to Micah's life and work, to his faithfulness, and to the blessing attendant on his labours, is also evidence of the position which his prophecies held about 100 or 120 years afterwards.

His name is one that occurs in longer and shorter forms in several passages of the Old Testament : the shortest form is Micah, used in the titles of the book ; a longer form, Micaiah, is that used in Jer. xxvi. 18, which is the form (with a well-known but unessential fuller ending in Hebrew) of the prophet's name, 1 Kings xxii. 8-28. That solitary witness to the truth of Jehovah in the midst of Ahab's false prophets, who flattered their king as he went forth to war in the character of a defender of Israel against the nations, ended his testimony with the words, "Hear ye peoples, all of you," as he was led away to prison. It is the opinion of many, and I agree with them, that by using these same words to begin his prophecy, Micah indicated a certain unity between himself and his namesake in an older period. And this is confirmed by his speaking of his own time as if the times of Ahab and his father Omri had returned, chap. vi. 16 ; as well as by some

references, which serve to connect his prophecy with that passage in Kings : such as the lying spirit of the false prophets with whom he was compelled to struggle, chap. ii. 11 ; and the shame to which they should be put, chap. iii. 6, 7, compare 1 Kings xxii. 22-25 ; perhaps also the horns of iron, chap. iv. 13, compare 1 Kings xxii. 11.

The meaning of his name, Micaiah, "who is like Jehovah," is alluded to in chap. vii. 18, where see the remarks : his name might be the motto of his life, as no doubt the name of a prophet often was.

If the ministry of Micah extended over the whole of these three reigns, it might occupy sixty years, which is not in any way incredible ; but it might be not over twenty, of which the reign of Ahaz occupied sixteen years. In any case I cannot doubt that the written prophecy is a very short specimen, or summary, of what he taught by word of mouth. And the settlement of a controversy by the quotation of a prophecy of his with verbal exactness, in Jeremiah, suggests that the accuracy of the book was recognised by every one a century after Micah lived. There is nothing known about how it was reduced to writing : there is certainly nothing against the common opinion that Micah himself arranged it. In spite of objections which are approved by many, I adhere to the opinion that there are three sections in the book, chaps. i., ii. ; chaps. iii.-v. ; chaps. vi., vii. The beginning of each of these is marked by the same word in Hebrew, rendered "Hear," or "Hear ye," just as in three successive prophecies in Amos iii. 1, iv. 1, v. 1. To this is prefixed the second time, "And I said," iii. 1 ; and both the second and the third time is added a little word, rendered "I pray you," in iii. 1, and "now" in vi. 1. Thus arranged, each section begins with sadness and solemnity in the presence of abounding evil, which is denounced or bewailed ; and each ends with prophecies of deliverance, forgiveness, and cleansing ; the last of them also closing the book with an outburst of praise.<sup>1</sup>

The title has been often noticed as resembling the title of Isaiah's prophecies, only that an earlier king, Uzziah, is also mentioned by Isaiah, indicating that the two prophets laboured at the same time, yet that Isaiah commenced somewhat (perhaps only a year) earlier. Indeed, their resemblance is manifest in their writings : and the book of Micah, being vastly shorter, is often made plainer by reference to Isaiah. However, there are differences, which may be due in part, but only in part, to the length and shortness of the two books. We know a great deal of Isaiah's life, but nothing of Micah's. Isaiah introduces us repeatedly to the kings and rulers : Micah speaks of them more generally. Isaiah has much to say of the course of politics among his own people, and he has detailed judgements to pronounce on foreign nations, with whom Israel was brought into friendly or hostile contact. Micah does not exclude other nations from his view, chap. i. 1, but never goes into detail : his fullest prophecy being chap. iv. 1-5, of the coming time of universal blessing ; his most definite being against the great enemy of God's people at the time,

<sup>1</sup> See note at the end as to objections to this arrangement.

CHAP. I. 1 **T**HE word of the LORD that came to Micah the Morasthite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

- 2 Hear, ye peoples, all of you; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is: and let the Lord GOD be witness against you, the  
 3 Lord from his holy temple. For, behold, the LORD cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high  
 4 places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, as waters

Assyria, chap. v. 5, 6, preceded by the promise of the Saviour to be born at Bethlehem, ver. 2; his most severe, chap. v. 15, and his most comprehensive, noting both gain and loss to them from Israel, chap. v. 7, 8. But while Isaiah declares the proper objects of his vision to be "concerning Judah and Jerusalem," Micah makes his object somewhat wider, "concerning Samaria and Jerusalem." Of course Isaiah included Samaria; and both prophets included a great many other objects, while naming these as the chief or central ones.

#### FIRST SECTION, CHAP. I. 2-II. 13.

Universal judgement, coming especially on Samaria and Jerusalem. The sin and the misery of the people. The exile and the restoration.

I. 2-4. *A general call to judgement at the bar of God.* Ver. 2. "The peoples" are equivalent to "the earth and all that therein is," literally, "the earth and the fulness thereof," as Deut. xxxiii. 16; Ps. xxiv. 1. The opening clause is taken from I Kings xxii. 28, as to which see the Introduction. The call to hear, used by the prophet as his commencement in each section, is frequent in the prophets, especially Isaiah, who speaks of his message as the thing heard; see in the original, chap. xxviii. 9, 19, liii. 1. Especially does Isa. xxxiv. 1 resemble this commencement. The nations are chiefly, no doubt, witnesses of what Jehovah has to say to His people; yet they, too, are called to the bar; there is something against them also, as the whole world is sinful, and the nations are dealt with by the prophets for their sins against the people of God. Jehovah speaks "from His holy temple," where Amos had perhaps seen Jehovah standing for judgement, Amos ix. 1, and to which Jonah looked, Jonah ii. 4, 7, and where Isaiah had seen Jehovah in his wonderful vision, Isa. vi. 1, where at ver. 3 "the fulness of the earth" comes in, as here. Ver. 3. He "will tread upon the high places of the earth," as He is described in Amos iv. 13; the highest places (the expression in Hebrew is somewhat different from the "high places," ver. 5, where idolatrous services were rendered) being not at all too high for Him, since He can even make His servants ride upon them, Deut. xxxii. 13; Isa. lviii. 14; and see Hab. iii. 19; for, when He treads upon these, He "cometh forth out of His place, and will come down," as He came

5 that are poured down a steep place. For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria? and what are the high places of Judah? are they not Jerusalem? Therefore I will make Samaria as an heap of the field, and as the plantings of a vineyard: and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will discover the foundations thereof. And all her graven images shall be beaten to pieces, and all her hires shall be burned with fire, and all her idols will I lay desolate: for of the hire of an

down for judgement at the tower of Babel and at Sodom, Gen. xi. 5, xviii. 21. Ver. 4. And at His coming all nature is moved; "*the mountains shall be molten, . . . as wax before the fire,*" and "*the valleys shall be cleft,*" as when their "*waters are poured down a steep place;*" for so the four clauses may be used to throw light on each other, as in our poetry the first and third lines may rhyme, and the second and fourth. Such descriptions occur more or less in Isa. xxxiv. 3, Ps. xviii. 6-9, lxviii. 2, 8, all perhaps referring back to Judg. v. 4, 5.

I. 5-7. *This disturbance of nature at the presence of Jehovah testifies to sin, especially in God's people.* It had been so in that first case, Gen. iii. 8, 10. But the nations now drop out of sight, as Jacob and the house of Israel engross the prophet's attention. And even a greater concentration of his attention takes place; for "*the transgression of Jacob*" is pronounced to be "*Samaria,*" in which the larger part of the national life found its suitable expression, which is explained at ver. 7; and the "*high places*" (a noun somewhat different from that in ver. 3) "*of Judah*" are "*Jerusalem.*" These two cities, the capitals of the rival kingdoms of the Ten Tribes and the Two, are seen to be the two centres and sources of pollution and guilt for the whole land and people: sad to say, from the time of Solomon there were and continued to be high places of Judah in Jerusalem as bad as any in the Ten Tribes; see 2 Kings xxiii. 13. He begins with Samaria, which one of the ablest of the men who successively seized the throne and founded dynasties had selected as the capital of his kingdom, 1 Kings xvi. 24: travellers speak in the highest terms of the beauty and other natural advantages of the site, though it is now the utter ruin which Micah foretells. Ver. 6. "*I will discover the foundations thereof,*" not one stone left upon another, as our Lord said of the temple, that shall not be thrown down: this would be the end of the "*heap of the field;*" to which condition he afterwards prophesies that Jerusalem also shall be reduced, chap. iii. 12. In the meantime, however, he confines himself to Samaria, whose sins had been more gross and constant, and whose judgement was on the point of being accomplished by the Assyrians, 2 Kings xvii. 5, 6. "*Discover*" is a verb used repeatedly to describe the disgraceful exposure of the human person, which may naturally lead on to the description of idolatry as spiritual adultery. Ver. 7. "*All her graven images shall be beaten to pieces, and all her hires shall be burned with fire,*" much as Moses dealt with the golden calf, Deut. ix. 21. The ill-

harlot hath she gathered them, and unto the hire of an harlot  
 8 shall they return. For this will I wail and howl, I will go  
 stripped and naked : I will make a wailing like the jackals, and a  
 9 mourning like the ostriches. For her wounds are incurable : for  
 it is come even unto Judah ; it reacheth unto the gate of my  
 10 people, even to Jerusalem. Tell it not in Gath, weep not at all :

gotten gains shall perish, as such things often do, in the righteous retribution of God's providence : "*the hire of an harlot*" is an expression to which in this sense currency had been given in Hos. ii. 12, ix. 1, though going back to Deut. xxiii. 18.

I. 8, 9. *This sinfulness, with its consequent judgement, overwhelms the prophet.* He loses all control over his feelings, and breaks out, "*For this will I wail and howl*" with "*mourning*;" such passionate expressions of grief as men used in mourning for the dead, though more like wild beasts and birds, "*jackals and . . . ostriches*:" for these creatures, compare Isa. xiii. 21, 22, xxxiv. 13, xliii. 20; and for mourning like their cries, Job xxx. 29. "*I will go stripped and naked*," representing his people, and in sympathy with them when exposed to going into captivity and exile; compare Isaiah walking naked and barefoot, for a sign to the Egyptians and Ethiopians in similar case, Isa. xx. 3, 4. Ver. 9. "*My people*" is repeatedly found in Micah, here and ii. 4, 8, 9, iii. 3, 5, vi. 3, 5, 16. Why so violently excited? "*For her wounds are incurable*:" both the noun and the adjective occur in Jer. xxx. 12, 15, xv. 18, at the time when the execution of judgement was to be deferred no longer. Micah, like other prophets in their visions, may have had little knowledge of the nearness or remoteness in point of time; but, so far as place was concerned, "*it is come even unto Judah, it reacheth unto the gate of my people, even unto Jerusalem.*" His language is forcible: the verb "*it is come*" passing into the stronger "*reacheth*" (as Jonah iii. 6 in the Revised), literally "*toucheth*;" and the strongest preposition "*even unto*" being used three times in the original. "*The gate of my people*" might be said, perhaps, of the gate of any walled city, as the well-known place of meeting for business and administration of justice, and organization for defence; but it could be especially said of the capital, to which the people from every part of the kingdom resorted, Ps. lxxxvii. 2, cxxii. 2.

I. 10-16. *The particulars of lamentation over approaching exile.* The violence of grief has so far spent itself in inarticulate wailing and mourning. Now, to recall from this weeping, he begins a lamentation in articulate words, "*Tell it not in Gath*," a clause which he borrows from David's lamentation over the death of Saul and Jonathan at the disastrous battle of Gilboa, 2 Sam. i. 20; for, indeed, a similar, yet sorer calamity, was now pressing on the people of God, which might tempt the Philistines to break forth into renewed rejoicings; see Isaiah, chap. xiv. 29-32, when he warns his own people against despair, as well as the Philistines against idle triumphing. But the exact translation and the interpretation of the following verses pre-

- 11 at Beth-le-Aphrah have I rolled myself in the dust. Pass ye away, O inhabitant of Shaphir, in nakedness and shame: the inhabitant of Zaanan is not come forth; the wailing of Beth-azel  
 12 shall take from you the stay thereof. For the inhabitant of Maroth waiteth anxiously for good: because evil is come down  
 13 from the LORD unto the gate of Jerusalem. Bind the chariot to the swift steed, O inhabitant of Lachish: she was the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion; for the transgressions of  
 14 Israel were found in thee. Therefore shalt thou give a parting gift to Moresheth-Gath: the houses of Achzib shall be a deceitful  
 15 thing unto the kings of Israel. I will yet bring unto thee, O inhabitant of Mareshah, him that shall possess thee: the glory of  
 16 Israel shall come even unto Adullam. Make thee bald, and poll thee for the children of thy delight: enlarge thy baldness as the eagle; for they are gone into captivity from thee.

sent serious difficulties. FIRST of all, the places seem to be named on some principle of a play of words with their names, such as was intelligible to the prophet's countrymen, and was apparently relished by them, but which needs laborious explanation to us. "*Beth-le-aphrah*" is "a house of dust," as in the margin, in which the prophet had rolled himself, in token of deepest sorrow. "*Shaphir*" means "fair, comely;" but its inhabitants (represented collectively as a female, according to a common Hebrew idiom) were to "*pass away in nakedness and shame.*" "*Zaanan*" probably means "a going forth;" but the inhabitant "is not come forth," whether moved by shame, like the last, or by fear. "*Beth-azel*," that is, "the house or place in the neighbourhood," was, in its wailing, to "*take from you the stay*" (or, *standing place*) "*thereof*," perhaps to fail them as a resting-place, or as a support in trouble. "*Maroth*," that is, "bitter;" "*waiteth anxiously*" (or, *is in travail*) "*for good*," "*because evil was come down from Jehovah*" unto the very capital of the kingdom. "*Lachish*" is of less certain etymology; but by the common change of the letter L into the kindred letter R, we get a word for a "*swift steed*," to which the chariot should be bound, not it to the chariot, as if to let this steed hurry the fugitives whithersoever it pleased. "*Moresheth-Gath*" is obscure, yet might be "the betrothed of Gath," which was not to be protected, but to be surrendered to the enemy with a parting gift. "*Achzib*" is "lying, deceitful," practically the same word as in Jer. xv. 18: hopes connected with it were delusive. "*Mareshah*," meaning "a possession," should meet with a conqueror who should take possession of it, as is said again in Jer. viii. 10. The etymology of *Adullam* is doubtful, but it may be named because the cave of Adullam was the hiding-place of David and his friends. SECONDLY. The places do not seem to be mentioned because of their intrinsic importance, but largely for the sake of this play upon words. Some of them mentioned only here are, with more or less probability, identified with other places resembling them in Hebrew: Beth-le-Aphrah with Ophrah in Benjamin, Josh. xviii. 23, 1 Sam. xiii. 17;



CHAP. II. 1 Woe to them that devise iniquity and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in 2 the power of their hand. And they covet fields, and seize them; and houses, and take them away; and they oppress a man and

Shaphir with Shamir, Josh. xv. 48; Zaanan with Zenan, Josh. xv. 37; Beth-ezel with Azel, Zech. xiv. 5, which text apparently speaks of a spot or town near Jerusalem; Maroth with Maarath, Josh. xv. 59, six or seven miles north of Hebron; Achzib, Josh. xv. 44, with Chezib, Gen. xxxviii. 5. But the situation of these places, and of Moresbeth-Gath, is really not known, unless, perhaps, Ophrah, Maarath, and Achzib; and nothing is known about them, except that Micah was born at Moresbeth, ver. 1. An allusion to Lachish, as bringing the sins of Israel to Zion, is unexplained by anything in the history recorded. It seems certain that Lachish, Mareshah, and Adullam lay near each other on the frontier of Judah toward the Philistines. THIRD. There are ten places named here; ten may be the number of completeness, telling of complete destruction, since the chapter ends with a call to mourning, the token of which was to be cutting off the hair (see Jer. vii. 29, xvi. 6, any disregard to ceremonial law notwithstanding, see Deut. xiv. 1, now that God cast them off) and becoming bald, on account of the exile of her children,—an unexpected evil, according to the intimation in ver. 12, and one reaching to the very gate of Jerusalem. And the conjecture is plausible that the first five were north of Jerusalem and the last five south of it, so that the names indicate something of the course of the advance of the invader; the list of names has therefore been compared with that in Isa. x. 28–32. FOURTHLY. Some make twelve cities instead of ten, by taking the houses of Achzib to contain a reference to the northern Achzib, Josh. xix. 29, between Tyre and Accho; and they find Accho in ver. 10 by a change of reading. This does not approve itself to me; but it would leave the general meaning unaltered.

II. 1–3. *The prevailing gross sins.* Ver. 1. "Woe to them," etc., a frequent word in the prophets; see Nah. iii. 1; Hab. ii. 6, 9, 12, 15, 19; Zeph. ii. 5; Isa. (though sometimes translated, *Ho*, with or without a marginal note) x. 5, xxix. 1, xxx. 1, xxxi. 1, xxxiii. 1, when beginning a prophecy; or even in shorter divisions of one discourse, for instance, v. 8, 11, 18, etc.; in these latter cases the matter of the discourse may be compared with Micah's. He deals both with the devices of the heart and with the execution of it; they "*devise . . . upon their beds*," as in Ps. xxxvi. 4; but they execute deliberately, "*when the morning is light*," "*because it is in the power of their hands*," for so they abuse the opportunities and influence and authority which God has given them. Ver. 2. Their first sin is that "*they covet*" their neighbour's "*fields . . . and houses*," breaking the tenth commandment; it is a further step in sin that they "*seize them . . . and take them away*;" see Isa. v. 8. We can scarcely doubt that here, as in the passages of Isaiah, chap. v., mentioned above, the breach of the remarkable land laws given in Lev.

3 his house, even a man and his heritage. Therefore thus saith the LORD: Behold, against this family do I devise an evil, from which ye shall not remove your necks, neither shall ye walk  
4 haughtily; for it is an evil time. In that day shall they take up a parable against you, and lament with a doleful lamentation, and say, We be utterly spoiled: he changeth the portion of my people: how doth he remove *it* from me! to the rebellious he divideth our  
5 fields. Therefore thou shalt have none that shall cast the line by

xxv. is denounced. This is confirmed as we read on, "*They oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage,*" and compare it with Naboth's reply to Ahab, which cost him both his vineyard and his life and the lives of his sons, "Jehovah forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee," 1 Kings xxi. 3; for "inheritance" and "heritage" represent the same Hebrew word. Those laws, which no uninspired legislator has been able to copy and apply to practice, so long as they were obeyed, secured to Israel a contented and united people: when they were disregarded and overthrown, the terrible questions arose in Israel, regarding property and poverty, which have so often in all countries convulsed society and paralysed government. For God's justice has a punishment in kind, which ensures righteous retribution. Ver. 3. "*Therefore . . . against this family do I devise an evil,*" His devising is the counterpart of theirs in ver. 1, from which no efforts of theirs, and no haughtiness will "*remove your necks . . . ; for it is an evil time,*"—a clause borrowed from Amos v. 13, where that prophet had been rebuking similar sins. From Amos, at chap. iii. 1, the expression "*this family*" may also have come.

II. 4, 5. *Their miserable condition in consequence.* Ver. 4. This will be plain to all men, who "*shall take up a parable against them,*" if their feelings be hostile; or if they feel more compassionately, then they shall "*lament with a doleful lamentation,*" for which latter words very good authorities prefer to translate, as in the margin, "*shall lament with the lamentation, It is done.*" Anyhow, this is the fact: the execution of divine judgement shall be undeniable. They shall say, "*We be utterly spoiled: he changeth the portion of my people: how doth he remove it from me! to the rebellious he divideth our fields,*" as had been said at chap. i. 15. All these verbs except the first may be equally well rendered either in the present or in the future, as the new condition of things, from this time and so forward, is contrasted with the past. The words have all the obscurity which is permitted in a "parable," but the translation brings out the meaning. Observe that "the portion of my people" is rightly understood to be the land of promise, see Amos vii. 4, and Revised margin; to "change" the portion is to exchange it, bringing in new occupants, and these rebellious, for there is no Joshua to divide (the verb answers to the noun "portion") their fields anew to Israel; on the contrary, he removes their portion, after having warned them in ver. 3 that they should be unable to remove their necks from the evil. Ver. 5. What a contrast to the transaction

6 lot in the congregation of the LORD. Prophecy ye not, *thus* they  
 prophesy. They shall not prophesy to these: reproaches shall  
 7 not depart. Shall it be said, O house of Jacob, Is the spirit of  
 the LORD straitened? are these his doings? Do not my words  
 8 do good to him that walketh uprightly? But of late my people  
 is risen up as an enemy; ye strip the robe from off the garment  
 9 from them that pass by securely *as men* averse from war. The  
 women of my people ye cast out from their pleasant houses; from

recorded in Josh. xviii. 8-10! The sentence acknowledged by themselves to be executed, ver. 4, and now the repetition of it by the prophet in his Master's name, remind us of the closing words in the parable of the vineyard and the wicked husbandmen, Matt. xxi. 41, 43. Luke indeed, chap. xx. 16, adds their final rejoinder "God forbid!" But this, too, has its parallel in ver. 6.

II. 6, 7. *Their wish to gag the true prophets.* They cannot endure to have the truth spoken to them; therefore they would gladly silence the prophets of Jehovah, as Micah's namesake was silenced by Ahab, and as Amos was silenced by the priest of Bethel, Amos vii. 13 (also ver. 16, where the peculiar word for prophesying, "Drop," is used, as it is here both in ver. 6 and ver. 11), and as a similar silencing is mentioned in Isa. xxx. 10, 11; Amos ii. 12. Such treatment had been experienced by prophets even at the hands of earlier kings of David's line, 2 Chron. xvi. 10, xxiv. 21, xxv. 16. Such violence done to the message and the messengers of Jehovah recoils on those who are guilty of doing it: in anger, he says, they shall be left undisturbed till shame and ruin overtake them, like those of whom he spoke to Ezek. xxxiii. 1-9, who refused to hear the watchman's warning, whose blood should be upon their own head. Ver. 7. The opening words are peculiar, and one may well hesitate between the Revised text and the margin, which is the Authorized; but the general sense is not much altered either way. It might be a question among the unworthy members of the house of Jacob (see i. 5) whether the Spirit of Jehovah was straitened in power, or perhaps, as in the margin, was shortened and angrily impatient. There was anger, there was straitening; but the straitening was in themselves, see 2 Cor. vi. 12; Mal. iii. 10; otherwise the anger might be turned away, see Isa. xxvii. 2-6. The promises of God were as abundant and as true as ever; and it was not "*His doings*," but their own, according to Isa. l. 1, 2. "*Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?*" For the rule of providence had been long ago expressed plainly by David, Ps. xviii. 20-27.

II. 8, 9. *Their cruelty to others better than themselves.* The particular application of these sentences is unknown to us at present. But in general the prophet declares that violence is prevalent, even against women and young children; that it is done "*of late*," literally, yesterday; that it is done to those "*that pass by securely as men averse from war*," in which, among God's people, incidents of unexpected misery, and exceptionally of still less expected kindness,

10 their young children ye take away my glory for ever. Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest: because of uncleanness that  
 11 destroyeth, even with a grievous destruction. If a man walking in wind and falsehood do lie, *saying*, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people.

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are recorded in 2 Chron. xxv. 10, 13, xxviii. 5-15. Probably he hints that there is worse than temporary misery, that both spoilers and spoiled are to be driven into exile, since "*ye take away my glory for ever*" from these children (as David complained, "they have driven me out this day, that I should not cleave unto the inheritance of Jehovah," 1 Sam. xxvi. 19); so it is of exile that Micah had spoken, i. 16, "the children of thy delight," where the noun is the word translated here by an adjective, *pleasant*.

II. 10, 11. *Exile, not without hope for the faithful among the faithless.* What may have been hinted is now openly stated. Ver. 10. Sin makes it impossible that this should be "*your rest*" or resting-place, — a favourite word with Isa. xi. 10, lxvi. 1, of God and His Christ, and xxviii. 12, xxxii. 18, of His people, to whom that prophet again and again speaks of giving rest. But Canaan cannot be this rest, Josh. xxi. 44, when it is no longer the holy land: "*this is not your rest: because of uncleanness that destroyeth, with a grievous destruction;*" it is like the house incurably affected with leprosy, which must be broken down. It is impossible to reproduce in English Micah's play upon the word which means here "destruction," but in ver. 5 "the line." "*Arise ye, and depart,*" might be a threatening to the wicked; however, the similar exhortations in Isa. lii. 11, John xiv. 31, suggest what better suits the context, that it is a word of consolation to those who are spoken of in ver. 9 as driven out; it says that their exile is from a polluted land, and that a better prospect awaits them, if they only have faith and patience; see vers. 12, 13, and compare the symbol of good and bad figs in Jer. xxiv. Ver. 11. But faith and patience are not to be found in the mass of the people. The prophet to their taste would be "*a man walking in wind and falsehood:*" here again it is impossible to reproduce the play upon a word which means "the Spirit," but also "the wind," such as carried away these empty liars and boasters (as "Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation," Hos. xii. 1), and made them lie like those who had the lying spirit in them, which induced them to resist Micah's namesake in the days of Ahab, 1 Kings xxii. 22-26. Lying had indeed more or less been found in the prophets of the Ten Tribes from the beginning, 1 Kings xiii. 18; but it seems that Isaiah and Micah had so severe a struggle with such unworthy prophets, as to force on them the conviction that the Two Tribes were now sinking into the same state of spiritual degradation; as to which, again, see iii. 11. These lying prophets betrayed their own real character by the character of their message, "*I will prophesy unto thee of wine and*

- 12 I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah: as a flock in the midst of their pasture, they shall make  
 13 great noise by reason of *the multitude of men*. The breaker is gone up before them: they have broken forth and passed on to the

*of strong drink;*" see the description in Isa. xxviii. 7, 8, not forgetting the spiritual drunkenness which followed as a judgement upon the prophets and the people who loved such ministrations, Isa. xxix. 9-12.

II. 12, 13. *The glorious deliverance by means of a new exodus.* This joyful deliverance from sin and sorrow by the manifestation of Jehovah, was to come as suddenly as in other prophecies, though not without hints to those who waited for redemption, as we have seen in vers. 9, 10. Ver. 12. "*I will surely assemble . . . I will surely gather,*" as he repeats at chap. iv. 6, and as the prophets often speak, who had to deal with the actually dispersed of Israel, or those in near prospect of dispersion; the language goes back upon the old promise in Deut. xxx. 3, 4. Micah may have had in his mind especially Hos. i. 11, with which the entire prediction here accords. For he makes it quite clear that the Ten Tribes are not left out in this expression by "*O Jacob, all of thee,*" as indeed might be expected from the comprehensiveness of chap. i. 5. And yet those who are gathered are only "*the remnant of Israel,*" of which remnant he speaks again, chaps. v. 7, 8, vii. 18; and a word in a slightly different form is used in the teaching of Isa. x. 21, 22, that "though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, [only] a remnant of them shall return;" see at Zeph. ii. 7. In thus gathering them He will show Himself as the shepherd of Israel, Isa. xl. 11, for "*I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah: as a flock in the midst of their pasture.*" Except in the account of the primitive history of Edom in Gen. xxxvi. 33, Bozrah is named only by Micah here and by two fellow-prophets, Amos i. 12, Isa. xxxiv. 6, lxiii. 1, when they are denouncing judgement on Edom; this suggestion that Micah makes has a similar purpose here, asserting superiority over the flock of Bozrah, which had been often in bitter rivalry with the flock of Zion and hostility to it. And there is a rare emphatic definiteness in the Hebrew, perhaps as if we rendered it, "in that pasture of theirs," or "in their own pasture." So Ezek. xxxv. and xxxvi. works out the destruction of Edom, which had meant to swallow up the peculiar possession of Israel, where Jehovah ever was, and was guarding it for them. No wonder that "*they shall make a great noise by reason of [the multitude of] men,*" when Jerusalem should again be as Isa. xxii. 2 described it, using a kindred word, "full of shoutings, a tumultuous city, a joyous town." Ver. 13. Jehovah is Himself "*the breaker,*" breaking every yoke and bar, and bursting open every place of confinement, so that His people are free from their imprisonment and exile; "*they have broken forth,*" where the breaker who is their leader has been on their behalf, "*and passed on to the gate, and gone out thereat,*" as we see also in Isa. lxii. 10, 11. They are no fugitives, escaping in disorder as best

gate, and are gone out thereat : and their king is passed on before them, and the LORD at the head of them.

CHAP. III. 1 And I said, Hear, I pray you, ye heads of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel : is it not for you to know  
2 judgement? who hate the good, and love the evil; who pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones ;  
3 who also eat the flesh of my people ; and they flay their skin from off them, and break their bones : yea, they chop them  
4 in pieces, as for the pot, and as flesh within the caldron. Then shall they cry unto the LORD, but he will not answer them : yea,

they may, but a victorious army in perfect order ; “ *and their king is passed on before them, and Jehovah at the head of them ;*” as at the exodus, of which this is a repetition, Jehovah marched at the head of Israel. The whole description is parallel to Isa. lii. 10-12 ; and it is in contrast to their apparently forsaken condition under the king of Babylon, who “ let not loose his prisoners to their home,” Isa. xiv. 17. Inasmuch as Micah brings in Messiah in the next section, there can be no objection, if the interpreter sees fit, to distinguish the king here from Jehovah, whose servant and representative he would then be, as in the description of the same deliverance, Isa. xlix. 5, 6. But see also the passage already referred to, Isa. lxiii. 1-6.

#### SECOND SECTION, CHAPS. III.-V.

The ruin of the state and of the temple : its restoration, and the universal reign of righteousness and peace, under Messiah, born at Bethlehem, at the end of a period of exile, suffering, and degradation. His victories abroad, his purifying chastisements at home.

III. 1-3. *Repetition of the charges of violence, cruelty, and oppression* in chap. ii. 1, 2, 8, 9. This repetition is suggested to the reader by the opening words, “ *And I said.*” The language is perhaps more severe, as if it charged those men with being cannibals, “ *who eat the flesh of my people,*” etc. ; again, with being more like Satan than men, “ *who hate the good, and love the evil,*” much like those in Isa. v. 20 ; and with guilt peculiarly aggravated laid against them, because “ *the heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel*” are directly addressed, who acted in flagrant defiance of the duties of their office so that he asks, “ *is it not for you to know judgement ?*” The word, here translated “ rulers ” is not very common, though it is found in Joshua, Judges, and Proverbs, and in Isa. i. 10, “ rulers of Sodom,” when addressing perhaps the same persons ; also at iii. 6, 7, xxii. 3. The call with which this section begins (as it has been already noticed that all the three sections begin so) is *Hear*, which, however, the people addressed will not consent to do.

III. 4. *The useless cry to Jehovah.* There will indeed come a time when anguish and terror may extort a cry from them to Jehovah ; but “ *He will not answer them,*” in accordance with the solemn

he will hide his face from them at that time, according as they  
 5 have wrought evil in their doings. Thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that make my people to err; that bite with their teeth and cry, Peace; and whoso putteth not into their  
 6 mouths, they even prepare war against him: Therefore it shall be night unto you, that ye shall have no vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down upon the prophets, and the day shall be black over them.  
 7 And the seers shall be ashamed, and the diviners confounded; yea, they shall all cover their lips: for there is no answer of

threatenings, Prov. i. 28; these rulers might perhaps recollect the mournful confession of the first king of Israel, 1 Sam. xxviii. 15. The cause of this is always cherished sin, "*according as they have wrought evil in their doings,*" compare Isa. i. 15, lix. 1, 2; whereas they had heard the appeal to them already, ii. 7, "Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?" Such descriptions and warnings might well be uttered by the prophet in the wicked reign of Ahaz, or even under the comparatively good king Jotham (chap. i. 1), in whose time it is recorded, "And the people did yet corruptly," 2 Chron. xxvii. 2.

III. 5-7. *The false prophets and their punishment.* Ver. 5. The corrupt people and their wicked rulers were led on and encouraged by "*the prophets that make my people to err,*" an expression also used in Isa. iii. 12, ix. 15, 16, this latter passage showing what blind and destructive guides they were. They "*bite with their teeth,*" as the rulers did, vers. 2, 3, this biting being properly that of serpents: their low aim in getting hearers is seen by this, "*whoso putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him,*" literally, "sanctify war," or prepare a holy war, denouncing that he shall not have the peace which they promised, as in Isa. xiii. 3; Joel iii. 9; Jer. vi. 4. They had been exposed in similar terms at chap. ii. 11. Vers. 6, 7. Their punishment should be double: first, helplessness, "*ye shall have no vision . . . ye shall not divine;*" and secondly, disgrace, in consequence of having "*no answer of God,*" as already threatened in ver. 4, they "*shall be ashamed and . . . confounded; yea, they shall cover their lips,*" a phrase borrowed from the law of the leper who was to do this, and cry out against himself, "Unclean, unclean," Lev. xiii. 45, to which there was probably an allusion at ii. 10. Strictly speaking, it seems that it was the upper lip which they covered; Ezek. xxiv. 17, 22 speaks of this not being done in one case of overwhelming grief, yet as if it was remarkable not to do it. We read here of "*prophets,*" vers. 5, 6, and of "*seers,*" ver. 6, as we do in a very similar context, Isa. xxix. 10; we learn from 1 Sam. ix. 9, "He that is now called a prophet was beforetime called a seer." Yet, since both names are found often together, I think the distinction has been rightly explained to be that "prophet" came to be restricted to those who held the prophetic office, and gave themselves to it as the business of their life; whereas the "seer" might have visions

8 God. But I truly am full of power by the spirit of the LORD, and of judgement, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin. Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel, that ye do not abhor judgement, and pervert all equity. They build up Zion

more or less frequently, but did not hold the office, being habitually engaged in other occupations. Both prophets and seers, however, professed simply to wait on God, and to hear His word; but along with them are named "*diviners*," vers. 6, 7, which the prophets might degrade themselves by becoming, ver. 11; these were men who used incantations and other unlawful means, whether they professed to adhere to Jehovah the God of Israel, or whether they openly went after idols. Hos. iii. 4 threatens that lawful and unlawful means of drawing near to God shall all alike be withdrawn from Israel.

III. 8. *The effective equipment of the true prophet.* "But I truly," a very strong adversative conjunction; we might render, "But I, on the contrary," the very opposite of those false prophets (who are filled with wine, ii. 11, compare Eph. v. 18), "*am full of power by the Spirit of Jehovah.*" In some way the true prophets had a full assurance that it was the Holy Spirit who spoke in and by them, in sharpest contrast with those "that prophesy out of their own heart," Ezek. xiii. 2, 3, to whom Ezekiel brought the message, "Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing." See also Jer. xxiii. 16, etc. The effect of Micah's being filled by the Spirit was, that he was "*full of power . . . and of judgement, and of might;*" through this manliness and equipment of mind for the spiritual warfare, he could "*declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin;*" so Jeremiah and Ezekiel were remarkably enabled to do, at a time when evil was still more rampant, and false prophets were still more daring than in Micah's time, and prophesied peace as his opponents did; for instance, Jer. xxviii., especially vers. 8, 9, 16; Ezek. xiii. 8-16. We see from Isa. lviii. 1, that Micah's great contemporary needed strength for the same work; and the need of it was the first lesson that had to be learned by the child Samuel, who became the leader of the long line of prophets in Israel (see Acts iii. 24), according to 1 Sam. iii. 15-20.

III. 9-12. *The message of utter ruin, of both city and temple, now that corruption is universal.* Vers. 9, 10. Strengthened with all might by the Spirit in the inner man, Micah repeats his address and his charge of sin much as at vers. 1-3. He accuses them that they "*pervert all equity,*" employing a verb which, with its kindred adjective and noun, is very frequent in the Book of Proverbs,—a book that had prominence given to it in the reign of Hezekiah, Prov. xxv. 1, very likely under the guidance of Isaiah and Micah. The sad thing which is brought out here is, that men attempted to "*build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity;*" Jeremiah, at xxii. 13-19, intimates that the wicked king, Jehoiakim, made the same attempt in favour of his own



11 with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD in the midst of us? no evil shall come upon  
12 us. Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest.

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palace, and incurred an awful judgement, analogous to what is predicted here. Habakkuk, at chap. ii. 12, denounces a woe on any such attempt, even by a heathen king for his own city; how opposite the course was which the house of David ought to have taken, is taught in the penitential prayer of their great ancestor, Ps. li. 14, 18.

Ver. 11. See the miserable condition of God's people, sunk in worldliness and vice. "*The heads thereof . . . and the priests thereof . . . and the prophets thereof;*" that is, the three orders of the theocracy, as they had been established in Israel to be the separate channels of divine grace, because varied in form and use, while yet co-operating in all these forms, and tending to one great end, for which prophets, priests, and kings ought to have acted harmoniously. One of these channels might be polluted, and notwithstanding God's commonwealth, might be restored to healthy life by the action of the others: it was Micah who was first called upon to announce the hopeless condition of all the three orders, though the message is repeated by other prophets, especially in Jer. ii. 8, v. 30, 31, xxii. and xxiii., when the judgement actually came which Micah predicts in ver. 12. See more at Zeph. iii. 3, 4. And with all this sin there was a monstrous insensibility on their part, or rather a false confidence; "*yet will they lean upon Jehovah,*" etc.; see this false leaning, or "staying" (the same word in Hebrew), and the true leaning presented together in Isa. x. 20. Ver. 12. "*Therefore,*" this very confidence being their destruction, as Jer. vii. 4-15 brings out, "*shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field,*" etc., as Isa. iii. 26, xxxii. 13, 14. There is some obscurity about the topography of Jerusalem which is not yet cleared away: the traditional view has been that "*Zion,*" the proper city of David and the stronghold, is the hill on the south-west of Jerusalem, and that "*the mountain of the house*"—the temple mount—is Moriah, on the east; but some recent students look on Zion as the continuation of Moriah towards the south. In any case, the judgement is thoroughgoing, extending to the whole city, and to its two prominent hills, representing the kingdom of the house of David, and the service of the house of God. The universal ruin was the proper outcome of the universal sin. Only one gleam of hope remains, not from what the prophet says, but from his silence or reserve; when he denounces the corruption of the three orders of the theocracy in ver. 11, he says, "*the heads thereof,*" but does not say "*the king.*" Was Ahaz dead by this time, and Hezekiah on the throne? or did the prophet at least see that this devout and faithful reformer was coming to the throne? If so, he may have felt that, however polluted the

CHAP. IV. 1 But in the latter days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow unto it. And many nations shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law,

government was, there was still some hope for the house of David. He unfolds this in the two following chapters.

IV. 1-5. *The vision of glorious restoration, extending to all nations, who yield a holy obedience in the coming reign of peace.* The prophet lifts up his eyes, and sees a glorious vision, the contrast to all that he bewails in the present. Some interesting questions about the occurrence of this passage in Isaiah also must be reserved for a note at the end of the book. Ver. 1. "*In the latter (or, last) days,*" is a phrase by no means indefinite, describing the near and better age which Messiah should bring in, often employed by the prophets, and continued in the New Testament, Heb. i. 2; Jas. v. 3; 2 Pet. iii. 3. It first occurs in Jacob's dying blessing to his children, Gen. xlix. 1. There is no emphasis in the first word, "But;" it might equally well be translated "And," the blessing growing out of the judgement. "*The mountain of Jehovah's house,*" is a more honourable expression than that in iii. 12. This, which had been like the high places of a forest, now "*shall be established,*" see our Lord's promise, Matt. xvi. 18; the grammatical form in the Hebrew is as emphatic as possible; but the word in various forms is a characteristic of Nathan's prophecy to David, 2 Sam. vii. 12, 13, 16. "*In the top of the mountains,*" or at their head, as in the margin; I think this is more natural in the Hebrew (see the original at ii. 13; 1 Sam. ix. 22; 1 Kings xxi. 9, 12), and gives a clearer idea and suits the parallel expression, "*it shall be exalted above the hills,*" whether this is interpreted literally or symbolically. "*And peoples shall flow unto it;*" the verb again occurs only in Jer. xxxi. 12, li. 44, where it may have been borrowed from this passage; but its cognate noun is the ordinary word for a river; the temple mount shall be so high, and yet, reversing nature, the streams of nations shall flow up to it. It is not formally stated who these "peoples" are, but no doubt they are the same as in i. 2, the inhabitants of the whole world; while the intermingling of the names "peoples" and "nations" (often in the Authorized Version "heathen"), and the still more peculiar interchange of these two nouns systematically throughout this prophecy, when we compare its form in Micah with its form in Isa. ii. 2-4, implies the great truth of the New Testament, that all national and other sectional divisions come to an end in Christ, and that Jew and Gentile are seen incorporated into one, as had been described in Ps. xlvii. 7-9. See on Zeph. iii. 20. Ver. 2. Still the nations that go up to the house of Jehovah (see Zech. xiv. 16, 17), and encourage one another in doing so, aim at receiving His teaching and obeying it: "*for out of Zion*

- 3 and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge between many peoples, and shall reprove strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it. For all the peoples will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.

*shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem;*" that is, "the law and the prophets," repeatedly referred to in the New Testament as the sum of the divine revelation to God's ancient people, Matt. xxii. 40. See as to the fulfilment, Luke xxiv. 47-53; Acts i. 4-8, etc. Ver. 3. "*And He shall judge between many peoples, and shall reprove strong nations afar off . . . neither shall they learn war any more;*" the evils shall disappear which have distressed the world since the building of the tower of Babel, and the commencement by Nimrod of an era of conquering kingdoms (of which more plainly in chap. v.), under the reign of a true prince of peace, such as Solomon had been only in name and in symbol. The omitted words about "*swords . . . and . . . spears*" being beaten into "*plowshares . . . and . . . pruninghooks,*" seem to be borrowed from Joel iii. 10, where, however, the word for "spears" is different, and the process is reversed in the sad times preceding those latter days; see this very chapter at ver. 13. Ver. 4. "*But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid:*" those two precious possessions in every Israelite's homestead, the vine and the fig tree, brought back to memory the days of Solomon, 1 Kings iv. 20, 25, arising out of the original promise, Lev. xxvi. 3-6. The Assyrian, who wished to wile Israel away from faith in Jehovah, used the same expressions, 2 Kings xviii. 31, 32; and they return in Zech. iii. 10, when the prophet promises pardon and acceptance to encourage the remnant who came home from Babylon. "*For the mouth of Jehovah of hosts hath spoken it;*" it is not a promise by the false prophets of wine and strong drink, as in ii. 11, who were in that day to have no answer of God, iii. 7. A shorter but similar expression clenches the short prophecy of Obadiah, ver. 18, and Joel iii. 8; and in Isa. i. 20, xl. 5, lviii. 14, we find much the same. Micah has, however, still more to add. Ver. 5. Other nations might for a time continue to "*walk every one in the name of his god,*" of which our missionaries have abundant experience, as they hear it said, Your God and your religion is good for you, and our gods and our religion are good for us; but Micah makes the broad distinction, "*and we will walk in the name of Jehovah our God for ever and ever,*" this unchangeable perpetuity of our satisfaction with our God and His ways being one of the tests of truth to us. So the contrast is drawn

6 In that day, saith the LORD, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven away, and her that I have  
7 afflicted; and I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the LORD shall reign

also in Isa. xlv. 16, 17, from which, at vers. 22-25, an argument is obtained for believing in the universal spread of the gospel.

IV. 6-8. *Jehovah will gather Israel, and reign over them in Zion for ever, restoring the old dominion.* Ver. 6. "In that day," some time in those "latter days" of ver. 1 which are the date of these promises, as again chap. v. 10; though in itself "in that day" is too general to fix anything, and it has been used very differently at ii. 4. "*Saith Jehovah*" represents one of those expressions which the translator would gladly render otherwise, if scholars would come to an agreement how to distinguish this verb in English from that in the common expression of the Hebrew Bible. It is "the solemn utterance of Jehovah," or something of this sort. It is the past participle of a verb that can scarcely be said to be in use, reminding us of the Latin FATUM, "a thing spoken;" with this essential difference, that to Pantheists and Polytheists "fate" was a lifeless or impersonal thing, controlling the very gods, if such beings existed; whereas we have here the utterance of Jehovah, the ever-living, all-knowing, ever-working sovereign, good and holy God. It is found seven times in Samuel and Kings, once in Chronicles, in Ps. xxxvi. 1, cx. 1; Prov. xxx. 1. Micah uses it again at chap. v. 10, Isaiah twenty-five times, Jeremiah and Ezekiel with remarkable frequency, Hosea four times, Joel once, Amos twenty-one times, Obadiah once, Nahum twice, Zephaniah five times, Haggai twelve times, Zechariah twenty times, Malachi once. In the Pentateuch it occurs only in Num. xiv. 28 (if we leave out of account a curious use of it by Balaam, Num. xxiv. 3, 4, 15, 16) and in Gen. xxii. 16, reminding us of the other peculiarity, that the Pentateuch never contains the divine title, LORD or God of hosts, common in the prophets and the histories and psalms, which Micah also uses at iv. 4. "*Will I assemble . . . and I will gather,*" taking up again the language of the promise in ii. 12; but it is fuller and tenderer. We have still as there the "*remnant,*" and though the words "flock" and "sheep" are not repeated now, we have them implied and described as "*her that halteth . . . her that is driven away*" (all imitated in Zeph. iii. 19), which last word is repeatedly used in descriptions of this gathering by Isa. xi. 12, xxvii. 13, lvi. 8; the whole of these going back upon the original promise, Deut. xxx. 1-4. Even the sadder description, "*her that I have afflicted*" (while it is necessary to use it, the verb being cognate to the noun in their boast, "no evil shall come upon us," iii. 11), comes in tenderly, as Hos. vi. 1 teaches us; and the thought that others than Jehovah had assisted willingly to help forward the affliction, became a ground of consolation and hope, see Zech. i. 15. Ver. 7. The emblem of a flock now passes gradually into that which is really meant, as Jehovah makes "*her that was cast far off a strong nation,*"

8 over them in mount Zion from henceforth even for ever. And thou, O tower of the flock, the hill of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come; yea, the former dominion shall come, the 9 kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem. Now why dost thou cry out aloud? Is there no king in thee, is thy counsellor perished,

as strong as any heathen nation whom he is to govern, ver. 3; the compound word rendered "her that was cast far off" never occurs again, but is ingeniously formed from an adverb "beyond," and has been very reasonably understood as an allusion to Amos v. 27, "I will cause you to go into captivity (or exile) beyond Damascus." "*And Jehovah shall reign over them in Mount Zion,*" as the promise ran in ii. 13 (for Zion is no longer as in iii. 12), "*from henceforth even for ever;*" with which compare Joel iii. 17, 21, Obad. 21, and also Isa. ix. 6, 7, if we take into account the king Messiah under Jehovah, as at the end of the remarks on chap. ii. 13. Ver. 8. There is again some obscurity in respect of the topography. "*O tower of the flock*" is naturally to be understood of Jerusalem, the chief city of the kingdom which has been spoken of as His flock; though there may be a reference to some well-known outstanding tower, connected with the palace of the king; see Neh. iii. 25; Song iv. 4. "*The hill of the daughter of Zion,*" is in the margin Ophel, the continuation of the temple mount toward the south, and thus brought into relation with Zion, according to the opinion noticed at iii. 12: Ophel is also mentioned in the Revised margin of Isa. xxxii. 14, prophecy which has many points at which it touches this one of Micah. "*Unto thee shall it come,*" which is repeated for emphasis; "*yea, the former dominion shall come, the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem,*" all that had belonged to Solomon, and to David his father (in spite of the prophet having alluded to David's lamentation for Saul and Jonathan, i. 10), before the schism of the tribes. For this bright prediction was in harmony with the great prophecy by Nathan of the building of both the house of Jehovah and the house of David, with all that Hosea had written at i. 10, 11, iii. 5, and Amos at ix. 8-15, and Isaiah in his magnificent predictions of the Messiah, especially in chaps. vii., ix., xi.; which had been perhaps already sung in Ps. lxxxix.

IV. 9, 10. *Trouble first; then deliverance at Babylon.* Ver. 9. "*Now why dost thou cry out aloud,*" as if these promises made no impression? The prophet speaks of the return of the former dominion and the kingdom of the daughter of Zion; but even already, and all along, "*Is there no king in thee?*" Even Balaam, when called to curse Israel, while yet in the wilderness, had acknowledged, "The shout of a king is among them," Num. xxiii. 21; a familiar prophecy to which it is all the more plain that Micah refers, because of his skilful play upon the Hebrew words, when he uses the verb expressive of this joyful shout to express the present crying out in grief. "*Is thy counsellor perished?*" this time a reference to contemporary prophecy, Isa. ix. 6, 7: could that counsellor perish? But he understands how it is. The promises to sinners can be

that pangs have taken hold of thee as of a woman in travail?  
 10 Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and shalt dwell in the field, and shalt come even unto Babylon; there shalt thou be rescued; there shall the LORD redeem thee from

accomplished only through much tribulation; the peculiar privilege being, that these pangs are birth pangs, John xvi. 21, 22; as it had been from the time of the first promise, Gen. iii. 15, 16; and as the general law was understood by the faithful down to the apostle's time, 1 Tim. ii. 14, 15, and to that of the closing visions of the New Testament, Rev. xii. 1, 2. "*Pangs have taken hold of thee as of a woman in travail.*" the expressions are such as are used of the enemies of the Church, Ex. xv. 14; Ps. xlvi. 6; Jer. vi. 24, xxii. 23, l. 43; but to her this valley of troubling has become a door of hope, as she had been taught in Hos. ii. 15. Ver. 10. So Micah bids her observe and act. His language may well have reference to Isaiah's great prophecy of Immanuel, especially Isa. vii. 14. "*For now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and shalt dwell in the field.*" it had been said just before, iii. 12, that Zion for their sake should be plowed as a field, and into the open field she must go, leaving all her comforts behind. "*And shalt come even unto Babylon,*" a wonderful exactness in geographical prediction, though not more so than his naming of Bethlehem Ephrathah at v. 2 as the place of the Saviour's birth: Joseph and Mary in Nazareth as little thought of the child Jesus being born at Bethlehem, as God's people in Jerusalem thought of Babylon as the place of deliverance. Hosea in chap. ii. 9-15 had spoken only generally of their being stripped and left bare, so that Jehovah might show them the tenderness of His mercy in that unnamed land, out of which, he said, reunited Judah and Israel were to come up, chap. i. 11; and Amos v. 27 did not name anything more definite than an exile "beyond Damascus." Micah might here have been no more definite than he had been at ii. 12, 13. But he had some intimation that Babylon should be the place (as his fellow-labourer Isaiah had, xxxix. 6, 7), though as yet it did not come much into contact with God's people, so far as we know, and certainly not yet as a decidedly hostile power, perhaps rather as one that courted friendship, though it would have been a friendship disastrous to their spiritual and moral purity. Of further intimations to Micah we shall read at ver. 13, v. 6, 7. At present the naming of Babylon is enough of mysterious revelation: he adds, "*there shalt thou be rescued; there shall Jehovah redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies.*" It was to Isaiah, in chaps. xl.-lxvi., that the fullest light was granted in reference to this coming deliverance, and no doubt in reference to greater things than the Old Testament could fully disclose. But ever since that "former dominion," "the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem," had crumbled to pieces in so extraordinary a manner at the death of Solomon, when the Twelve Tribes broke up into two hostile nations, the process of ruin had gone on

11 the hand of thine enemies. And now many nations are assembled  
 12 against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye see *its*  
*desire* upon Zion. But they know not the thoughts of the LORD,  
 neither understand they his counsel : for he hath gathered them

apace ; and by the time that Micah wrote, successive captivities had entirely destroyed what was much the larger of these two nations, and greatly weakened the other. It was a mere remnant of Israel that remained in their own land ; and both spiritual and political men might see that universal ruin was delayed only by the faith of king Hezekiah, and of those who were like-minded with him. The whole outward framework must be broken down, in order that a new building might be erected on the old foundations, according to Deut. xxviii. and xxx.

IV. 11. *The gathering of many nations planning to destroy Zion.* "And now many nations are assembled against thee," in contrast with the assembling of His people by Jehovah Himself, ver. 6 ; for such counter-working of good and evil is often manifest in full activity. There is, however, considerable difficulty in settling the date intended by the word "now." It is the characteristic of prophecy that definite dates are rarely given, that, indeed, the element of time is kept very much out of sight in the disclosures of the work of Him with whom one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day ; see the whole passage, 2 Pet. iii. 1-15 ; and study the use of "now" by Micah in this very context, vers. 7 (in the English "henceforth"), 9, 10, 11 ; v. 1, 4 ; and weigh its relation to "in the latter days," iv. 1 ; "in that day," iv. 6, v. 10, not to speak of ii. 4 and vii. 11, in the other two sections of the book. The course of events is not so easy to trace as might be supposed ; and how unspcakably less so the nearness or distance of these events from one another ! It is no more to be settled by reading the passages, than the relative position of a number of mountain tops, and their distance from one another, when a traveller has climbed a peak from which the whole of them is to be seen : before being very confident, he would need to be on that peak repeatedly, and perhaps on some neighbouring ones. I certainly understand it, not of the time in which the prophet wrote, but of that time which runs on till the wondrous birth at Bethlehem, chap. v. 2, or even longer. "Let her be defiled," a word not used to express the ceremonial defilements of the Mosaic law : it is moral defilement, and is sometimes translated "pollute," Num. xxxv. 33 ; Jer. iii. 1, 2, 9, and "profane," Jer. xxiii. 11. The corresponding noun is in the Authorized Version rendered "hypocrite,"—a word which has disappeared from the Revised Old Testament, in consequence of the adoption of the less definite renderings, "godless" and "profane."

IV. 12-V. 1. *On the other hand, the thoughts of Jehovah in favour of His people and against them.* Ver. 12. "But they" (the pronoun being used with emphasis in the Hebrew ; as much as, "as for them, they, etc.") "know not the thoughts of Jehovah, neither understand they His counsel." He had said that He was devising an evil against His own

13 as the sheaves to the threshing-floor. Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion : for I will make thine horn iron, and I will

corrupt people who devised iniquity, chap. ii. 1, 3 ; and it is the kindred noun here which might have been rendered "devices," as it often is, instead of "thoughts," as again in Isa. lv. 8, a text which throws light upon our present text : His thoughts are not our thoughts, nor His ways our ways. And Isa. x. 12-15 explains how Jehovah would "perform His whole work upon mount Zion and Jerusalem," no doubt in the first instance chastening His own people most severely, yet in the end punishing the fruit of the stout heart and the glory of the high looks of those heathen who were permitted to gather round Jerusalem only that they might be the unconscious instruments in His hand. The "counsel" was all His ; and men were not to imagine that the "counsellor" had perished, ver. 12, merely because the axe and the saw, the rod and the staff, as Isaiah contemptuously calls them, did not know in whose hands they were, and who employed them to do His pleasure. See again the strongly expressed and repeated utterances of Isa. xiv. 24-27 ; though the parallel may not strike an English reader so much, since the exigencies of the translator, dealing with the feeble instrument of human language, has led to use of the verb and noun "purpose" for what strictly is "counsel." Those heathen should learn that when they assembled against Zion, "*He hath gathered them as the sheaves to the threshing-floor :*" a similar case of rapid change from securing favour for the enemies brought together against Zion, to real favour and deliverance for His people, is given in Isa. xxix. 1-8, and very probably in xxxi. 4, 5, according to the translation in the Revised margin. Ver. 13. The word of command is soon given, "*Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion.*" In these circumstances the nations stand in an attitude towards Zion the reverse of the one occupied by the nations described in vers. 1, 2, as flowing together to the mountain of Jehovah's house ; and therefore their treatment is the opposite of that in vers. 3, 4. For all the various occupations of husbandry are from Jehovah, and they are the emblem of His varied dealings with His people and those who have to do with them, from plowing and sowing to threshing (as in this verse) and grinding, Isa. xxviii. 23-29. In the conclusion of one of Isaiah's prophecies against Babylon, chap. xxi. 10, we read, "O thou my threshing, and the corn of my floor ! that which I have heard from Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, have I declared unto you." Micah had now declared that Babylon was to be the very spot where they should be rescued : and Babylon, or whatever other nations should assemble themselves against Jerusalem, should now take their turn (compare passages like Obad. 15, 16) of lying down on the threshing-floor ; nay more, Zion herself should be the threshing instrument. This is just what had been also announced in Isa. xli. 14-16, however improbable it might seem to the world that Zion should be able to do this. For this, however, her God will make her fit : "*for I will make thine horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs*



make thy hoofs brass : and thou shalt beat in pieces many peoples : and thou shalt devote their gain unto the LORD, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth.

CHAP. V. 1 Now shalt thou gather thyself in troops, O daughter of

*brass ; and thou shalt beat in pieces many peoples.* The false prophet with whom Micah's namesake had contended made horns of iron with which he falsely said that Ahab should push the Syrians until they were consumed, 1 Kings xxii. 11 ; and not so long before, the military kings of the Ten Tribes had proudly asked, "Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength?" Amos vi. 13. But that which was a mere boast and fancy in their case should really be the case with God's repenting and restored people, in fulfilment of the old promises with which Moses had blessed the people, Deut. xxxiii. 17, 25, 27, 29. "*And thou shalt devote their gain unto Jehovah, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth.*" The law of "devoting," or putting to the ban, is laid down in Lev. xxvii. 28, 29 : it was first applied to the destruction of the abominable nations of Canaan, Deut. xx. 17 ; and the earliest and most graphically described instance of its application is given in Josh. vi. and vii., when, as it were, the first-fruits of the conquest of Canaan were given up to utter destruction in honour of Jehovah ; on that occasion, because Achan coveted and stole from these devoted spoils of Jericho, he himself became a devoted thing, and perished by the same awful doom. The Old Testament closes with a warning to prepare, with the advantages of Elijah's mission, for the great and terrible day of Jehovah, lest He should come and smite the earth (or land) with a ban, Mal. iv. 6. It is of little importance in this verse of Micah whether we read the verb in the second person, as in the text, or in the first person, as in the margin ; the original admits of either. Anyhow, the nations who assembled themselves against Jerusalem should meet with an experience analogous to the experience of Jericho when besieged by Joshua ; and in this new holy war the assailants of God's people should be given to the ban, and a new Joshua should give over to the supreme Lord the gain and substance which are rightfully His, and which these malicious evil-doers wrongfully withheld from Him. Chap. v. 1. The obscure language of this verse teaches the lesson that this victory is to be gained only through difficulties, disgraces, and dangers ; for the serpent's head is not bruised without the bruising of the heel of the seed of the woman.

Zion receives the title, "*O daughter of troops,*" which never elsewhere is applied to her ; indeed, nothing like it occurs again, unless in 2 Chron. xxv. 13, margin : it implies that her condition is one of constant, anxious, or irregular and harassing struggle and warfare, for which she must brace herself up. She is the Church militant in one of its most trying moments ; therefore "*gather thyself in troops,*" as befits thy present title and thy present condition, when "*he hath laid siege against us ;*" whereas if things were as they ought to be, Zion would be carrying the war into the enemies' country and subduing

troops : he hath laid siege against us : they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek.

- 2 But thou, Beth-lehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel ; whose goings forth are from of old,

everything to her God and king. An earthly king in Zion is not named here, whatever be the reason ; it is simply a "judge," as if going back to the times of Israel when as yet there was no king, in which period there were frequent and sudden changes from sin and suffering to glorious deliverance under the judge whom Jehovah raised up to save them : compare the reverting to the times of the judges in Obad. 21. Only such is the disgrace and danger, as described by Micah, that "*they shall smite the judge of Israel*" (where I do not see that the Ten Tribes can be shut out, after the use of the word in chap. i. 13, 14) "*with a rod upon the cheek*;" with which language we may compare Isa. l. 6 and Matt. xxvi. 67.

V. 2, 3. *The birth of the Saviour at Bethlehem.* Ver. 2. "*But thou*," the same opening in the Hebrew as in the similar comforting address to Zion at iv. 8, "*Bethlehem Ephrathah*," the Bethlehem where David had been born ; to distinguish it from Bethlehem of Zebulun, in the north, Josh. xix. 15 ; see the union of the two names, as here, in the account of Rachel's death, Gen. xxxv. 19. "*Which art little to be among the thousands of Judah*." God exalts the lowly, and works by the humblest instruments ; as when it was Gideon's turn to be "the judge of Israel," ver. 1, he spoke in language like this of the little "thousand," or division of his people, from which he had sprung, Judg. vi. 15. "*Out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel*" (the ordinary Hebrew word ; not as in iii. 1, 9), so that present difficulties and disgraces were to pass away when this son of David rose up to claim "the former dominion," iv. 8 ; though He was to be only like a root out of the stock of Jesse, Isa. xi. 1, when the royal tree had been felled to the ground. "*Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting*." To the Church of the Old Testament there might well be difficulty in distinguishing between the work of Jehovah and the work of His servant and representative ; nor did the prophets always rise to the understanding of all that the Spirit bore them along to utter. Hosea, in chap. vi. 3, had already said, "His going forth is sure as the morning ;" and the whole gracious history of Israel had been the history of His goings forth, as here said by Micah, perhaps, too, as expressed in Ps. lxxviii. 24, "They have seen Thy goings, O God, even the goings of my God, my King, in the sanctuary." The Christian, who has learned that David's son is also David's lord, need not stop short at this point, without determining whether or not Micah and his first readers soared so high. We now know that His goings forth have been "of old, from everlasting ;" though this would have been denied by men who at least knew from this prophecy that the Christ was to be born at Bethlehem ; see Matt. ii. 4-6, xxii. 41-46. Looking closely to the

3 from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time  
 that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the residue  
 4 of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he  
 shall stand, and shall feed *his flock* in the strength of the LORD,  
 in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God: and they shall

two expressions, "of old" might point to the days of the patriarchs, as in chap. vii. 20; and "from everlasting" is literally enough translated as in the margin, "from ancient days," for it is so used in the Hebrew, Amos ix. 11, with reference to David's time. But the expressions may no less naturally stretch infinitely beyond this meaning; and it is this exalted sense that suits the grandeur of the context; as it is also suggested to us by the two expressions being brought together, which otherwise seems useless repetition. Ver. 3. This is an unparalleled event, with issues depending on it which are as yet unimagined: "*Therefore will he give them up,*" according to ver. 1, iv. 9, 11, "*until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth,*" see at chap. iv. 10: both there and here it may be difficult to distinguish in the prophet's picture the individual mother of the Saviour from the whole travailing Church. "*Then the residue of his brethren shall return unto*" (or, as in the margin, *with*) "*the children of Israel.*" The return of the children of Israel under this glorious Son of David had been already predicted with less detail in ii. 12, 13, and still earlier in Hos. i. 11, iii. 5. Yet the prophet seems to point to something wider, when he speaks of "the residue of his brethren;" the word is quite unconnected with the word "remnant" applied to the Israelites themselves, chaps. ii. 12, v. 6, 7, vii. 18; this residue is different from the children of Israel, and is to return unto them, or, with them. Micah here foretells that calling and ingathering of the Gentiles, of which more will be said immediately, of which so much is also said in Isa. xlii. 6, xlix. 6, etc., and other prophets, and which was in the Saviour's own mind when he was on earth, John x. 16. Certainly this ingathering of all nations was one of the highest blessings included in the promises to Abraham, Gen. xii. 3, etc., promises which the prophet mentions as he completes his book, chap. vii. 20. Only thus, indeed, could the happy times be brought in of which he spoke, iv. 1-5.

V. 4-6. *The reign of peace, yet also of victory over Assyria and the land of Nimrod.* Ver. 4 "*And he shall stand, and shall feed [his flock]:*" others, no doubt, shall do this under him, compare the same thing said of strangers with the flocks of God's people, Isa. lxi. 5; but here it is the Chief Shepherd in person, with that flock which is men, as is repeatedly declared in Ezek. xxxiv. 31, xxxvi. 37, 38; so Micah himself had used the figure, chap. ii. 12. "*In the strength of Jehovah, in the majesty of the name of Jehovah his God,*" using no human means, at least none that could for a moment hide the fact that the excellency of the power is of God alone. This divine equipment and sufficiency is described at length in passages like Isa. ix. 6, 7, xi. 1-5, xlii. 1-7, xlix. 1-7, li. 16, lxi. 1-5; the word here rendered "majesty"

abide ; for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.  
 5 And this *man* shall be *our* peace : when the Assyrian shall come  
 into our land, and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we  
 6 raise against him seven shepherds, and eight principal men. And

is a favourite with Amos, chap. viii. 7, etc., only it has been translated "excellency." "*And they shall abide,*" as no doubt we may fitly express the verb when it stands alone ; it is the verb commonly employed to express dwelling in a place ; as, in what is really a parallel promise, Isa. xxx. 19, "for the people shall dwell in Zion, at Jerusalem." It is the promise made to David through Nathan, though he employs a different verb, 2 Sam. vii. 10, "And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be moved no more ; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more," etc. "*For now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth,*" a favourite expression in describing Messiah's kingdom, though the translation is not uniform, Ps. ii. 8, lxxii. 8 ; this wide stretching of his kingdom stands in contrast with Jerusalem, hemmed in by nations assembled to besiege her, ver. 1. Ver. 5. "*And this [man] shall be [our] peace,*" a statement emphatic by standing alone ; it would be still more so in English, as it is in Hebrew, if we could dispense with the pronoun before "peace," as the original does. Peace is one of the most outstanding characteristics of the glory of the latter days, iv. 3, 4 ; it is often so mentioned by the prophets, by none more than by Micah's contemporary, Isaiah, for instance, ix. 6, 7, xxvi. 3, 12, lx. 17. It was the Saviour's bequest to his people, John xiv. 27, and they say of him, "He is our peace," Eph. ii. 14 ; see Isa. liii. 5. "Peaceful" is the meaning of the name given to David's son Solomon, whose kingdom we have already seen that Micah uses as a type ; and of these verses we may say, a greater than Solomon is here. "*When the Assyrian shall come into our land, and when he shall tread in our palaces,*" for enough has been said of dangers and losses before that bright time of final victory and peace ; and the most prominent enemy in those days, and the most dangerous, as every reader of Isaiah knows, was the Assyrian, who brought the kingdom of Ahaz into a debased vassalage, and that of Hezekiah to the verge of extinction. But at the worst (and it may be when the great Deliverer had not yet been born, ver. 3), "*then shall we raise against him seven shepherds, and eight principal men.*" Three and four in Amos i. 3, 6, 9, etc., express a considerable number ; seven and eight, more than twice as many, may express the multitude of defenders whom God can raise up for His people. Or, as it is written in Eccles. xi. 2, "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight," since seven was a number expressing perfection or completeness, we may equally well say, here is perfection in their number, and something over, to show that the residue of the Spirit is still with Him whose resources cannot be exhausted. So long as the Great Shepherd is not visible among God's people, seven ordinary shepherds will be raised up, the

they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof : and he shall deliver us from the Assyrian, when he cometh into our land, and when he treadeth

verb being that used to describe God's raising up judges for them in their times of need. And if this seem not to be provision enough, there will be eight "principal men," a difficult and rare word, used again only in Josh. xiii. 21; Ps. lxxxiii. 11; Ezek. xxxii. 30; Dan. xi. 8. Ver. 6. "*And they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword;*" that overbearing and bloodthirsty nation took the sword, and shall perish with it; such intimations of judgement come into the middle of the most peaceful visions of the future kingdom, as in Isa. xi. 4, 14. It is impossible to translate the play upon words, except by noting in the margin that "waste" means also "be shepherds over," being the verb translated in the foregoing verse, "feed his flock." Only it must be remembered that feeding in the ordinary sense contrasts strongly with this feeding Assyria in a hostile sense; such a hostile sense occurs in Ps. xlix. 14, "They are appointed as a flock for Sheol; death shall be their shepherd." Micah finds a more easy comparison afterwards, ver. 7, with a lion among the sheep. "*And the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof;*" or in its gates, or gateways. Nimrod is mentioned only in Gen. x. 8-12 as the mighty hunter before Jehovah, whose hunting grounds were countries, and the objects of whose sport were infant nations; though this is not actually stated in Scripture, he has been generally associated with the building of the tower of Babel in Gen. xi. 1-9, indeed the present ruins of that tower popularly bear his name, Birs Nimrūd. If this be granted and remembered, Micah foretells the overthrow of the great ungodly worldly power by the true King, born at Bethlehem; it is the very truth, taught in the visions of Daniel, chaps. ii. and vii., to which the voices in heaven give utterance when the seventh angel has sounded, Rev. xi. 15, "The kingdom of the world is become [the kingdom] of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever." Micah may further hint that the worldly power is all one from first to last, by whatever name it is at any particular stage in history known among men; in his day it was called Assyria, but it was really the old empire of Nimrod at Babylon, and it might be Babylon again before the struggles were over; in fact, he had already predicted that Babylon should be the scene of Zion's humiliation and of her rescue, iv. 10. So at the end of ver. 6 he repeats the words which he had used of the Assyrian invasions in ver. 5, changing only a single word, "border" for "palaces." It is as if he had written, "Did I say, when he shall come into our land, and tread in our *palaces*? No such thing. He shall not do more than set foot in our *borders*." It reminds us of the message to Hezekiah in answer to Sennacherib's boastings, Isa. xxxvii. 33-35. In truth, the words of Micah, "*And He shall deliver us from the Assyrian,*" are the direct reply to the taunts of Rabshakeh, "Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you, for he shall not be able to deliver you; neither

7 within our border. And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples as dew from the LORD, as showers upon the grass; that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of 8 men. And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep: who, if he go through,

let Hezekiah make you trust in Jehovah, saying, Jehovah will surely deliver us;" see Isa. xxxvi. 14, 15, 18, 20, xxxvii. 11.

V. 7-9. *The influence of the remnant of Jacob on the nations, for blessing or the reverse.* Ver. 7. It might be objected contemptuously that this was a poor result when the prophet speaks of nothing better than "*the remnant of Jacob*," an expression of which he has already made use in ii. 12, and to which he returns in vii. 18; but on the former passage I noted how it is of this remnant that Isaiah often speaks, the sifted remains (Amos ix. 9; "for they are not all Israel which are of Israel; neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children," Rom. ix. 6, 7), and he does so in the account he gives of this deliverance from the Assyrian, Isa. xxxvii. 4, 32. Micah therefore goes on to explain, in vers. 7, 8, how vast shall be the influence of this remnant; vast, indeed, in the two opposite directions of mercy and of vengeance, which come together in Isa. lxi. 2 and elsewhere; compare, in the New Testament, 2 Cor. ii. 14-16. In both cases this remnant shall exert its influence "*in the midst of many peoples*," as he had already spoken of the nations both favourably and unfavourably, chap. iv. 3, 13, for the leaven must be mixed with the dough before it works. We have seen already, at ver. 3, how the prophet contemplates the return unto the children of Israel of the residue of his brethren from among the Gentiles; perhaps, when he conjoins "*among the nations*" to "*in the midst of many peoples*" in the unfavourable case, he indicates that these are a hard and unmixing, element, a useless or worthless element, like the "refuse silver" mentioned in Jer. vi. 30, of whom no refining in the furnace can by possibility make anything. As a favourable influence among the peoples, this remnant of Jacob shall be "*as dew from Jehovah, as showers upon the grass*," favourite emblems both of them, Ps. lxxii. 6, cx. 3, etc. Note the warlike accompaniments in this last psalm, as in ver. 8 here. "*That tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men*;" words which show that, while dew and rain furnish many illustrations of the gracious influences, such as their abundance and their frequent return, their refreshing, healthful, and fertilizing influences, etc., still the special point of comparison is their heavenly origin, independent of man, and sovereignly bestowed by Him from whom cometh down every good and every perfect gift. Ver. 8. But as an unfavourable influence, an instrument of vengeance to be repaid by God to those who have often been like wild beasts when they were wasting His heritage, this remnant shall be "*as a young lion among the flocks of sheep: who, if he go through*," a verb used already of passing on when obtaining deliverance and victory, chap.

- treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and there is none to deliver.
- 9 Let thine hand be lifted up above thine adversaries, and let all thine enemies be cut off.
- 10 And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD, that I will cut off thy horses out of the midst of thee, and will destroy
- 11 thy chariots : and I will cut off the cities of thy land, and will

ii. 13, "treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and there is none to deliver." These final words of warning come in many a time in descriptions of God's judgements; but our diluted English gives a poor idea of the terseness and force of the three verbs, three single words, which precede them. In this figure, descriptive of "the wrath of the Lamb," Micah seems once more to go back to the prophecies of Balaam, Num. xxiii. 24, xxiv. 9, and earlier, to the blessings of Jacob, Gen. xlix. 9. It is a figure which is also used in Isa. xxxi. 4. Ver. 9. After this the prophet has no more to utter, unless the prayer for the fulfilment of his prediction, "Let thine hand be lifted up above thine adversaries, and let all thine enemies be cut off!" The like sentiment occurs in Isa. xxvi. 10, 11, "Let favour be showed to the wicked, yet will he not . . . behold the majesty of Jehovah. Jehovah, Thy hand is lifted up, yet they see not : but they shall see thy zeal for the people, and be ashamed ; yea, fire shall devour thine adversaries."

V. 10-15. *In the meantime necessary chastisements within the Church, as well as severe judgments beyond it.* Discipline and chastisements were needed by the Church itself ere these glorious results could be attained. Ver. 10. "And it shall come to pass in that day," perhaps a very long time, see at iv. 11, "saith Jehovah," that is, the solemn utterance of Jehovah, see at iv. 6, "that I will cut off;" for this prophet's prayer had just been, "let all thine enemies be cut off," and God's people must be distinguished from hypocrites by first plucking the beam out of their own eye. Judgement begins at the house of God, 1 Pet. iv. 17; and this verb, "cut off," and the phrases, "out of the midst of thee," or, "out of thine hand," form the main part of the announcement, with the particulars added. Such a list has been compared with the list of cities named in the striking passage, chap. i. 10-15. The resemblance, however, is much closer to the list of doomed objects in the great announcement of visitation, beginning with Israel, yet taking in the world at large, in Isa. ii. 10-22. In the list of things to be cut off, Micah begins with "thy horses," in themselves indifferent, yet a constant source of false confidence, as in his time the horses of Egypt were, Isa. xxx. 16, xxxi. 1, 3. If they were cut off, then, of course, "thy chariots" become useless, and might also be destroyed. We must remember the fundamental law of the kingdom against multiplying horses, Deut. xvii. 16, partially disregarded by David, perhaps, 2 Sam. viii. 4, against his better judgement and true faith, Ps. xx. 6-8; set at defiance by Solomon and the later kings; but renounced by Hosea, chap. i. 7, and still more forcibly by Zechariah, chap. ix. 10. Ver. 11. Again, "the

12 throw down all thy strong holds : and I will cut off witchcrafts  
 13 out of thine hand ; and thou shalt have no *more* soothsayers : and  
 I will cut off thy graven images and thy pillars out of the midst  
 of thee ; and thou shalt no more worship the work of thine hands.  
 14 And I wilt pluck up thine Asherim out of the midst of thee : and  
 15 I will destroy thy cities. And I will execute vengeance in anger  
 and fury upon the nations which hearkened not.

*cities of thy land,*" carrying with it the threat, "*I will throw down all thy strong holds,*" since the song to be sung in the regenerated land of Judah was to be, "We have a strong city ; salvation will He appoint for walls and bulwarks," Isa. xxvi. 1, compare lx. 11, 18 ; and the vision of Zechariah, ii. 4, 5, was of the new Jerusalem "inhabited as villages without walls, by reason of the multitudes of men and cattle therein. For I, saith Jehovah, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and I will be the glory in the midst of her." It was, indeed, at the time of Jeroboam II., the great military king of the Ten Tribes, that king Uzziah also had shown the same spirit, and had perfected the military inventions for fortifications, etc., which made Jerusalem and himself renowned even to distant lands, but he fell terribly, 2 Chron. xxvi. 9-16 ; and thus he brought in a disastrous period, which was at its worst during part of the time that Micah prophesied. Ver. 12. Yet there were also things necessarily evil, evil in themselves, which must all the more be cut off : "*witchcrafts . . . and thou shalt have no [more] soothsayers,*" of whom they were full, according to Isa. ii. 6. Ver. 13. And "*thy graven images and thy pillars,*" these latter having been in use in the worship of the patriarchs, but having been forbidden by the law of Moses, Lev. xxvi. 1 (unless in going back to the fundamental worship of the patriarchs by making a covenant with Jehovah, Ex. xxiv. 4, and, of course, in cases outside the land of Israel, Isa. xix. 19), and now, we may be sure, hopelessly polluted, through their connection with those graven images. This explains the concluding words, "*and thou shalt no more worship the work of thy hands,*" in defiance of the second commandment. Ver. 14. But as if even "cutting off" was too feeble a verb, Micah uses a stronger one in the last threatening, "*And I will pluck up thine Asherim out of the midst of thee:*" these idolatrous objects in many versions are rendered "groves," from Ex. xxxiv. 13 and onwards, perhaps because they were wooden symbols of a goddess whose name took the corresponding female form of the word, namely, Asherah. He ends with repeating substantially a threat in ver. 11, "*I will destroy thy cities,*" perhaps, as is said, Jer. ii. 28, "according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah." Ver. 15. However, the judgement only begins at the house of God ; this verse makes it plain that it rests finally, and in its full weight, upon those who are on the outside of the professing Church : "*I will execute vengeance in anger and fury upon the nations which hearkened not,*" while, no doubt, those should escape who were blessed by the gracious dew and



CHAP. VI. 1 Hear ye now what the LORD saith: Arise, contend  
 2 thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice. Hear,  
 O ye mountains, the LORD'S controversy, and ye enduring founda-  
 tions of the earth: for the LORD hath a controversy with his  
 3 people, and he will plead with Israel. O my people, what have I  
 done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against  
 4 me. For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and  
 redeemed thee out of the house of bondage; and I sent before

showers spoken of in ver. 7. Parallels to this dealing are easily found in Isaiah and other prophets.

### THIRD SECTION, CHAPS. VI., VII.

Hopes deferred: lessons from the past, both of sin, with consequent sufferings, and of redemption, which shall yet be complete.

VI. 1, 2. *Summons to hear the pleading of Jehovah.* Ver. 1. The prophet a third time calls "*Hear ye,*" especially suitable, since he himself falls into the background; "*Hear ye now what Jehovah saith.*" But the message will not be received without a struggle on the part of the rebellious house of Israel; therefore, its form is this: "*Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice.*" When Jehovah had summoned the peoples, the earth and the fulness thereof, it was that He might witness against His people, chap. i. 2. It is so again. Ver. 2. "*Hear, O ye mountains, Jehovah's controversy,*" the same word in the original as the verb "contend" in the preceding verse, "*and ye enduring foundations of the earth:*" for these continue unchanged from age to age, however the generations of men pass away in succession, Eccles. i. 4. "*For the Lord hath a controversy with His people, and He will plead with Israel;*" and this lesson the Church must learn ere she can have peace, chap. vii. 9. The last verb carries us to that tender message to sinning Israel, in Isa. i. 18, though the sameness is disguised in the translation, "Come now, and let us reason together," etc.

VI. 3-8. *His dealing at the exodus with Balak and Balaam.* Ver. 3. "*O my people, what have I done unto thee?*" On the contrary, as in Isa. v. 3, 4, He appeals to them to judge between Him and His vineyard, what could have been done more to it that He had not done in it. See the expostulations in Jer. ii. 5, 31. "*And wherein have I wearied thee?*" So again Isa. xliii. 23, 24, though the verb for wearying is different there: the identical word, however, occurs in Isa. vii. 13, where also that prophet throws back the charge upon themselves, "Is it a small thing for you to weary men, that ye will weary my God also?" Ver. 4. Micah therefore sends them back to the first great blessing to the nation, "*For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of bondage,*" according to the lessons of the Book of Exodus, to which the prophets continually

5 thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now  
 what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of  
 Beor answered him; *remember* from Shittim unto Gilgal, that ye  
 6 may know the righteous acts of the LORD. Wherewith shall I come

return; for instance, 1 Sam. xii. 8; Hos. xi. 1-4; Amos iii. 1, 2; and Micah himself, chap. vii. 15, 18, 19. "*And I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.*" The mention of Miriam is peculiar; yet she is carefully mentioned in the genealogies, Num. xxvi. 59, as, indeed, her faith and love were indispensable means towards the rearing of Moses for his work, Ex. ii. 4-8: and she was a prophetess herself, Ex. xv. 20, 21; and she was aware of her position side by side with her brothers, however she and Aaron may have acted amiss in their want of due meekness towards Moses, Num. xii. It is to be observed also that in Isa. lxiii. 11 the Revised Version follows the best reading, where, speaking of "the days of old, Moses, and his people," it asks, "Where is He that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds (in the plural) of His people?" In Micah's time of struggle for a revival of religion, as we find in our own, it was of the highest importance to remember the place that woman has taken and still has to take. But it was needful to look to the lessons of the Books of Leviticus and Numbers, as well as to that of Exodus. Ver. 5. In Numbers, in the accounts of the marshalling of the people as the hosts of Jehovah, and their guidance through all the weary wanderings of their time of suspension from full Church privileges in the wilderness, "*O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him.*" In that process of training for Israel few things are so picturesque, interesting, and important, as this conflict with heathenism just as they were about to pass from the wilderness into the land of promise: for it was not a conflict of physical force, but one in which any nobility and grandeur that might be thought to exist in other religions than that of Israel appeared in Balaam when called by Balak's counsel to curse Israel, who yet, in real understanding of heathenism, did not hesitate to avail himself of help from vice, Num. xxxi. 16: on this account a peculiarly heavy curse fell upon the Ammonites and Moabites, Deut. xxiii. 3-6. The great successor of Moses, in his brief historical review, reckons this incident at its true value, as a real fighting against Israel, in a struggle out of which Israel came victorious only by a special deliverance granted by Jehovah, Josh. xxiv. 9, 10. "*[Remember] from Shittim unto Gilgal, that ye may know the righteous acts of Jehovah.*" Shittim was the last of the stations in the wilderness, and it was there that Balaam answered Balak's invitation, and attempted to curse Israel: and it was there that, on being foiled in this attempt, he consulted further with Balak, and allured the Israelites into bringing a curse upon themselves by the sin of Baal-peor, Num. xxxiii. 49 compared with xxii. 1 and xxv. 1, and xxxi. 16; see also Ps. cvi. 28-31. But Joshua led them from Shittim across the Jordan to Gilgal, their first resting-place in

- before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?
- 7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, *or* with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my trans-
- 8 gression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

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Canaan; and there the people renewed the covenant of circumcision, and entered once more into possession of all the privileges of the people of God, Josh. iii. 1, v. 1-12. The "righteousness" of Jehovah, as it is in the Authorized Version, was known by all these dealings with Israel as believing, as sinning, and as restored penitents; but it is given more accurately in the Revision, his "righteous acts," which they loved to rehearse, Judg. v. 11; these acts, no doubt, sprang from His righteousness. **Vers. 6, 7.** In the Book of Leviticus the answer is given fully to the question, "*Wherewithal*" (the original reminds us of the question of the Philistines in 1 Sam. vi. 2) "*shall I come before Jehovah, and bow myself before the high God?*" Certainly there was a sacrificial service; and the expression, "*with calves of a year old,*" or, as elsewhere translated, "of the first year," may allude to Lev. ix. 3, the first sacrifices which Aaron offered for Israel. But even if these sacrifices were multiplied a thousand or ten thousand times, with a profusion that should eclipse the fame of the hecatombs offered by Solomon at the dedication of the temple, 2 Chron. vii. 5, 7; even if the wild feelings of awakened conscience were to carry them beyond all that the law of Moses had prescribed into the horrible excesses which it sternly forbade, although such offerings were made by the heathen round about, "*shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul*" (compare a successor of Balak on the throne of Moab, 2 Kings iii. 27, and the heathenish king of Judah, Ahaz, in Micah's own time, 2 Kings xvi. 3),—this would be of no avail. The Book of Proverbs and the Book of Psalms declared that ritual observances without repentance and moral purity were abomination to Jehovah: and the lesson had been pressed home in Micah's own age by Isaiah, chap. i. 11-20. Most striking of all, however, is the manner in which this lesson is enforced in that very book of the Law which has chiefly to deal with the ordinances of sacrifice and priesthood: the first part of Leviticus gives the details of all manner of sacrifices, etc., by which the sinning people, or individual Israelites, were to come for pardon and acceptance; but the latter part of it tells how to maintain their fellowship with Jehovah by personal purity and strict obedience to the moral law. **Ver. 8.** So Micah concludes this subject. "*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.*" Unbelievers have readily acknowledged the beauty and simplicity and completeness of this exhibition of practical religion; which, nevertheless, has been

9 The voice of the LORD crieth unto the city, and *the man of* wisdom will see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath

twisted from its natural meaning, just as Jas. i. 27 has been, by those who imagined that they found in it a disregard for the lessons of sin and atonement, which are no less taught as essential truths of religion.

VI. 9. *The call to hear the rod.* For the prophet has other things to say. "*The voice of Jehovah crieth unto the city,*" namely, Jerusalem; for in it and in the other capital, Samaria, He had seen the evils of the two kingdoms concentrated, chap. i. 5. There is no great difficulty as to the general nature of the lesson, according to the last clause, "*Hear ye*" (Micah's favourite language) "*the rod, and who hath appointed it:*" for he had had many sharp, sad teachings of providence to set before them, as necessary before the glory of the latter days could be manifested. The verb "appoint" is not very common, though in Jer. xlvii. 7 it is very similarly applied to the sword of judgement. It is usually applied to a very particular appointment, especially when two parties make an appointment to meet: and so God's providences have a suitableness for every single person who comes across them, a voice for him individually; if he will listen attentively and intelligently. In this direction we have to look for the explanation of the difficult intermediate words, whether we arrive at it exactly or whether we fail in this attempt; "*and [the man of] wisdom will see thy name.*" The word here translated "wisdom" is also rare, occurring only eleven times more; six of these times in Job, v. 12, vi. 13, xi. 6, xii. 16, xxvi. 3, xxx. 22; four in Proverbs, ii. 7, iii. 21, viii. 14, xviii. 1; once in Isaiah, xxviii. 29. It will be observed, then, that it belongs almost exclusively to the two didactic books, as they are called, Job and Proverbs: then it is used once by each of the two prophets who exercised their ministry under king Hezekiah, in whose time we know that the Book of Proverbs was a special subject of study, Prov. xxv. 1. It was a term of or for the age. It is difficult to grasp its meaning, as any one may see for himself who looks to the efforts of the translators: wisdom, reality, effectiveness, and resulting strength, or help, or salvation, have all been traced, with probability, as included in the idea of it. And to complicate the labours of the expositor here, he finds good scholars adopting the rendering of some ancient versions by a very slight change (perhaps not going beyond the merely traditional vowels of the original), "*the man of wisdom will fear thy name,*" or "*it is wisdom to fear thy name.*" Perhaps it is safest to recollect Jehovah-jireh in Gen. xxii. 14 with its explanation: in that very mount where Abraham in his extremity heard the voice of Jehovah, and saw the lamb provided by which his dear and only son was rescued from death on the altar, where now the city of Jerusalem stood, the voice of Jehovah was crying to Israel; and the prophet in the confidence of faith addresses God, "*Thy name will see,*" or provide "*effective working;*" with which consideration he presses on his people to hear the rod,

10 appointed it. Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable?  
 11 Shall I be pure with wicked balances, and with a bag of deceitful  
 12 weights? For the rich men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful  
 13 in their mouth. Therefore I also have smitten thee with a grievous wound; I have made thee desolate because of thy sins.

and Him who hath appointed it. This exposition would give a thought, and a use of the rare word, in harmony with the passage in Isa. xxviii. 29.

VI. 10-15. *The gross sins and vices of those who made a profession of religion.* Vers. 10, 11. For indeed there was a necessity in the meantime that the rod should be used with severity. A religion of forms, while morality was set at defiance, had been denounced in Isa. chap. i., and still earlier in Amos chap. viii., where ver. 5 may be the basis of vers. 10, 11, here. "*Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure*" (Hebrew, ephah) "*that is abominable?*" This last word is rather uncommon, and has been variously rendered; twice in Proverbs, xxii. 14 and xxiv. 24, it is "abhor;" and once, chap. xxv. 23, too feebly, "angry:" perhaps we might say, as in the Revised margin of Prov. xxii. 14, "the scant measure against which He has indignation." "*Shall I be pure with wicked balances,*" etc.? This is impossible, unless we are to turn upside down every conception of the character of God, as Hab. i. 13 declares, and, indeed, unless we defy the very words of the law, Deut. xxv. 13-15. Vers. 12. Already Micah, like Isaiah, has denounced the sins of oppression and covetousness relating to the land; but here he is no less faithful in reference to the sins of mercantile life. "*For the rich men thereof*" (namely, of the city) "*are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth;*" statements which do not need much explanation, yet which show that the prophet involved in a common condemnation the rich oppressors and the poor oppressed ones, since all the inhabitants were alike tainted with that falsehood which must be detestable to "the God of truth," "God that cannot lie;" and also his language implies that words are as truly sinful as deeds in the sight of Him who tries the heart. Vers. 13. This made it impossible that judgement should not come on them. "*Therefore I also have smitten thee with a grievous wound:*" the verb reminds us of Isa. i. 5, 6, liii. 10. "*I have made thee desolate,*" or we might translate, carrying on the action already described, "making desolate," "*because of thy sins;*" for none of this suffering came by accident, or could present any difficulty to those who wished to trace the cause in its effect. In the original the pronoun "I" in this verse is placed very emphatically; it is the hand of Jehovah, and of no one else. Vers. 14, 15. Emphasis is also placed here on the other pronoun "thou," the party that had sinned

- 14 Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied; and thy humiliation shall be  
 in the midst of thee: and thou shalt remove, but shalt not carry  
 away safe; and that which thou carriest away will I give up to the  
 15 sword. Thou shalt sow, but shalt not reap: thou shalt tread  
 the olives, but shalt not anoint thee with oil; and the vintage, but  
 16 shall not drink the wine. For the statutes of Omri are kept, and  
 all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels:

and was to suffer. *"Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied; and thy humiliation shall be in the midst of thee; and thou shalt remove, but shalt not carry away safe; and that which thou carriest away will I give up to the sword."* It is a picture of sin being punished, so far by natural and necessarily self-executing laws, partly by the inflictions of misery at the hand of other sinners. Some things, as might be expected from the richness and power of Micah's language, cannot well appear in a translation. The word rendered "humiliation" occurs nowhere else; the rendering in the margin is just as probable, "emptiness" in the stomach, which there had been a vain attempt to satisfy. And a delicate variation in the form of the verb is indicated, as far as may be, when "carry away safe" is repeated by dropping in English the adjective "safe." In short, what comes on them, as predominantly an agricultural people, is described in ver. 15 by the ruin of their hopes of a harvest, a vintage, and an olive crop; it is all in language which condenses the well-known threatenings of Moses in Deut. xxviii. 38-40.

VI. 16. *The times of Ahab coming back.* Micah had begun his message, chap. i. 2, in language which served him heir to his elder namesake; and references to the corrupt age in which that prophet lived have occurred once and again, as the seizure of Naboth's vineyard by Ahab was paralleled by atrocities described in chap. ii. 2, iii. 1-3. Now he directly charges the people with bringing back that apostatizing and God-defying age. *"For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels."* The introduction of the name of Omri, the founder of the dynasty, and apparently little behind his son Ahab in daring wickedness (compare the two statements, 1 Kings xvi. 25, 30), suggests the firmness and continuance of the evil, which was not dependent on the will of a single king, and was not confined to one generation. If Ahab in the history enjoys a bad pre-eminence, on account of his marriage with Jezebel, and his consequent introduction of the worship of Baal and the Asherah (see here the mention of the Asherim in chap. v. 14), it is to be remembered that Omri had waded to the throne through blood, in a civil war which lasted half of his official life; and that it was he who founded Samaria, having himself carefully selected the site, and that Samaria had been the object of Micah's terrific denunciation, chap. i. 5-7. Very possibly Omri was the stronger character of the two: certainly the Assyrian inscriptions give his name to the kingdom of the Ten Tribes; if so, there is force and delicacy in the choice of the

that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof an hissing; and ye shall bear the reproach of my people.

CHAP. VII. 1 Woe is me! for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape gleanings of the vintage: there is no  
2 cluster to eat; my soul desireth the firstripe fig. The godly man

expressions, "the statutes of Omri" and "the works of the house of Ahab." There is also a peculiar form of the verb, when it is said that these statutes "are kept;" kept for themselves, as some explain; kept earnestly or eagerly, according to others: it is an expression found again only in David's great psalm, xviii. 23, "I kept myself from mine iniquity." The account in Isaiah, chap. vii., hints at least that many in Judah would have accepted a king in place of Ahaz, at the bidding of Pekah the king of the Ten Tribes. Here was an effort like David's, but in the opposite direction, involving therefore a curse instead of a blessing like his: "*that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof an hissing; and ye shall bear the reproach of my people.*" At Gilgal, as Micah had reminded the people, ver. 5, the righteous acts of Jehovah towards Israel had come to be completely known; for there, by renewing the covenant of circumcision under Joshua, Jehovah had said to His people, "This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you." Now they brought that reproach anew upon themselves by apostatizing from the covenant, in the days of Ahaz and Manasseh, just as in those of Omri and Ahab. It is expressly recorded that in Ahab's days, Hiel the Bethelite set at defiance the curse pronounced in Jehovah's name by Joshua against him who should rebuild the walls of Jericho, and that he learned by the loss of his whole family how this word of Jehovah remained in full force, Josh. vi. 26; 1 Kings xvi. 34. Micah warns his contemporaries how they walked, as did those men of Omri's and Ahab's time, and were working for similar ruin to themselves, "*that I should make thee a desolation*" (after he had used the kindred verb in ver. 13) "*and the inhabitants thereof a hissing.*" The Hebrew is very definite, "in order that I should make," as if they were acting with contemptuous, high-handed disregard of his word, as Hiel must have acted. "A hissing" is an expression used five times by Jeremiah: it occurs again only in 2 Chron. xxix. 8.

VII. 1-6. *The consequent disorganization of society, and its punishment.* If the days of Ahab had returned, they might well be followed by violence and bloodshed, which are regarded as the characteristic of the dynasty of Jehu in Hos. i. 4. Ver. 1. "*Woe is me,*" not the usual word, as in chap. ii. 1; but another, which is found elsewhere only in the very mournful utterance, Job x. 15. The prophet looks on the miserable condition of the professing Church, and feels himself alone, "*as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape gleanings of the vintage.*" It was a bare time: "*there is no cluster to eat; my soul desireth the firstripe fig,*" which was a special delicacy, Hos. ix. 10, etc., but was not to be found here. Ver. 2.

- is perished out of the earth, and there is none upright among men: they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net. Their hands are upon that which is evil to do it diligently; the prince asketh, and the judge *is ready* for a reward; and the great man, he uttereth the mischief of his soul: thus they weave it together. The best of them is as a brier: the most upright is *worse* than a thorn hedge: the day of thy watchman, even thy visitation, is come; now shall be their perplexity. Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide: keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter in law against her mother in law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house.
- 7 But as for me, I will look unto the LORD; I will wait for the

The figure of speech is dropped. "*The godly man is perished out of the earth;*" the same words are found in the similar complaint of Isa. lvii. 1. "*There is none upright among men: they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net.*" This recalls chap. ii. 1, 2, 8, iii. 2, 3. Vers. 3, 4. This allusion is kept up in these descriptions, which present certain difficulties to the translator. The margin gives two elegant variations; the former of which in its use of the Hebrew dual may be compared with Revised margins in Prov. xxviii. 6, 18. The very fountain of justice is polluted, when "*the prince asketh, and the judge [is ready] for a reward,*" or more literally, "a recompense," as the word is rendered in the only other places where it is used, Isa. xxxiv. 8; Hos. ix. 7: it is here meant as a recompense for a wicked decision, that is, a bribe (compare a kindred word in Isa. i. 23); though the prophet may, in his own mind, have had in view a very different recompense, the retribution from God. "*The day of thy watchmen, even thy visitation, is come.*" Micah, like the other faithful watchmen, in opposition to the false prophets described in chaps. ii. and iii., had been foretelling that this day would come; and of this time of "visitation" Jeremiah speaks often, nay, already it had been mentioned in Hos. ix. 7, in the text just named; and in Isa. x. 3, where the confusion and hopelessness of the wicked on that day are earnestly pressed on their consideration. So it is here, "*Now shall be their perplexity,*" a word occurring again only in Isa. xxii. 5, "A day of discomfitures and of treading down, and of perplexity, from the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, in the valley of vision." Vers. 5, 6. These disclose a new source of perplexity: when in danger elsewhere, men turn for comfort, advice, and protection to their intimate friends, at all events to their own family, as to a wife or to a child; but in this crisis these shall be the most dangerous of all, and "*a man's enemies are the men of his own house.*" Our Lord used this passage to show how it should be in the disorganization of society, as between those who received and those who refused him, Matt. x. 21, 35, 36.

VII. 7-10. *Humble, hopeful waiting for better times, in spite of*



8 God of my salvation: my God will hear me. Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him; until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness. Then mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her; which said unto me, Where is the LORD thy God? Mine eyes shall behold

*mockery by unbelieving enemies.* Ver. 7. "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy cometh in the morning:" and the prophet who has uttered his lamentation in the name of the feeble few who were worthy to be called the Church, speaks out in joyful confidence. "But as for me, I will look unto Jehovah:" I much prefer the margin, "in Jehovah will I keep watch," for it is the same word as in ver. 4, "watchmen;" as it is said by Habakkuk, chap. ii. 1, that he stands upon his watch, and sets him upon his tower, and looks forth (the same verb as here) to see what his God will speak with him. "I will wait for the God of my salvation;" the verb being rendered "hope" when it occurs in this form in the Psalms, xxxviii. 15, xlii. 5, 11, xliii. 5, cxxx. 5. "My God will hear me." The confidence which runs through all these expressions is natural to true faith, which appropriates Christ, and can do all things through him; we have met with it already at chap. iii. 8. Ver. 8. Therefore he addresses those who oppose him, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy," where the feminine form of the noun, repeated at ver. 10, indicates a collective: it is uncertain whether it be the false members of the professing Church, who have resisted him all along, or whether, as is more likely, it take in the open enemies of all profession of the true religion. "When I fall, I shall arise," as in the promise, Prov. xxiv. 16; perhaps more exactly translated, as a matter of experience, "when I have fallen, I have arisen." "When I sit in darkness, Jehovah shall be a light unto me," according to a frequent figure of speech in the Psalms and the Prophets; the situation may be compared with that in the latter part of Isaiah, chap. viii. Ver. 9. The time, how long, was probably unknown to Micah, if the reckoning was by days; but he knew how long it was to be, reckoning morally. His sin had been the cause of the indignation of Jehovah, which therefore he would bear with humility and patience, "until He plead my cause, and execute judgement for me;" for with this pleading of Jehovah's controversy the prophet had commenced this last section of his book, chap. vi. 1, 2. "He will bring me forth to the light," see ver. 8. "I shall behold His righteousness," which had been seen in so many "righteous acts" (the same word) for His people, chap. vi. 5. Ver. 10. Then what I see and feel shall contrast with what my opponents shall see and feel. "Then mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her;" or, more exactly, it is a solemn wish, such as often interrupts the succession of predictions, "Then let mine enemy see," etc. "Which said unto me, Where is Jehovah thy God?" according to

her; now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets.  
 11 A day for building thy walls! in that day shall the decree be far  
 12 removed. In that day shall they come unto thee, from Assyria  
 and the cities of Egypt, and from Egypt even to the River, and

the taunts which bitterly tried the Psalmist, Ps. xlii. 10. It is such taunts which explain the occasional severity of language by the psalmists and prophets, as here, if the verse is read as a wish; there was no mere personal feeling, they lost all thought or remembrance of themselves in their holy zeal for the glory of God's name; and these were simply His enemies, not theirs. These enemies ventured to say of Zion, "*mine eyes shall behold her,*" much as already at chap. iv. 11, where the prophet goes on to say that they did not know the thoughts of Jehovah. And again they said, "*now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets,*" an expression which rather describes their own doom, Isa. xli. 25 in the original, Ps. xviii. 42.

VII. 11-13. *The day for rebuilding and gathering home.* Ver. 11. "*A day for building thy walls!*" exclaims the prophet, as he sees the blessed time approaching. It has been often noticed that the noun never denotes the wall of a town, but is habitually the fence of a vineyard, as in Isa. v. 5, so the reference may naturally be to the restoration of Jehovah's vineyard. "*In that day shall the decree be far removed,*" a clause whose obscurity is proved by the perplexities of the commentators.<sup>1</sup> The noun is the one habitually translated "statute," and the verb "to be far." Ver. 12. "*In that day shall they come unto thee, from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, and from Egypt even to the River.*" He had already spoken of deliverance from

<sup>1</sup> 1. An old opinion is that it refers to the statutes imposed by heathenish oppressors, an opinion which is scarcely defensible; though it would be safer to understand it of heathenish statutes accepted willingly by the people, see 2 Kings xvii. 8, 19, 34; Ps. xciv. 20; Jer. x. 3; Ezek. xx. 25, as Micah himself had lately spoken of the statutes of Omri, chap. vi. 16; all these examples have the feminine form of the word, not the masculine as here, yet this difference seems an objection of little or no moment. 2. The noun is used occasionally for some special "decree," and this is the Revised translation, with a marginal reference to Zeph. ii. 2; as if Micah spoke of a divine decree, bursting in judgement and then passing far away, like a destructive tempest that is soon over and gone. 3. There is occasionally a use of the word for a fixed time or place, and so it is translated "bounds," "boundary," Job xiv. 5, xxvi. 10. If it were not a meaning so little used, and so poetical, one might incline to this, for which there are good authorities, and interpret that the coming times should be not only of safety but of enlargement, as in Isa. xxvi. 15 (Revision), Jer. xxxi. 38-40, Zech. ii. 1-5, and as the following verses lead us to expect. 4. Possibly the same result may be reached by giving to "statutes" its ordinary meaning, and by taking the verb in a good sense, as much as to say, The statutes of Jehovah shall be known and obeyed far and wide. The kindred adjective is often used so in this connection, in speaking of the joy being heard afar off at the rebuilding of the temple and of the city wall, Ezra iii. 13, Neh. xii. 43, as indeed they that were far off were to come and build, Zech. vi. 15; and there is much said of the blessings to those that are far off in Isa. xliiii. 6, xliix. 1, 12, lvii. 19, lx. 4, 9, lxvi. 19. Micah himself, chap. iv. 1-3, had spoken of the law going forth out of Zion, and exerting its authority over strong nations afar off.

- 13 from sea to sea, and *from* mountain to mountain. Yet shall the land be desolate because of them that dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings.
- 14 Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily, in the forest in the midst of Carmel : let them feed

Assyria, and of victory over it, chap. v. 5, 6; but Christ's victories are a blessing to those whom he conquers; so Assyria is attracted to him ("to thee" is in the masculine form of the pronoun, as again in ver. 14, which see, not, as hitherto, in the feminine, vers. 10, 11, of Zion), and Assyria's rival Egypt, as in prophecies of Isaiah, xi. 11, xix. 23-25, xxvii. 13; it seems plain that there is here an ingathering of the nations themselves, as well as of the seed of Israel scattered among them, as in chap. v. 4, 7. "The River" is the known designation of the Euphrates, from Gen. xv. 18 onwards. The Hebrew form of the name "Egypt" is peculiar, used only in lofty language, Isa. xix. 6, xxxvii. 25, and the parallel passage, 2 Kings xix. 24; though it is possible that Micah makes a play upon words, since it might be translated "cities of a siege," or "fortified cities," as in the Authorized Version; and so the word is used Jer. x. 17; 2 Chron. viii. 5, xi. 5, etc. The mention of the River leads on to more, "*and from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain.*" words which are compressed to the utmost in the original, no doubt for the purpose of expressing what is general and comprehensive in the most emphatic manner; compare Ps. lxxii. 8. Ver. 13. Finally it is said, "*Yet shall the land be desolate because of them that dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings.*" As here translated it is a caution, as much as to say, Before those bright times come, there must be a winter of darkness and misery, due to their own misconduct; see chap. ii. 3-5, 10, iii. 12, iv. 10-v. 1, 10-14, vi. 16, in accordance with the teaching of Isaiah also, chap. iii. 26, v. 5, 6, vi. 11-13, vii. 14-25, xxxii. 9-20. Another translation, however, is not less natural, "And the earth shall be desolate," etc.; in which case the meaning would be that judgements were to break upon the world at large, driving its inhabitants to seek shelter in the restored and glorified Zion: compare the thought in Jer. xvi. 19; this equally agrees with ii. 12, 13, iv. 3, 12, 13, v. 6, 8, 9, 15, and here with vers. 16, 17.

VII. 14-17. *The call to the shepherd of the desolate flock to repeat the gracious dealings at the Exodus.* Ver. 14. "*Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thy heritage;*" the verb and the pronouns are masculine, as already noted, carrying us back to the Great Deliverer and Shepherd, chap. v. 4. "*Feed,*" as the margin reminds us, includes "rule," both in the literal and in the metaphorical meaning. "*The flock of thine heritage*" is very attractive, a compound phrase, each part of which is often used to describe the people of God: Micah uses the one word in chap. ii. 12, and the other in ii. 2, vii. 18, yet not precisely with the meaning here. "*Which dwell solitarily,*" not as matter of mourning, but as their distinctive character: for Balaam, who has been mentioned in

15 in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old. As in the days of  
 thy coming forth out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him  
 16 marvellous things. The nations shall see and be ashamed of all  
 their might : they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their  
 17 ears shall be deaf. They shall lick the dust like a serpent ; like

chap. vi. 5, uses the same words when he says, Num. xxiii. 9, "Lo, it is a people that dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations ;" and Moses seems to copy this in his closing words of blessing, Deut. xxxiii. 28. "*In the midst of Carmel : let them feed in Bashan and Gilead.*" the first name is that of a mountain ridge running out into the Mediterranean Sea on the west of Canaan, rich alike in forests and in grassy pastures ; and the second and third being names of districts—no less well-known—famous on the eastern side of Jordan, which had attracted the two tribes and a half at the time of the conquest by Moses to settle down on them without going across Jordan. Similarly we have Carmel and Bashan in the promise of Jer. l. 19. "*As in the days of old*" most naturally is understood of those days of Balaam and Moses at the commencement of the national history of Israel : compare the next verse. No doubt the seeds of this are traceable back to the age of the patriarchs who feed their flock in Canaan, ver. 20 ; but in the original the expression "the days of old" there is not the same as here. Ver. 15. "*As in the days of thy coming forth out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him marvellous things.*" The age of the exodus is habitually referred to by the prophets in promises of grace and in calls to duty, compare Hos. ii. 15, Amos iii. 1, and here chap. vi. 4 : for the Church of the Old Testament it occupied a place analogous to Christ's lifetime on earth and his death on the cross for us. And this noun, which is variously rendered "marvellous things," "wondrous works," etc., is in use many a time to describe what Jehovah did for Israel in Egypt, that faith may be strengthened in every emergency to ask, "Is anything too hard" (still the same word) "for Jehovah?" Gen. xviii. 14. Ver. 16. "*The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might,*" which will appear as trivial as the working of the Egyptian magicians in opposition to the marvellous things done by Moses in the might of Jehovah. Such seeing and being ashamed, when His hand has been lifted up, is also spoken of in Isa. xxvi. 11. "*They shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf :*" the former a gesture expressive of silence arising out of astonishment, Judg. xviii. 19 ; Job xxi. 5 ; the latter understood by many expositors as if their ears had been deafened by the thunder of His power. Such strong emotions are probably part of the workings of grace in conviction and conversion ; as Isa. lii. 15 tells of the like in connection with the sprinkling of many nations by the Servant of Jehovah. Ver. 17. Such operations of the Spirit are sometimes saving, but sometimes they stop short of salvation : both classes may be included here. "*They shall lick the dust like a serpent :*" or perhaps better, "They shall lick dust like the serpent," for the figure of speech goes back on the

crawling things of the earth they shall come trembling out of their close places : they shall come with fear unto the LORD our God, and shall be afraid because of thee. Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever,

first message of the gospel, Gen. iii. 14, of which we have the echoes in Ps. lxxii. 9 ; Isa. xlix. 23, lxv. 25. "*Like crawling things of the earth they shall come trembling out of their close places :*" every word alluding to language of the servants of God with which Micah's hearers were familiar. The Song of Moses, Deut. xxxii. 24, threatened degenerate Israel "with the poison of crawling things of the dust : " Micah, using a word found only there (Job xxxii. 6 scarcely can come into view here), says that now these crawling things shall be completely subdued and submissive. "They shall come trembling," a verb for which it is difficult to find one adequate rendering, but which expresses above all things the disquiet or unrest of one whose emotions are stirred by feeling himself in a wrong position with God ; "out of their close places," which can scarcely be anything else than an adaptation of David's song of praise, now to be realized more gloriously than ever, Ps. xviii. 45, "The strangers shall fade away, and shall come trembling out of their close places." How such movements may be gracious and may have a happy issue (as in a passage so far resembling this, Hos. xi. 10, 11), is declared in the last clauses, "*They shall come with fear unto Jehovah our God, and shall be afraid because of thee ;*" with mixed feelings, as in Ps. ii. 11, fearing yet coming. Changes of person occur in the prophets at times very suddenly, though generally a rhetorical reason can be alleged, as in ver. 19, to arouse attention, to give emphasis, etc. : here, however, we have the last word in the second person, "thee" in preparation for the wonderful address to Jehovah with which Micah concludes his prophecy.

VII. 18-20. *Concluding prayer and prediction of mercy, resting on the oath to the patriarchs.* Ver. 18. "*Who is a God like unto Thee,*" borrowing the words of the Song after crossing the Red Sea, Ex. xv. 11, compare the promise recorded by the prophet in ver. 15 ; and at the same time probably making one of his favourite verbal allusions, this time to his own name, which means, "Who is like Jah?" for in the prophets' names we can often trace a connection with the work given them to do. In many ways this question might be asked, and it might receive very various answers, as, for instance, in the light of chap. vi. 6-8. But to the messenger from God to fallen men, the aspect of special interest is this, "*that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage.*" This description seems manifestly founded on the proclamation of His own name made by Jehovah to Moses, Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7, which is taken up by the prophets, Joel ii. 13, Jonah iv. 2, as the basis of all their work : but there is a turn given to it by introducing two words, dear to Micah, "the remnant," as in chap. ii. 12, iv. 7, v. 7, 8, and "His heritage," as in ver. 14. Much so we

19 because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again and have compassion upon us ; he will tread our iniquities under foot : and  
20 thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, *and* the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.

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read of the restored Zion in Isa. xxxiii. 24, "The people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity." "*He retaineth not His anger for ever*;" with this may be compared such statements, though varying in language, as Ps. ciii. 9; Isa. xlvi. 9, lvii. 16; Jer. iii. 5; Hos. xiv. 4. "*Because He delighted in mercy*," a most attractive representation of God's character, as in Jer. ix. 24; Ezek. xviii. 23, 32, xxxiii. 11; Hos. vi. 6; though the resemblance is less distinct to the English reader on account of variation in the rendering. Ver. 19. "*He will turn again and have compassion upon us*," quoting the old promise in Deut. xxx. 3. "*He will tread our iniquities under foot*," as the literal sense of the verb is : it is commonly rendered "subdue," or "subject;" but it is more, see the renderings in 2 Chron. xxviii. 10; Neh. v. 5; Esth. vii. 8; it comes nearer to that bruising of Satan under our feet which is promised in Rom. xvi. 20. "*And Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea*," again referring to the Song at the Red Sea, Ex. xv. 5, 10; yet here it is plainly said that the enemy who perishes is not Pharaoh, but sin. Ver. 20. "*Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, [and] the mercy to Abraham which Thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old*." The faithful messengers of God were ready from time to time to teach, what, however, could come fully into view only in the New Testament (Gal. iii.; Rom. iv., etc.), that the law of Moses could not give life; that this could be nothing else than the free gift of God, according to His promises to the patriarchs : this is asserted here, in the use of two favourite nouns, "mercy," or loving-kindness, and "truth," which meet together in His dealings with His people, Ps. lxxxv. 10, 11. Jacob and Abraham are the two patriarchs named as having had these communications; so also in Isa. xxix. 22, lxiii. 16. Especially there was an oath to Abraham, Gen. xxii. 16, in which Isaac is directly interested, though he is not named by the prophet, since he is the least prominent of the three patriarchs in the record of Genesis : indeed the oath is said in Ps. cv. 9 to have been unto Isaac. "The days of old" is the expression used for the times of the patriarchs and Moses in Ps. xlv. 1, lxxvii. 5; Isa. li. 9; though at ver. 14 of this chapter there is a different word. There is nothing nobler to a believer, or more inspiring to a soul under convictions, and aware that the blood of bulls and goats cannot take sin away, than this reference to the promises and oath of God with which Micah finishes his message.

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## NOTES IN CONCLUSION.

## THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE BOOK.

I have adhered to the method of division into three discourses, chaps. i. and ii., chaps. iii.-v., chaps. vi. and vii., for reasons given at the beginning, which I hope have been confirmed in the course of the exposition. These three sections run somewhat in parallel lines, though there may be an advance in the thought, and especially in the feeling, from the first to the last. Many good judges, however, have rejected this arrangement, and in one way or another have connected chaps. ii. and iii. as one continuous discourse or writing. The characteristic of all these newer schemes is that chap. ii. 12, 13 is reckoned to be an utterance of the false prophets, with whom Micah had to contend, ver. 11, when they promised prosperity in opposition to his denunciations of judgement; and chap. iii. 1 is taken as his reply to this falsehood, the additional statement being sometimes made, that "And I said" had better have been given as an adversative clause, "But I said;" or even it is supposed that a dialogue runs through a good deal of chap. ii. The principal statement appears to me highly improbable. (1) This prophecy in ii. 12, 13 is taken up by Micah himself at chap. iv. 6, 7, without a hint of a difference between the two predictions, as if the first were false and fleshly, the second spiritual and true; and it becomes necessary to suppose that this unmentioned difference is very subtle, the false prophets imitating the true, and going wrong only in assuring God's goodness to the impenitent, of which supposed distinguishing feature I see no trace. (2) I find nothing whatever in ii. 12, 13 to make me connect the message with a lying prophet, who prophesies of wine and of strong drink; it breathes spirituality all through. (3) The figure of "the sheep of Bozrah" has nothing in it of a mere imitator, as the false prophet is alleged to be; it is as original as the figure of "the tower of the flock" in chap. iv. 8. (4) Nor is the message followed immediately, as we should expect a false prophecy to be, by a rebuke to those who spoke blasphemously: chap. iii. 1-4 certainly gives no prominence whatever to the false prophets, but speaks in general and comprehensive terms of the evil pervading the community, with emphasis apparently laid on the sins of the heads and rulers; while the prophets come in only at vers. 5-7 as if in a new paragraph. (5) There is no reason for preferring "But I said," in ver. 1, to "And I said:" if an adversative were wished, clearly and decidedly expressed, so as to guard against the dangerous false prophecy, Micah might have used the adversative he uses at ver. 8, "But truly," or as some would render it, "On the contrary." (6) I see nothing of a concealed dialogue with his opponents running through chap. ii. Where others speak, as in vers. 4, 6, this is distinctly stated: I am aware that ver. 5 has been interpreted as a threat addressed to Micah, but surely with no probability. Besides,

that exposition takes away all meaning from the first word in the verse, "Therefore," which the prophet uses from time to time, chap. i. 14, iii. 6, 12, v. 3, with its full meaning and force.

#### THE RELATION OF MICAHL IV. 1-3 TO ISA. II. 2-4.

This relation might be (1) That each of the prophets was moved independently to utter the same prophecy. (2) That one of them borrowed from the other. (3) That both took up the prophecy of some one older than they. The first supposition may for the present be left out of account. The second has had most supporters; but the third has also had many.

If one of the prophets borrowed from the other, and the original is to be ascertained by the examination of the passage and its context in the two books, I agree with those who make Micah the original. For (1) with him it stands in its natural place, exhibiting the peaceable fruits of righteousness yielded after chastisement, when those who have endured it have been rightly exercised by it. Chap. iii. denounces sin, and foretells its consequences, even to such a degree that Zion should be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest. Then chap. iv. at once predicts that in the latter days the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, etc. (2) On the other hand, in Isaiah there is an abrupt beginning, especially as "And it shall come to pass" is unparalleled at the commencement of a prophecy; or perhaps I should say more strongly, at the commencement of a prophetic book, if Isa. i. be looked on as a preface. Isaiah might take his friend's and fellow-worker's words as a motto or text for his discourse, especially if that friend's words had made a deep impression and were well known to the community. In this way, either Jeremiah, in chap. xlix., or else Obadiah, has borrowed from the other much of the prophecy against Edom. See the Introduction to Obadiah. (3) The invitation with which Isaiah would then connect what he quotes with what he has himself to say, ver. 5, "O house of Jacob, come ye and let us walk in the light of Jehovah," might be a reference to Micah's words in ver. 5, "And we will walk in the name of Jehovah our God for ever and ever," taken along with chap. vii. 8, "Jehovah shall be a light unto me."

The one objection plausibly urged against this opinion is, that Isaiah's prophecy seems certainly to belong to the early part of his ministry, before Hezekiah came to the throne, perhaps many years before; whereas the language in Jer. xxvi. 18, 19 dates Micah's prophecy of the destruction of the city and temple in the time of Hezekiah. I do not feel the force of this argumentation. Micah may have spoken the prophecy long before, and may have written it down in the form in which we have it, in which form Jeremiah's contemporaries had it, under Hezekiah. But more particularly,



suppose Micah had been persecuted in the days of Jotham, when the people "did very corruptly," or in the days of the apostate Ahaz, that proceeding would have been no rule for later times: whereas if the godly Hezekiah, who had done much to reform Jerusalem, and to restore the pure worship of Jehovah, saw this threatening of Micah (no matter how many years old) still standing face to face with him, and feared Jehovah speaking through Micah, and entreated his face, then, and then only, was it a precedent; nay more, it was a conclusive precedent, for the purpose for which it was adduced, that Jeremiah ought not to be persecuted for his faithful threatenings.

Some, however, who have felt this to be a difficulty, have preferred to suppose that both prophets borrowed from the same earlier source. This is possible; only these cautions need to be thrown in. (1) That we *know nothing* of such an earlier prophet, and we should be sparing in our conjectures. (2) That we do not have any clear case of *quoting from an unknown prophet*: for Isa. xvi. 13 does not necessarily apply to any other than Isaiah himself; and if it does so apply, Balaam is at least as probably the prophet quoted as a person whose existence is purely conjectural. (3) That it would be still more curious, and farther off from the lines of all experience, if two prophets *agreed in quoting* from an unknown source. (4) That if it was some prophecy so well known and so much thought of as to make a good text for the sermons of both Isaiah and Micah, it is very strange that *they did not quote from it with greater precision*, but, on the contrary, made systematic and deliberate changes. For while the three verses are substantially the same in the two prophets, there are differences running through them, though these are less appreciated in a translation. More particularly, there is this systematic and sustained difference, that "nation" and "people" are interchanged throughout: be the difference of the two words larger or less, this fact remains. And there are one or two other changes: in Isa. ver. 2, "all nations," or more exactly, "all the nations," corresponds to only "peoples" in Micah; in Isa. ver. 3, "to the house," is in Micah "and to the house;" in Isa. ver. 4, "the nations," is in Micah "many peoples;" and "many peoples," in Isa. ver. 4, is in Micah "strong nations afar off."

## N A H U M.



OF this prophet we really know nothing beyond what is told us in the title of his book. It is just possible that "the Elkoshite" might mean, of the family of Elkosh, as some have understood it; but apparently this opinion has no longer any supporters, since there is no trace of any family so named. We may now say that Elkosh is with unanimity taken to be the place to which he belonged, but there our knowledge stops short. There is a village of this name near the site of Nineveh, a few miles north of the modern town Mosul, but on the east side of the river, where a modern building is shown as the tomb of the prophet; and this has been supposed by some good authorities, for the last hundred years, to be the place of his birth. If this be the correct view, he was an exile, well acquainted with the city whose ruin he predicted. There is nothing, however, in the book itself to favour the supposition that he had any special acquaintance with Nineveh, nor any reference to the Ten Tribes and their captivity; as indeed there is nothing about the Assyrian Elkosh to show that it is ancient. And, if we may infer anything from Ezekiel being silent about the fall of Babylon, we might rather incline to expect that the message of the ruin of Nineveh would not be entrusted to an exile living in its neighbourhood. The general opinion has always been that Nahum belonged to the land of Israel. There is a tradition among the Christian Fathers, pseudo-Epiphanius, etc., that he was from a place belonging to the tribe of Simeon, across the Jordan; which supposition carries improbability on the very face of it, since the tribe of Simeon was settled in the south-west of Canaan. We may therefore fall back on the testimony of Jerome, one of the best-informed of the Fathers, in the end of the fourth century, who says that it is "a hamlet in Galilee to this day, small, certainly, and scarcely by ruins indicating the traces of buildings, but yet known to the Jews, and pointed out to me by the man who led me about." We can say nothing more of it; it is a mere guess which some have made that Capernaum, meaning "the hamlet of Nahum," was a later name of it. The central point of his prophecy has been generally acknowledged to be Judah, see chap. i. 11-15, and there is no reference to the Ten Tribes; from which facts it is natural to infer that he may have removed from Galilee to the land of Judah, very probably in connection with the political convulsions which occurred

throughout the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. The idea conveyed by his name, "comforting," to which there may be a reference in iii. 7 (as Micah vii. 18 has a reference to that prophet's name), was in harmony with his book, and was much needed by the Church of his day.

The time at which he lived is quite undetermined. Some have fixed the date at the time that Nineveh was on the point of being destroyed, according to their conception of prophecy; that distinct prediction of a distant event is not to be expected is perhaps inconceivable. Curiously, we are unable to fix the date of its fall more accurately than by saying, certainly between B.C. 622 and 605, very probably between B.C. 610 and 606. It was attacked by the combined forces of Cyaxares the king of the Medes, and of Nabopolassar (Nebuchadnezzar's father) the king of Babylon, who reigned from 625 to 606-5; but there were circumstances connected with the Scythian invasion of south-western Asia that delayed the falling of the fatal blow which these kings had long planned to deliver. And the language of 2 Kings xxiii. 29 seems to imply that the kingdom of Assyria still existed, though perhaps on the point of dissolution, when Pharaoh-Necho made an expedition against him, in the course of which king Josiah was killed, B.C. 610, or possibly as late as B.C. 607.

Josephus, *Antiq.* ix. 11. 3, speaks of Nahum prophesying about 115 years before the destruction of Nineveh; though a few years more must have elapsed, if we take his words strictly, that Nahum prophesied about the time of king Jotham. Again, if some regard to the order of time prevails in the arrangement of the twelve minor prophets, this suggests that perhaps he lived not earlier than Micah, the contemporary of Isaiah, not later than Habakkuk, who lived probably towards the beginning of the Babylonian period of trouble to Israel. Accordingly, two opinions at present may be said to be the most probable, and the most generally held, as to the date of Nahum's prophecy. The one is that he belonged to the age of Isaiah and Micah. The passage already referred to, chap. i. 9-ii. 2, has by almost all writers been understood to refer to the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib, and his sudden and complete destruction, of all which we read in Isaiah's prophecies; and the way in which this is noticed by Nahum makes it very natural to suppose that the deliverance had just taken place, and was the event uppermost in the thoughts of the people whom he addressed. There is, however, another event which also looks very fresh in the minds of all, namely, the judgement which had befallen No-Amon (in the Revised translation and the margin of the Authorized), iii. 8, called by the Greeks Thebes, the great capital of Upper Egypt; an event of which the prophet makes use as a lesson to Nineveh. It is only recently that the historical notice has been discovered in the Assyrian inscriptions which explains this; and there were critics who therefore rejected this part of Nahum as a later interpolation, or brought down the composition of the book to a much later date. But we know now from an inscription of Asurbanipal, the son of Esarhaddon and the grandson of Sennacherib, that he conquered Urdamanî (that is,

Rud-Amón), the son and successor of Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia and Egypt in Hezekiah's time, 2 Kings xix. 9, took his city of (Thebes) Nô, and carried the spoil of it to Nineveh; see Schrader's *Cuneiform Inscriptions and the Old Testament*, translated by Whitehouse, vol. ii. p. 150-1. This took place soon after the death of Tirhakah, B.C. 664. And if the event was recent, at all events fresh in men's minds, when the prophet wrote, then his book was written probably some time during the long reign of Manasseh, Hezekiah's son, B.C. 698-641 in the chronology on the margin of the Bible, or perhaps four or five years later. Manasseh is mentioned in the Assyrian inscriptions as tributary to the great king, B.C. 676, 666, or thereabouts. The inclination has been strong of late to revert to an old opinion, that the prophecy of Nahum was delivered not long after the fall of Thebes, an event which occurred about B.C. 663; whereas the memory of Sennacherib's overthrow might well remain vivid in the minds of the men of Judah much longer than an Assyrian victory over Egypt, perhaps for half a century or more. See more on chap. ii. 2 for its possible connection with Manasseh's restoration.

We may say generally that Nahum's prophecy is confined to the fall of Nineveh, as Obadiah's is to the fall of Edom. It has been thought surprising, in one sense, that nothing occurs in his book of Messiah and his kingdom, the theme of all the prophets; but the fall of the ungodly or worldly power, whose head at that time was Nineveh, as Assyria was its embodiment, was practically the elevation of the kingdom of God, to which that other is ever antagonistic; see Obad. 16-21; Rev. xi. 15-18.

The literary character of the prophecy is acknowledged on all hands to be that of the loftiest poetry. The boldness and sublimity of his style, and the uncommonness of some of his words, combine to throw considerable difficulties in the way of the expositor.

The three chapters form very natural divisions for the book; they have been said to answer to the three questions, What? How? Why?

#### FIRST SECTION, CHAP. I.

**What?** The purpose of Jehovah to judge and destroy the rival and oppressor of His people Israel.

**I. 1. *The titles.*** There are, in fact, two titles here: the one telling the matter, the other naming the author. This double title is not so uncommon as is sometimes alleged. In a long book like Isaiah, besides the general title at i. 1, there are particular titles in which both subject and author may be named, as at xiii. 1; in shorter books we may see cases like Obadiah's, ver. 1, and also Amos i. 1; Micah i. 1. If Nineveh had not been named here, no one would understand what was meant by "the place thereof" in ver. 8; and the prophecy, like Isa. xxiv., would have been quite general and comprehensive, directed against the whole worldly power, in whatever form it might clothe itself during advancing ages, though not yet revealed in these

CHAP. I. I **T**HE burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.

successive forms, as it came to be in Dan. ii. and vii. Assyria had been hinted at, though not yet named, in Amos v. 27 and vi. 14. Hosea had repeatedly named it, twice also apparently alluding to it under the mystical name of king Jareb, "a king that should contend," v. 13, x. 6. Jonah had been sent to Nineveh, the capital; see his book, specially the Introduction. Isaiah had much to do with the struggles between Assyria and Israel, in which he had always predicted ultimate victory to Israel. Micah had something of the same; see at v. 5, 6, vii. 12. But it remained for Nahum (whether a fellow-labourer of these two prophets, sharing with them in many of their thoughts and expressions, or a disciple who studied their writings at the distance of perhaps two generations) to speak out what they had hinted, as in Isa. xxxi. 8, 9, and to tell plainly of the ruin of the splendid capital which they had not named, except in the historical statement Isa. xxxvii. 37. This message of divine wrath is delivered once for all, see here, i. 8, 9, 12; so that Nineveh is only once again named, in the short prophecy of Zephaniah against Assyria, ii. 13-15, "*The burden of Nineveh.*" There is a strong tendency at present to render this "The oracle," or utterance, "against Nineveh." But (1) the ordinary meaning of the word is allowed to be certainly "a burden;" and I agree with those who see no clear evidence of any other meaning, as a question of language. (2) There are prophetic passages in which this meaning seems to be necessary, as in the remonstrances with the scoffers in Jer. xxiii. 33-40; and in Jehu's words about Ahab, 2 Kings ix. 25, "Jehovah laid this burden upon him," where the reader of the original sees also this noun connected with its cognate verb, translated "laid." (3) Indisputably the meaning "burden" almost always (I believe always) suits admirably these prophecies to which it is prefixed as a title here and Hab. i. 1, Zech. ix. 1, xii. 1, Mal. i. 1, and especially the ten burdens in Isa. xiii.-xxiii. The only possible cases of doubt are Prov. xxx. 1, xxxi. 1, where the Authorized Version has "prophecy," and the Revised "oracle," yet placing "burden" in the margin; not to say that it is a fair question whether Massa is not in these two cases a proper name, an Arabian principality, Gen. xxv. 14. Both of the terms "burden" and "vision" connect Nahum's language with Isaiah's.

I. 2-7. *Jehovah, the avenging God, the stronghold of His people.* Ver. 2. The name of God here is El, not in such common use as Elohim, more of a personal title, occurring especially in compounding proper names; and this the one true God is carefully identified with Jehovah the covenant God of Israel. The language goes back on the great revelations made of Himself at Sinai, when Israel entered into this covenant relation with Him, and received the law by which they were distinguished from all the nations whom for a time God "suffered to walk in their own ways," Acts xiv. 16. The object of the prophets was to expound and apply that law, and to preserve

- 2 The LORD is a jealous God and avengeth ; the LORD avengeth and is full of wrath ; the LORD taketh vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth *wrath* for his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will by no means clear *the*

those covenant relations in spite of unworthiness and backsliding ; hence the importance of this gracious language, used even at the time when the people sinned by making the golden calf. He is "*jealous*," without any of the imperfections seen in human jealousy ; that is, He has a zeal for His own glory and for the love of His people, which they were apt to squander on wretched objects ; see Ex. xx. 5, xxxiv. 14 ; Deut. iv. 24, etc. ; Josh. xxiv. 19, in which last passage the Hebrew word has a peculiarity of pronunciation the same as here. Of Him it is said three times, and therefore emphatically (as the three times in Jer. vii. 4, xxii. 29 ; Ezek. xxi. 27), that He "*taketh vengeance*," or, is an avenger, which had been said repeatedly in the Song of Moses, Deut. xxxii. 35, 41, 43 ; so that psalmists claimed it as a special attribute of Him who alone can rightly avenge, Ps. xciv. 1 compared with Rom. xii. 19 (hence the unsuitableness of the *lex talionis* as a rule for individual righteousness, Matt. v. 38, 39), and prophets spoke of it, even combining "the acceptable year of Jehovah and the day of vengeance of our God," Isa. lxi. 2. It is a solemn thing to say that God is "*full of wrath*," if one might literally render the Hebrew, "the owner, or possessor, of wrath ;" but this word also runs through the Psalms and prophecies (though the frequent rendering "fury," as in ver. 6, and also here in the Authorized "is furious," is not happy) ; nevertheless the New Testament makes the revelation of the wrath of God the dark background on which is seen the bright revelation of the righteousness of God in the gospel, Rom. i. 17, 18. There can be no doubt that "wrath" is rightly supplied at the end of the verse, "*He reserveth . . . for His enemies* ;" the same phrase occurs in Lev. xix. 18 ; Ps. ciii. 9 ; Jer. iii. 5, 12. These awful views of God are inseparable from belief in His holiness and in the wickedness of men ; the living God, who loves, must be capable also of hating, and His hatred must flame forth against any who are here described as His adversaries and His enemies, because of what they are and what they do, Ps. vii. 11, xlv. 7, etc. ; for indeed, in the Hebrew language, "adversary" is the same word in the masculine which becomes in the neuter "trouble," ver. 7, and "affliction," ver. 9 ; and it is when "all things that offend" as well as "those which do iniquity" are removed, that the righteous shall "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father," Matt. xiii. 41-43. Ver. 3. Manifestly the prophet lays the emphasis on God's gracious character, that He is slow to anger, though this in its very nature includes His by no means clearing the guilty ; it is a favourite statement with the prophets, as in Joel ii. 13, Jonah iv. 2, all going back on the glorious proclamation of Jehovah's name made by Himself to Moses, Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7, on which Moses fell back, Num. xiv. 17, 18. The peculiarity of Nahum, however, is that between the two descriptions he brings

*guilty*: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, 4 and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, 5 and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt; and the earth is upheaved 6 at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks 7 are broken assunder by him. The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that put their trust

in "great in power," an assertion which is wrought out to the end of ver. 6, as a necessary preparation for Jehovah's victorious contest with Nineveh, at that time the mistress of the world. "*The whirlwind and the storm*," which may terrify us and involve us in ruin, are simply "*His way*," the path along which He is seen to move in this evil world; those two words are often found in the descriptions of His majestic working; the thing, though not the exact language, fills the first half of Ps. xviii. Ver. 4. The sea and the dry land are alike to Him, as Nahum's predecessor Jonah knew and taught, chap. i. 9, etc.; this phrase, "*rebuketh the sea*," is applied to the miracle when Moses led the people through the Red Sea, Ps. cvi. 9. Mountain ranges, like "*Bashan*" in the east, "*Carmel*" in the west (Micah brings Carmel and Bashan together, chap. vi. 14), and "*Lebanon*" in the north, "*languish*" (a favourite verb with Isaiah). Ver. 5. "Mountains . . . and hills" "quake . . . and melt," as it is recorded that they did at Sinai; see Ex. xix. 16-18, and the sacred poets, compare Micah i. 3, 4. The Authorized Version is very doubtful in the clause, "*the earth is burned at His presence*," safer in Revision, "is upheaved," or "lifts itself up," the verb as in Ps. lxxxix. 9; Hab. i. 3 (Revision). Sometimes we are doubtful whether "*the earth*" or "the land" is meant; but here it is the whole earth which has to do with Jehovah, for "*the world*" is added. Ver. 6. We now have all this summed up in proof that no one can stand before that wrath of His, with which the prophet began his description of God, ver. 2; to which additional names are now given, not differing much in meaning, and the image of fire is used to make it vivid, as at Deut. iv. 24. Ver. 7. Yet again, as at ver. 3, the prophet must return to the proper aspect of God's character, if men would only see it; He "*is good*," compare Ps. xxxiv. 8, cxix. 68, etc. "*In the day of trouble*," which must come so long as there are adversaries (see what has been said at ver. 2 on the essential sameness of these two words in Hebrew). He is "*a strong hold*," is often said in the Psalms and in Isaiah, though repeatedly disguised to the English reader by the imperfect rendering "strength," Ps. xxvii. 1, xxviii. 8, etc., but better "fortress," Jer. xvi. 19. Very probably Nahum here alludes to Joel iii. 16, where, after speaking of heaven and earth shaking when Jehovah shall roar from Zion, he adds, "but Jehovah will be a refuge to His people, and a stronghold to the children of Israel;"

8 in him. But with an overrunning flood he will make a full end of the place thereof, and will pursue his enemies into darkness.  
 9 What do ye imagine against the LORD? he will make a full end :  
 10 affliction shall not rise up the second time. For though they be like tangled thorns, and be drenched as it were in their drink,

for the noun "refuge" there corresponds to the verb here, "them that put their trust in Him," a verb which is also of frequent occurrence, and is so rendered rather oftener in the Revision (text or margin) than in the Authorized Version, "that take refuge in Him," though it might have been better so rendered also at Ps. v. 11, xi. 1, xvi. 1, xviii. 2, 30, xxv. 20, xxxi. 1, 19, xxxiv. 8, 22, lxiv. 10, lxxi. 1, cxli. 8, cxliv. 2, etc.

I. 8-15. *He will act according to his character, now declared, as friends and foes shall learn.* Ver. 8. To His enemies He will act terribly, pursuing them (an emphatic form, chasing them, as is said of Assyria, Isa. xvii. 13, therefore used often in the sense of "persecute") into darkness, according to Ps. xxxv. 6. The commencement of this verse uses three words which Isaiah also uses much, though not he alone. There will be a "flood" or inundation, and it will be "overflowing;" it is difficult not to think of reference to the important prophecies, Isa. viii. 8, x. 22, xxviii. 15; the more so that the third word is also in x. 23, xxviii. 22, although what is there translated "a consummation" is in Nahum "a full end" (the Authorized needlessly varies to "utter end"), as in Jer. xxx. 11, etc.; where the distinction is drawn, "I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have scattered thee, but I will not make a full end of thee; but I will correct thee with judgement, and will in no wise leave thee unpunished," these last words being in the original the same as "by no means clear the guilty" in Nah. i. 3. "The place" of Nineveh, here mentioned, was of great natural strength, on the east bank of the great river Tigris, in an angle formed by one of its important tributaries, named the great Zab, and with other rivers in the vast extent of ground which its site covered as the city grew; there may be a hint of the overflowing of these waters becoming the means of its destruction, as at ii. 6. Ver. 9. What then did they "imagine against Jehovah"? When He delivered His first blow there would be no need for a second, as Abishai and Joab knew how to strike, 1 Sam. xxvi. 8; 2 Sam. xx. 10; and with the full end made of Nineveh, there would be no "affliction . . . the second time," from her for Israel. So Isaiah had spoken, chap. xxxvii., when he prophesied of the catastrophe which befell Sennacherib's army. Ver. 10. This has its difficulties both in translation and in exposition. Yet the reference seems to be to the drunkenness of the Assyrian warriors, and to their wanton mischief. They might be as dangerous as thorns, 2 Sam. xxiii. 6, 7; Micah vii. 4; but they should be helpless as the most hopeless drunkards, who are described as "drenched . . . in their drink." No figure of speech in Scripture goes beyond the truth, nay, the figure always falls short of the truth, and those who



11 they shall be devoured utterly as dry stubble. There is one gone forth out of thee, that imagineth evil against the LORD, that

are said to be drenched in drink are yet like "*dry stubble*," they shall be utterly devoured by the fire mentioned in ver. 6, which is to kindle on them.

**Ver. 11.** There is now a serious difficulty in settling a point on which the sense wholly depends. "*There is one gone forth out of thee.*" Who is meant by "thee," Nineveh or Judah? Judah has not yet been named; Nineveh was at least referred to, "the place thereof," ver. 8, besides being expressly mentioned in the title. Plausible expositions can be given either way. Sennacherib, or one of his blasphemous servants, might very well be he "*that imagineth evil against Jehovah*" (substantially the same in the Hebrew with those who "imagine" something "against Jehovah," in ver. 9); explained to be he "*that counselleth wickedness*," or "worthlessness;" who seems again to be spoken of in ver. 15 as he who "*shall no more pass through*" Judah, "*he is utterly cut off.*" This person came out of Nineveh. But it may also be understood of unworthy members of the kingdom of Judah, who were really the worst enemies of God's people, bringing His wrath upon them; such was Shebna at the court of Hezekiah, 2 Kings xviii. 37, on whose character and destiny light is thrown by Isa. xxii.; and such persons may well have been found at the ungodly court of Manasseh, and may have led him into his course of outrageous wickedness, and consequently to terrible reverses and humiliation, if Nahum wrote in Manasseh's time. The removal of such a worthless person would be the turning-point for good in Judah's fortunes. Perhaps it is impossible to determine which view is correct,<sup>1</sup> though I prefer the latter.

<sup>1</sup> From the point of view of mere language, it is to be observed that in Hebrew the pronouns and verbs in the second person, as well as in the third, distinguish the masculine and feminine genders; and that in ver. 11, "out of thee" is feminine. The feminine is also used in ver. 12, "Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more;" in ver. 13, "from off thee," "thy bonds;" in ver. 15, "O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows: for the wicked shall no more pass through thee, he is utterly cut off;" and ii. 1, "He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face." Most of these feminines necessarily refer to Judah, and all of them, I think, naturally do so; and this feminine, which in Hebrew is commonly used of cities and countries, is especially suitable when they are thought of as feeble and suffering: whereas the masculine better suits the strong oppressor, as it is used, ver. 13, "his yoke;" and throughout ver. 14, "concerning thee . . . thy name . . . thy gods . . . thy grave; for thou art vile;" and in the end of ver. 15, "he is utterly cut off," where, however, it might arise from the occurrence of a masculine noun or adjective, "the wicked." When it is the turn of Nineveh to be feeble and suffering, iii. 5-7, it takes the feminine, though this, no doubt, might be attributed to the figure of a woman in ver. 4: nevertheless it is continued in ver. 8 and on to ver. 17, both of No-Amon and of Nineveh; whereas at iii. 18, 19, the masculines alone are found, as we have to do with the "king of Assyria." Very curiously in iii. 15 we have "make thyself many" twice, first masculine, then feminine; observe what is said there of Nineveh first oppressing and ravaging, then oppressed and ravaged, under the one figure of locusts. I think in i. 8, "the place thereof," literally "her place," comes under

12 counseller wickedness. Thus saith the LORD : Though they be  
 in full strength, and likewise many, even so shall they be cut  
 down, and he shall pass away. Though I have afflicted thee, I  
 13 will afflict thee no more. And now will I break his yoke from off  
 14 thee, and will burst thy bonds in sunder. And the LORD hath  
 given commandment concerning thee, that no more of thy name  
 be sown : out of the house of thy gods will I cut off the graven  
 15 image, and the molten image ; I will make thy grave ; for thou  
 art vile. Behold, upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth

Ver. 12. The vastness of this divine work of vengeance is marked by two descriptions of the enemy : they are "*in full strength*" (the Authorized Version "quiet" is owing to a misapprehension of the Hebrew adjective, properly meaning "entire," as much as, whole or complete, see Amos i. 6, 9) ; so Isaiah had said of them, as long as they were the executioners of God's vengeance on His people, "there cometh a smoke out of the north, and none standeth aloof at His appointed times," Isa. xiv. 31 ; and this strength is tremendous, for they are "*likewise many.*" But "*they shall be cut down ;*" the word occurs in Scripture only as applied to shearing sheep, Isa. liii. 7, or to polling the hair, Micah i. 16 ; yet there is evidence that it was equally applicable to cutting down crops ; and the figure is the same which we use in speaking of men being mown down by sword or cannon : in fact, the mower cuts his grass best when it grows thick, and this may be the prophet's idea in the harvest of death, "*even so shall they be cut down,*" as happened with Sennacherib's army. "*He shall pass away,*" though in a different application the same verb is used of him, ver. 15, "he shall no more pass through thee," which refers perhaps to the use of this same verb in the original at ver. 8, "an overflowing flood." The promise of no more affliction is another form of the promise already given in ver. 9, that it shall not come a second time.

Vers. 13, 14. The breaking of the yoke and the bursting of the bonds are phrases which have many parallels : perhaps they go back to Lev. xxvi. 13, though Nahum may have had specially in his mind passages in Isaiah, like chap. ix. 4, 5, x. 27, what are called "*bonds*" here being "*bands*" at Isa. xxviii. 22, lii. 2. So the commandment for the extinction of the oppressor's very seed and name, and for making his grave, reminds us generally of Isa. xiv. 20-22, spoken of the king of Babylon, who came in succession to the king of Assyria to complete the destruction of the Israelite kingdom. The concluding words, "*I will make thee vile,*" have no resemblance in the Hebrew to chap. iii. 6 : a safer rendering is, "thou art of light weight," when weighed in the balance of heaven ; see Job xxxi. 6 ; Dan. v. 27. Ver. 15. However, in the balance, as the one scale falls the other rises : the ruin of Nineveh, the worldly antagonistic power, is

the same rules ; the feminine is naturally used for a city in Hebrew, but especially is used here, since Nineveh is the weak and suffering one. Observe in ii. 1 the pronouns in "*make thy loins strong, fortify thy power,*" are supplied in the translation, and the Hebrew verbs are indeterminate in gender.

good tidings, that publisheth peace! Keep thy feasts, O Judah, perform thy vows: for the wicked one shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off.

CHAP. II. I He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face: keep the munition, watch the way, make thy loins strong, fortify

the glory and happiness of the true kingdom, which God Himself has founded in Israel, as prophets habitually declared from Balaam onwards. Therefore Nahum quotes Isa. lii. 7, perhaps not without a reminiscence also of xl. 9, if he lived in Manasse's days; possibly he hoped that Isaiah's prophecy against Babylon, and promises in connection with return from it, might be fulfilled on occasion of Manasseh's repentance and return from captivity, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11-16; but if he lived in Hezekiah's days, the language is applicable enough to the state of matters after the destruction of Sennacherib's army, 2 Chron. xxxii. 21-23, and might be the common property of these fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God. Isaiah had foretold how Egypt was yet to vow a vow unto Jehovah and to perform it, when Jehovah had smitten and healed it, chap. xix. 21, 22; and Nahum's predecessor Jonah had recorded the like of his heathen companions in the storm, whose example he resolved to copy, chap. i. 16, ii. 9. Much more should Judah do this when "*the wicked*" (literally, worthless) "*one shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off;*" as had been declared, vers. 9-12. It was an anticipation of millennial times, when Satan shall be bound.

## SECOND SECTION, CHAP. II.

How? Jehovah commissions powerful ministers of vengeance, and the city is swept away, leaving not a trace that it had been.

II. 1-4. *The efficiency and terribleness of the assailants, who have their commission on behalf of the revived and restored people of Jehovah.* Ver. 1. The difficulty in settling whose face it is before which the breaker goes up has been discussed at i. 11 and in the note there. The difference to the expositor is this: on the one supposition, the breaker goes before the face of God's people as their leader; and, on the other, he goes before the face of God's enemy, whom he is about to attack. The end of the verse, calling to activity and energy, does not decide the question: the noun "munition" is translated "siege-works" in Isa. xxix. 3. "*He that dasheth in pieces*" is a long title in English: in Hebrew it is a single word, the participle of a verb translated in Hab. iii. 14, "They came as a whirlwind to scatter me;" and the kindred noun is translated a "maul," which is united with a sword and a sharp arrow in Prov. xxv. 18; and "a battle-axe," Jer. li. 20, where Jehovah says to Israel, "Thou art my battle-axe and weapons of war: and with thee will I break in pieces" (a closely allied verb in Hebrew) "the nations," etc. See the promise in Micah ii. 13, "The breaker is gone up before them," though the

2 thy power mightily. For the LORD bringeth again the excellency  
of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel: for the emptiers have  
3 emptied them out, and marred their vine branches. The shield  
of his mighty men is made red, the valiant men are in scarlet:

word is entirely unconnected with the one in our text. If the equally satisfactory rendering "scatter" be preferred, we might find allusions to the scattering of the nations at Babel, Gen. xi. 8; or better, to the word of Moses as often as the ark set forward in the wilderness, "Rise up, O Jehovah, and let Thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee," Num. x. 35, which seems to have become a standing motto for Israel, if we may judge from Ps. lxxviii. 1. **Ver. 2.** The first clause is a real puzzle, owing to both the noun and the verb. "*The excellency of Jacob . . . of Israel*" are expressions occurring in the original of Hos. v. 5 and vii. 10, where our translators have adopted an unfavourable sense, "The pride of Jacob;" also in Amos vi. 8, viii. 7, in both of which probably, in the second certainly, it is used in a good sense, as in Ps. xlvii. 4. The good sense is the one naturally to be preferred, unless we are compelled to regard that good thing as corrupted; compare "the pride of Assyria" in Zech. x. 11. Accepting the favourable sense of the noun, it is still possible to look on the sentence as a threat to Israel, by following the Authorized Version and translating the verb "turn away." But undoubtedly it is the natural and common use of the word which is given in the Revision, "*bringeth again*;" or, as some prefer, without any essential difference of meaning, an intransitive verb, "returneth to," or "returneth with." We have here then a blessing, that Jehovah brings again their excellency, after a time of loss and shame: "*for the emptiers have emptied them out*," expressions borrowed from Isa. xxiv. 1, 3 (the same verb also at chap. xix. 3, "made void"), to be taken up again by Nahum in a cognate noun at ver. 10; "*and marred their vine branches*," which was a calamity natural and to be expected to come on the material vintage of sensual Moab, Isa. xvi. 7-10, but which ought never to have come upon the spiritual vine which Jehovah had planted for Himself, Ps. lxxx. 8-16. Nor would it have come upon them, but that Israel in its luxuriance had become an empty vine, bringing forth his fruit for himself; compare and combine the Authorized and Revised Versions of Hos. x. 1. The difficulties in this verse are not ended till the relation of the excellency of Jacob to the excellency of Israel is settled: it is scarcely allowable to understand these phrases respectively of the Ten Tribes and the Two; but perhaps, as Israel was the new name of honour given to old worldly Jacob, some such idea is intended here, the excellency of Jacob brought again in its noblest possible form as the excellency of Israel, since "Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified," Isa. xlix. 3. Some have thought of a curious statement regarding conquests by Simeon in the time of Hezekiah, 1 Chron. iv. 39-43.

**Vers. 3, 4.** How was judgement to be executed on Nineveh? By

the chariots flash with steel in the day of his preparation, and the  
 4 spears are shaken terribly. The chariots rage in the streets, they  
 jostle one against another in the broad ways : the appearance of  
 5 them is like torches, they run like the lightnings. He remem-  
 bereth his worthies : they stumble in their march ; they make  
 6 haste to the wall thereof, and the mantelet is prepared. The gates  
 7 of the rivers are opened, and the palace is dissolved. And Huzzab

restoring Israel to the highest glory, and this through the very chastisements which Nineveh had been the instrument in God's hand for inflicting. "Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed His whole work upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks," Isa. x. 12. Now was the time for him that dasheth in pieces to come forward and do this final work for Jehovah. In lofty poetic language Nahum describes the warriors, their weapons, their accoutrements, and their movements. It has been argued that "*the streets . . . the broad ways*," are on the outside of Nineveh, since this is a description of the besiegers. Possibly : yet it is very natural to understand that they are inside the city, the besiegers having at last forced an entrance ; though if so, ver. 5, goes back to an earlier time, at which the defenders acted.

II. 5-10. *How the city is taken, how its inhabitants flee or are carried off, and how its treasures are plundered.* The Assyrian king does not give up all as lost, but remembers his "worthies, iii. 18, a word not easy to translate uniformly : it is an attribute of God Himself, Ps. viii. 1, 9, lxxvi. 4, xciii. 4, Isa. xxxiii. 21, but it is also applied to earthly nobles, as in 2 Chron. xxiii. 20 ; Neh. iii. 5, x. 29 ; Jer. xiv. 3. But these worthies, smitten with helplessness by the immediate stroke of God, or perhaps drenched in their drink, according to chap. i. 10, stumble in their march : and though they hasten to the wall, it is only to find that the enemy have been beforehand, and "*the mantelet is prepared*." This covering of boards or other materials, thrown over the besiegers for their protection, like a mantle over the human body, appears often in the Assyrian representations of sieges. The Authorized Version "defence," perhaps is meant in the sense of a defence to those who attacked ; in the margin they note that in Hebrew it is "covering or coverer."

Ver. 6. Much has been written about "*the gates of the rivers*" which were to be "*opened*." Some insist that these were the city gates leading to the river, and that the besiegers were enabled by God to seize the very gates which might have been supposed least liable to be carried by assault. But the more probable opinion surely is that they were gates or openings by which the swollen river made its way into the city ; as in the history of the Flood we read of the windows of heaven being opened, Gen. vii. 11 ; and as Job is told of the bars and doors set to keep the waters from coming farther than God's will permits, Job xxxviii. 8-11. I see no reason for doubting that the manner

is uncovered, she is carried away, and her handmaids mourn as  
8 with the voice of doves, tabering upon their breasts. But Nineveh  
hath been from of old like a pool of water : yet they flee away ;

of the destruction of Nineveh is here foretold : the historian Ctesias relates that in the third year of the siege by the combined Median and Babylonian forces, the Tigris was swollen by extraordinary rains, and overflowed, bringing devastation wherever its waters came, and, in particular, breaking down twenty stadia (2 or 2¼ miles) of the city walls. This offered an easy entrance to the besiegers : though it might be all the more easy if the king lost heart at the same moment, because of an old saying that Nineveh should never be taken unless or until the river became its enemy, and in despair retired to his palace, set fire to it, and perished in the flames. It was a divine retribution. Assyria had been likened to a river going over all its banks, overflowing and passing through Judah, reaching even to the neck, that is, almost drowning the backsliding people of Jehovah, Isa. viii. 6-8 : now the overrunning flood which Nahum (i. 8) had said was to make a full end of the place of Nineveh was seen to be a literal flood of waters, bringing the flood of universal and final ruin along with it.

Ver. 7. The opening words have been variously rendered.<sup>1</sup> The marginal rendering seems the safer : the divine decree has settled what man might not have thought possible, and has unsettled and overturned what man might have thought most secure. Nineveh is "*uncovered*" (see more fully in iii. 5) and "*carried away*" into exile, as she had carried Israel and many other nations : the only token of the greatness of this fallen "princess among the provinces" (to borrow the description of Jerusalem in Lam. i. 1) is that "*her handmaids*" attend her, helpless, however, to do more than mourn for her. The mourning of the dove is an expression which occurs elsewhere in Scripture, as Isa. lix. 11, Ezek. vii. 16 ; beating their breasts in grief is here called "tabering," as if beating a timbrel, in which latter sense alone the word occurs again, Ps. lxxviii. 25.

Ver. 8. It would be easy to interpret this as meaning that Nineveh was reduced to the condition of a pool of water after this inundation ; compare what is said of Babylon in Isa. xiv. 23, "pools of water" (not the same noun in the Hebrew). Yet the language is better understood to describe, not what she became, but what she had been all along "from of old," or as in the margin, "from the days she

<sup>1</sup> An opinion, at least as old as the Chaldee version of this prophet, has been represented in the text of both the Authorized and the Revised Versions, that "*Huzzab*" is a proper name, that of the queen of Assyria ; and it has had able defenders down to this day ; nevertheless, there is a want of proper evidence to confirm it. The word is quite well known as a verb in the Old Testament, for instance, in Deut. xxxii. 8, Ps. lxxiv. 17, where Jehovah is said to have "set," that is, "settled" something, as in Ps. cxix. 89 ; and a closely related word is used for what is settled and true, by the decree either of God or of an earthly king, Dan. ii. 45, vi. 12. This is the marginal Revised rendering, perhaps also the marginal Authorized.

- 9 Stand, stand, *they cry*; but none looketh back. Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold: for there is none end of the store,  
 10 the glory of all pleasant furniture. She is empty, and void, and waste: and the heart melteth, and the knees smite together, and anguish is in all loins, and the faces of them all are waxed pale.  
 11 Where is the den of the lions, and the feeding place of the young lions, where the lion *and* the lioness walked, the lion's whelp, and  
 12 none made them afraid. The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his caves with

[hath been]." Perhaps, like the description of Babylon in Jer. li. 13, "O thou that dwellest upon many waters, abundant in treasures," the comparison is to a reservoir, into which water flows from all directions: so into Nineveh had been flowing a perpetual stream of people from all the conquered nations, transplanted to dwell in it, and bringing their treasures with them. Compare also what is said of the renewed Jerusalem in Isa. ix. 5. This suits the latter half of the verse: the reservoir is cracked, the gathered waters run out, and it is left dry. People may call to them to stand still instead of fleeing; but all in vain, as in Isaiah's description of Babylon, chap. xlvii. 15. None looks back (not the same word in the Hebrew as in the case of Lot's wife, yet perhaps the same idea) to see what comes of the accumulation of wealth for centuries in this metropolis. Ver. 9. All is given up to pillage. Ver. 10. Three very rare words, of sound nearly alike in the original (the first and third of which, in the transitive form, occur in Isa. xxiv. 1, "Behold, Jehovah maketh the earth empty and maketh it waste"), are brought together to describe the condition of the city after it has been rifled, as the last of the three words may be translated. And phrases are combined to give the impression of the despair and agony and terror of those who are left, for "*anguish is in all loins*," compare Isa. xxi. 3; Ezek. xxx. 4, 9; and for "*the faces . . . are waxed pale*," see Joel ii. 6.

II. 11-13. *How it perishes like a lion's den attacked and destroyed.* In countries infested by the larger and more dangerous beasts of prey, such as lions, the people may suffer long, standing chiefly on the defensive; but a time arrives when their condition is felt to be intolerable, and the conviction comes home to all that in some way, and at whatever cost, their misery must be brought to an end by invading the lion's den and exterminating these enemies. A reference to expeditions of this kind is found in Ezek. xix., applied to the case of the degenerate children of Josiah king of Judah: had they not been degenerate, the emblem of the lion might have been used of them in a favourable sense, as it is in Micah v. 8, where see the remarks. Here, in the case of Nineveh, the lion is represented at his worst: and his ruin is effected by combined and sustained effort to rid the world of such a pest, whatever may be the difficulties and dangers to be faced. The representations of lions are very frequent in the sculptures discovered at Nineveh: its people were ready enough to appropriate to themselves this emblem of strength, cun-

13 prey, and his dens with ravin. Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions: and I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard.

CHAP. III. 1 Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and rapine; 2 the prey departeth not. The noise of the whip, and the noise of the rattling of wheels; and pransing horses, and jumping chariots;

ning, and ferocity. The den is destroyed, so that it no longer exists, and the beasts of prey that dwelt in it are annihilated. Yet no figure of speech can exhaust the subject. In ver. 13, therefore, the prophet drops the metaphor. "*Behold, I am against thee, saith Jehovah,*" a short and emphatic statement repeated at iii. 5, which leaves no room for doubt how the struggle is to end; the phrase occurs often in the solemn denunciations pronounced by Ezekiel. "Saith Jehovah" is literally His solemn utterance, as explained at Micah iv. 6. And though the young lions are still named, it is only because they are to be destroyed by the sword, while the weight of the utterance is rested on the burning of her chariots (see Isa. xxxvii. 24) in the smoke, and the ceasing of the voice of her messengers to be heard,—voices speaking in the name of the great king, which had made the nations tremble. Of their blasphemous and injurious language we have in Scripture examples in the campaigns of Sennacherib against Hezekiah: it is interesting to read in Isa. xxxvii. 24, "By thy *servants* hast thou reproached the Lord," but in the parallel passage 2 Kings xix. 23, "By thy messengers," etc.

### THIRD SECTION, CHAP. III.

Why? Because of her extraordinary wickedness.

III. 1-7. *Her own wickedness has brought it on her.* Ver. 1. "*Woe,*" or "*Ho:*" it is frequent in Isaiah, as in the great prophecy beginning, "Ho, Assyrian," chap. x. 5; see on Micah ii. 1. Three classes of sins are brought together; her bloodthirstiness and her lies (not a common word, chiefly in Hosea, chaps. vii. 3, x. 13, xi. 12) and her robbery; the last, and, indeed, to some extent all three, following naturally on the emblem of the lion's den in ii. 11-13. "*Rapine*" is a noun occurring nowhere else (in Obad. 14 it is really a different word), yet the verb is in a passage which may have been in Nahum's mind, Ps. vii. 2, "Lest he tear my soul like a lion, *rending* it in pieces, while there is none to deliver." Vers. 2, 3. The prophet writes as if startled with the sights and sounds of the enemy as he advances in irresistible haste; "*pransing horses,*" compare Judg. v. 22; and "*jumping chariots*" driving madly over the uneven ground, compare Joel ii. 5, where also the flame of fire is mentioned, only there its crackling is heard, whereas here its flash is seen. The latter portion of ver. 3 in the Hebrew is very compressed, yet it reiterates



3 the horseman mounting, and the flashing sword, and the glittering spear; and a multitude of slain, and a great heap of carcases: and there is none end of the corpses; they stumble upon their  
 4 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.  
 5 Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will discover thy skirts upon thy face; and I will show the nations  
 6 thy nakedness, and the kingdoms thy shame. And I will cast abominable filth upon thee, and make thee vile, and will set thee  
 7 as a gazingstock. And it shall come to pass, that all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste: who will bemoan her? whence shall I seek comforters for  
 8 thee? Art thou better than No-amon, that was situate among

the statement of death everywhere. It is the conquerors now who stumble, not the conquered as in ii. 5; but it is over the masses of corpses that they stumble.

**Ver. 4.** An additional sinful element in Nineveh is mentioned, she is a harlot: for the reason of giving her this name see some remarks in the Introduction to Jonah, head Second, IV. There may be reference also to the allurements by means of which the nations were led willingly to ruin, since "witchcrafts" are coupled with the other, as in 2 Kings ix. 22; as also to the licentious worship, at least if Nineveh at all resembled Babylon. **Vers. 5, 6.** For this additional sin there shall be an appropriate disgraceful punishment; compare Isa. xlvii. 2, 3 of Babylon, and Jer. xiii. 22, 26 of Judah. The first part of ver. 5 repeats the words in ii. 13. "Discover" in ver. 5 is the same verb as "uncover" in ii. 7. "I will make thee vile," ver. 6, is the same verb as "dishonoureth," Micah vii. 6, and might be so rendered, or, "will disgrace thee," as it is at Jer. xiv. 21: it has no connection in the Hebrew with "thou art vile," i. 14, where see the note. Nothing remains to be said, but that those who simply look on here, now that she is made a gazingstock, shall flee from the spot, saying, "Nineveh is laid waste," or "spoiled," as the word is often translated. "Whence shall I seek comforters for thee," probably with an allusion to the prophet's own name, "a comforter." Vers. 7 and 10 seem to contain reminiscences of Isa. li. 19, 20.

**Vers. 8-13.** *Why should she escape more than No-amon?* **Ver. 7.** This great city, rightly named in the margin of the Authorized Version (in the text it is not well rendered "populous No," much as in Jer. xlvi. 25, "the multitude of No," but in the margin and in the Revision "Amon of No:" the city is called simply "No" in Ezek. xxx. 14, 15, 16; in ver. 15 Ezekiel does speak of "the multitude of No," by a slight change to produce a play on the words), was well known to the Greeks, and celebrated by them under the name of Thebes, the capital of Upper Egypt, specially dedicated to the god Amon, with temples which are still among the wonders of the world, at the modern villages of Luxor and Karnak, on the eastern side of

the rivers, that had the waters round about her; whose rampart 9 was the sea, *and* her wall was of the sea? Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength, and it was infinite; Put and Lubim were thy 10 helpers. Yet was she carried away, she went into captivity: her young children also were dashed in pieces at the top of all the streets: and they cast lots for her honourable men, and all

the Nile, and Gurnah and Medinet Abu on the west side. Ver. 8. There is, properly speaking, but one river in Egypt; and the noun rendered "rivers" is really an Egyptian word, used in Scripture in the singular for the Nile: no doubt it is used in the plural too, but apparently for the channels in which its waters were artificially conducted for irrigating the land, etc. So vast are the waters of the Nile, particularly when in flood, that they deserve and receive the name of a sea, that is, a lake: and this is probably what is here meant by "*the sea*," or more exactly "a sea." Ver. 9. The power of Egypt was greatest when it was supported by "*Ethiopia*" (in Hebrew, Cush), very much the indefinitely vast country known to us as the Soudan, which stretches to the south and south-west. "*Put*" (or Phut) is named along with Cush and Mizraim (or Egypt) among the sons of Ham, Gen. x. 6; and so also in Jer. xlvi. 9, Ezek. xxx. 5, xxxviii. 5, though with other associates in Ezek. xxvii. 10: there is a pretty general agreement that Put occupied the ancient Mauritania, lying within the modern Algeria and Morocco. There is more obscurity about the "*Lubim*," who are again named only in 2 Chron. xii. 3 and xvi. 8, and (with a small variation in spelling) in Dan. xi. 43: perhaps they occupied the country to the west of Egypt, called by the Greeks Lybia. Ver. 10. Yet the lot of Thebes, thus surrounded by everything that could support her, was exile and captivity. If any of her inhabitants did not meet with this, their fate was no better; her young children were dashed in pieces at the top of all the streets (compare the same barbarities, 2 Kings viii. 12, Isa. xiii. 16, 18, Hos. x. 14, xiii. 16, these three last cases being the act of Assyria against Israel, as Nahum charges to them the same crime against No-Amon): and lots were cast upon her honourable men (compare Joel iii. 3; Obad. 11); the tense of the Hebrew verbs suggests that this was a continuing state of matters, while once for all they had been bound in chains.

To what event did Nahum here allude? Undoubtedly the city of Thebes or No was reduced to ruins by the Persian king Cambyses, son and successor of Cyrus; but this event is not to be brought into connection with Nahum's prophecy, which speaks of an event already past. The answer to the question had to be left unsettled, like many other historical matters, until the Assyrian inscriptions gave us the history of the expedition against Egypt, whose king was Urdamanî, or Rud-Amôn, son of Tirhakah the Ethiopian (Isa. xxxvii. 9), by the Assyrian king Asurbanipal, son and successor of Esarhaddon. He writes, "In confidence on Sin, Asur, and the great gods, my lords, they [that is, my troops] inflicted on him in the battle,

- 11 her great men were bound in chains. Thou also shalt be drunken, thou shalt be hid ; thou also shalt seek a strong hold because of  
 12 the enemy. All thy fortresses shall be *like fig trees* with the first-ripe figs : if they be shaken, they fall into the mouth of the eater.  
 13 Behold, thy people in the midst of thee are women ; the gates of thy land are set wide open unto thine enemies : the fire hath  
 14 devoured thy bars. Draw thee water for the siege, strengthen

in a wide plain, a defeat, and shattered his might. Urdamanî fled alone, and entered into Nô, the city of his royalty. In a march of a month and ten days they advanced, on ways hard to traverse, behind him, into the midst of the city Nô ; that town in its entire extent they captured, overthrew like a flood. Gold, silver, the dust of its land, objects of cast metal (?), precious stones, the treasure of his palace, garments of Berom (?) and KUM, great horses, men and women . . . *pagi* and *ukupi* [perhaps animals], the product of its mountains, in measureless quantity they carried forth out of it, they counted as spoil ; to Nineveh, my royal city, they carried them away in good condition, and kissed my feet." This ruin of Thebes is placed by Schrader (*Cuneiform Inscriptions and the Old Testament*, translation, ii. p. 152) a year or so after the death of Tirhakah in 664.

Nahum is telling why Nineveh is to perish so awfully as he has foretold : and after describing her wickedness as the reason, vers. 1-7, he asks, ver. 8, "Art thou better than No-Amon," the capital of a great kingdom, in so many ways strong like herself, and which she had just destroyed? **Ver. 11.** He answers, that she is no better than the rival whom she has cruelly and thoroughly destroyed ; therefore her doom is all the more clear. "*Thou also shalt be drunken,*" a common metaphor in Scripture to describe the helplessness and insensibility of those on whom terrific judgements are about to fall, as Jer. xxv. 15, Obad. 16 ; possibly (compare what was said of another metaphor at ver. 4) with a reference to the drunkenness charged on them at i. 10. "*Thou shalt be hid,*" sinking out of notice, instead of being the foremost object to a wondering and submissive world : some understood the verb of swooning away, which would also give a good sense. "*Thou also shalt seek a strong hold because of the enemy ;*" of course seeking it in vain, whereas Jehovah is the strong hold of those who trust in Him in the day of trouble, i. 7. **Vers. 12, 13.** Nahum ends with two comparisons. In ver. 12 her very fortresses are like "*the firstripe figs,*" a well-known delicacy, no sooner seen than swallowed up, Isa. xxviii. 4 ; in Joel iii. 13 the metaphor is taken from the harvest and the vintage. Again in ver. 13 her defenders "*are women ;*" see Isa. xix. 16 ; Jer. i. 37, li. 30 : no wonder that "*the gates of thy land are set wide open unto thine enemies*" (see at ii. 6), and that their wooden bars are devoured by fire.

**III. 14-19.** *They begin with energy, they end in helplessness.*  
**Ver. 14.** The common means for energetic defence are these : the provision of water for the siege, no doubt also of food ; the

thy fortresses: go into the clay, and tread the mortar, make  
 15 strong the brickkiln. There shall the fire devour thee; the  
 sword shall cut thee off, it shall devour thee like the cankerworm:  
 make thyself many as the cankerworm, make thyself many as the  
 16 locust. Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of  
 17 heaven: the cankerworm spoileth, and fieth away. Thy crowned  
 are as the locusts, and thy marshals as the swarms of grass-  
 hoppers, which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the  
 sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known where

strengthening of the fortresses to resist attack; and the preparation of bricks for any further building that may be needed. Vers. 15. Notwithstanding, "there," at those very places, in the midst of these very efforts, they shall be destroyed by fire and sword. A striking effect is produced by the use of the cankerworm<sup>1</sup> or locust, as an emblem, to describe Nineveh from two points of view, with both of which the prophet is concerned, as ravager and as ravaged: the interchange of these two ideas in his discourse suggests that Nineveh shall rapidly pass from the attitude of spoiling others into that of being itself spoiled, as Isaiah had foretold, chap. xxxiii. 1. Vers. 16. We might not have expected the introduction of mercantile pursuits in the midst of these descriptions of war, "*thou hast multiplied thy merchants,*" etc.; yet this comes in to exhibit the variety of resources at the command of Nineveh, resources in wealth as well as force, which she had carefully developed, though all in vain when her time came to be judged; and something had already been said of that wealth at ii. 8, 9.<sup>2</sup> Ver. 17. There are here two nouns, "*thy crowned*" and "*thy marshals,*" which are both supposed to be technical Assyrian terms, whose meaning is not certain: the first occurs nowhere else, and the second only at Jer. li. 27. The flight of insects which had been camping in the hedges, upon a change of temperature, is familiar to many. Then "*the place is not known where they are;*" as of Nineveh it had been said, i. 8, that a full end

<sup>1</sup> It is unnecessary to go into a discussion in natural history. At Joel i. 4 and ii. 25 four creatures are named, which the English Bible renders, the palmerworm, the locust, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar; on which, in Revision, the marginal note has been placed, "Probably different kinds of locusts, or locusts in different stages of growth;" for each of these views is supported by eminent authorities. The second and third names there, translated "locust" and "cankerworm," are translated uniformly so here, in vers. 15-17; a fifth name, in two connected forms, translated, "swarms of grasshoppers," in ver. 17, is found in Amos vii. 1, and is conjectured to belong to the same class as the other four.

<sup>2</sup> There has been much difference about the last words of ver. 16. The marginal rendering, "the cankerworm spreadeth himself," etc., has high authority on its side; and so has even the more definite rendering, "casts his skin," as the caterpillar does when becoming an insect. However, the well ascertained meaning of the verb, from which there is no sufficient reason for departing, is "to spoil," or "to make a raid," as the word is repeatedly rendered in the Revision, 1 Sam. xxvii. 8, 10, xxx. 1, 14, 1 Chron. xiv. 9, 13, and in the margin at Job i. 17; Hos. vii. 1.

18 they are. Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria: thy worthies are at rest: thy people are scattered upon the mountains, and there is none to gather them. There is no assuaging of thy hurt; thy wound is grievous: all that hear the bruit of thee clap the hands over thee; for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?

should be made of the place thereof. Xenophon, in his narrative of the retreat of his ten thousand Greeks from the war with Artaxerxes II., B.C. 401, some two centuries after the fall of Nineveh, encamped perhaps on the very spot where Nineveh had stood, but did not hear its name, nor does he seem to have known anything about it: he only saw the ruins of two great cities, which he names Larissa and Mespila. Strabo, the painstaking and accurate Greek geographer, says that "the city Nineveh disappeared," or vanished out of sight (compare "be hid" in ver. 11), "immediately after the destruction by the Syrians."

**Vers. 18, 19.** The prophet concludes with what is almost a pathetic address to the king of Assyria, it matters not whether the last king, or the monarch in the abstract, whoever the individual might be. He has had "*shepherds*" under him, but they "*slumber*;" a word which might indicate carelessness and sloth, Isa. v. 27, lvi. 10, but which I much prefer to understand of the sleep of death, Ps. lxxvi. 5, 6, see also Jer. li. 57. He has had "*worthies*," ii. 5, but they "*are at rest*," a verb to be understood in the same sense as the sleeping. He has had a people, but now they are "*scattered*," a verb which the English reader will not recognise in the other texts where it is found, Jer. l. 11; Hab. i. 8; Mal. iv. 2; it seems to suggest enlargement and enjoyment after being repressed: they are in this sense "*scattered upon the mountains, and there is none to gather*" the flock which has attained to freedom. And there is "*no assuaging*" (a noun found only here, but the adjective is applied to faintness or dimness in the appearance of leprosy, Lev. xiii. 6, etc.) of his hurt, for "*thy wound is grievous*," a phrase familiar to Jeremiah, chap. x. 19, xiv. 17, xxx. 12. And the feature last to be noticed is, that, instead of sympathy, wherever the report comes, there is clapping of hands over him; as Isaiah, chap. xiv., makes the very dead break forth in joy when the fallen king of Babylon descends to them in the under-world. And this seeming harshness was justifiable: "*for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?*" Because Jehovah is a loving God, He loves righteousness; and righteousness and judgement are the foundation of His throne, Ps. lxxxix. 14.

## HABAKKUK.



WE are told less of this prophet than of any of the others who have written the Scriptures ; not even his father's name, nor his place of abode, nor anything about the time he lived, or the circumstances in which he prophesied, unless, possibly, with one exception. It has been plausibly inferred that he was a Levite who had some charge of the temple music, on account of his poem having close relations with the Book of Psalms : (1) it receives a title, iii. 19, "For the chief musician," like many of the psalms ; (2) it is "on my stringed instruments," the same title as Ps. iv., vi., liv., lv., lxi., lxvii., lxxvi., only that they want the possessive pronoun "my ;" (3) it has the word "Selah," vers. 3, 9, 14, as those psalms set to music have ; (4) though it has the title, ver. 1, "a prayer," so have some of them, Ps. xvii., lxxxvi., xc., cii., cxlii. ; (5) and there it is said to be "set to Shigionoth," as in the title of Ps. vii. This word occurs nowhere again ; it is explained by many scholars to be a dithyrambic ode, that is, one of an impetuous nature, and with an irregular measure.

The solitary hint of the time at which he lived is contained in one word in i. 6 ; the occasion of his prophecy was the actual or impending invasion and subjugation of Judah by the Chaldeans. This took place in the reign of Jehoiakim, the worthless son of Josiah, apparently in his fourth year, 2 Kings xxiv. 1 compared with Jer. xxv. 1-9, Dan. i. 1 (where it is said that Nebuchadnezzar came up in the third year of Jehoiakim), after his victory at Carchemish had destroyed the power of Egypt in Western Asia. The latest date that can reasonably be assigned to the prophecy is therefore before that event which is there announced. Those who hold that prophecy foretold only what was in the immediate future, necessarily object to placing Habakkuk any earlier. But very high authorities prefer to place him in the reign of Josiah, whose diligent efforts to reform his kingdom were very ill-supported by his people, as is clear from the tone of Jeremiah's prophecy ; whilst many scholars, like Delitzsch latterly, carry the date even farther back, to the reign of Manasseh. There can be no certainty, since the facts known to us are so very few. The earlier part of Manasseh's reign is, indeed, shut out by the statement, "I work a work in *your days*," i. 5, which probably confines

us, at all events, to half a century or so : and in the days of Manasseh's idolatry, violence, and murder, with the persecution of the true worshippers of God, the temple song would scarcely have been written and given to the chief musician. Some considerable interval of time between the prediction and the fulfilment is favoured by the following words, "a work in your days, which ye will not believe though it be told you," whereas it was difficult to expect anything else from the time that Nebuchadnezzar ascended the throne. And such an interval of time is also favoured by the extraordinary absence of particulars in the whole prophecy, with the one exception that the Chaldeans are once named : not, however, their heroic leader Nebuchadnezzar, nor his city Babylon, nor Judah, nor its king, nor Jerusalem, nor any of the details found in Zephaniah and Jeremiah. These two prophets also, and the prophets later than them, wrote for the most part in ordinary prose : Habakkuk is universally acknowledged to be unexcelled, perhaps unequalled, in the loftiness and poetic grandeur of his style, a characteristic which favours his claim to stand among the earlier writers. There were, undoubtedly, prophets, whose names are not recorded, who spoke to Manasseh and his people in their days of provocation, yet all in vain ; but there surely were also prophets in the period after his repentance, when he endeavoured to make amends for the evil he had done, see 2 Kings xxi. 10-16 ; 2 Chron. xxxiii. 10, 15-19. If we try to fix a date, the latter part of his reign seems as likely a period as any for the ministry of Habakkuk.

The meaning of a prophet's name is often manifestly connected with his work. In this case, however, there is some difficulty in determining the meaning. It has been very frequently translated "embracing," or "caressing." I incline to agree with those who take it in a passive sense, "embraced," or "caressed," namely, by God : compare the blessing of Benjamin by Moses, "The beloved of Jehovah shall dwell securely by Him : He covereth him all the day long, and he dwelleth between His shoulders," Deut. xxxiii. 12. This is Habakkuk's very attitude of mind amidst his most violent agitation and fears, "that I should *rest* in the day of trouble," iii. 16. And his prophecy exhibits a marvellous familiarity with God, a conversation kept up with Him, remonstrances addressed to Him, receiving answers, far beyond what occurs in Jer. xii., more like Moses whom Jehovah knew face to face, Deut. xxxiv. 10, and with whom He spoke mouth to mouth, Num. xii. 8.<sup>1</sup>

The book is naturally divided into two sections : the first, chaps. i. and ii., being, as it were, a dialogue between the prophet and Jehovah, running out into a longer discourse ; and the second being the psalm

<sup>1</sup> In this verse (as in ver. 3, the unwarranted claim to equal privileges made by Miriam and Aaron, and in ver. 6) occurs a very peculiar phrase for speaking *to* or *with*, which Habakkuk uses of God speaking to him, ii. 1, in the margin of the Authorized Version "in me." It may suggest extreme intimacy. It is used also of God speaking with Hosea, i. 2, for the relations of his Master with Hosea were very tender. It seems to be used again only of the interpreting angel, Zech. i. 9, 14, 19, iv. 1, 4, 5, who spoke to that prophet on a footing of intimacy and equality such as was not fitting for God.

CHAP. I. 1 **T**HE burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see.  
 2 O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not  
 hear? I cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save.  
 3 Why dost thou show me iniquity, and look upon perverseness?  
 for spoiling and violence are before me: and there is strife, and  
 4 contention riseth up. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgement

or prayer which he is encouraged and directed to compose with refer-  
 ence to the fulfilment of what has been revealed to him.

### FIRST SECTION, CHAPS. I. AND II.

The dialogue, and the discourse in which it issues.

I. 1. *The title*, which has been partly considered in the Introduction. On "*burden*" see what is said at Nah. i. 1. The verb "*did see*," and the kindred nouns, one of which is rendered "*vision*" at ii. 2, 3, are frequent in the prophets, especially in Isaiah, so much so that to the English reader it is at times disguised by the rendering "*prophecy*" as Isa. xxx. 10.

I. 2-4. *Habakkuk's first complaint: the gross and growing evils which he is forced to see.* Ver. 2. "*Cry . . . cry out.*" There are two verbs used for the prophet's cry: both are common in the Psalms: the first is especially to cry for help; the second is to cry out, as one does in sudden alarm or with great energy. The two verbs occur together in the complaint, Job xix. 7, and with the same noun as here, "*violence*," which is repeated by Habakkuk at vers. 3, 9, ii. 8, 17, with a difference, however: in vers. 2 and 3 it is the violence done by the professing people of God, whereas in the other passages it is the violence which they are made to suffer in consequence of their own ill-doing. Ver. 8. Here it is certainly the violence they do, the word being combined with "*spoiling*," as it often is in the prophets ("*violence and robbery*," Amos iii. 10, and Jer. vi. 7, etc.; in this very book, indeed, it is translated more loosely "*destruction*," ii. 17): and this is made plain by two other pairs of nouns. There is "*iniquity and . . . perverseness*," which ought never to have been seen in Israel, compare Balaam's testimony, Num. xxiii. 21: why, then, the prophet asks, dost thou show them to me, and look on them thyself? To the latter part of this question he returns at ver. 13. The third pair of nouns are "*strife and contention*" (found together elsewhere, as in Isa. lviii. 4), which cannot but arise in a state of society that is so evil. Ver. 4. No doubt there is such a thing as "*law*:"<sup>1</sup> it is throughout asserted in the Old Testament that Israel

<sup>1</sup> It would be out of place here to go into the study of this word, which is by many translated "*teaching*," or "*instruction*," sometimes so in the Revised margin, though this latter is the translation which alternates with "*correction*" for a different word, see at Zeph. iii. 2. For my own part, I see no evidence that it is anything else in these passages than the law of Jehovah given to Israel by Moses, which, unquestionably, is the meaning in the later writers: so the New Testament



doth never go forth : for the wicked doth compass about the  
 5 righteous ; therefore judgement goeth forth perverted. Behold ye  
 among the nations, and regard, and wonder marvellously : for I

was distinguished from all the other nations by the possession of the divine law. The sad truth, however, was that this law was "*slacked*," literally, was in a faint (see Gen. xlv. 26), or we might say paralysed, until Josiah found the autograph of Moses, and, aided by the impression which this discovery made on the nation, sought to restore its proper authority. In consequence of this, either "*judgement doth never go forth*," or else it "*goeth forth perverted*" (crooked, as we see the noun, Isa. xxvii. 1, Judg. v. 6, Ps. cxxv. 5, instead of taking the straight course, as it ought); and in doing so, justice would become injustice. A clause comes in to explain and emphasize, "*the wicked doth compass about the righteous*," thus having him in his grasp a helpless prey to ruin; contrast the Psalmist's description of his own happy position, "*the righteous shall compass me about*," Ps. cxlii. 7.

I. 5-11. *The first reply of Jehovah: His coming work of vengeance, which men would not believe, by the instrumentality of the Chaldeans.* Ver. 5. The prophet and his people are to lift their eyes and look beyond their own country to the nations, and among them to see the means of setting right what he felt was wrong: "*regard*" is the verb translated "look upon," vers. 3, 13. When the sins of God's professing people had reached a certain point, known only to Him, the outward framework of the theocracy had to be taken down; a very rough task, performed by rough hands, the Assyrians (who had, more than fifty or an hundred years before, carried the Ten Tribes into exile) and the Babylonians or Chaldeans: and almost all the prophets, whose writings have been handed down to us, had this as the duty assigned to them, to announce this work which God was working, and to prepare the Church for the new conditions under which it was to live on. It was such a revolution, that the people, who boasted of their covenant privileges, and felt secure in the possession of these, could not believe the announcement. "*Wonder marvellously*," a rather uncommon verb used to describe the feelings of the invading kings at a time when the Church was saved from its enemies, Ps. xlvi. 5; and the feelings of the people of Babylon itself when its turn came to be judged, Isa. xlii. 8; here it is used of the people of God themselves, according to the threat, Deut. xxviii. 28 (expressed in the original by the cognate noun), "*Jehovah shall smite thee with . . . astonishment of heart*," as Isaiah, xxix. 9, 10, had spoken of their wondering (the

writers invariably take it. No doubt the etymology of the word connects it in some degree with teaching: this is an essential attribute of the law of Jehovah, Ps. xix. 7-11, etc., which may be entirely wanting in a human law. But there is a quite different verb in Hebrew, which properly means to teach, from which this other had better have been carefully distinguished. The prominent idea in this word is not the communication of knowledge, but the authority that naturally goes along with this; in English we often use the word "instructions" as almost equivalent to "commands." See more at ii. 18, 19; and on the better word for "instruction," see at Zeph. iii. 2.

work a work in your days, which ye will not believe though it be  
 6 told you. For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty  
 nation ; which march through the breadth of the earth, to possess  
 7 dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dread-  
 ful : their judgement and their dignity proceed from themselves.  
 8 Their horses also are swifter than leopards, and are more fierce  
 than the evening wolves ; and their horsemen spread themselves :  
 yea, their horsemen come from far ; they fly as an eagle that  
 9 hasteth to devour. They come all of them for violence ; their  
 faces are set eagerly *as* the east wind ; and they gather captives

same word still), and being overwhelmed with a spiritual drunkenness, to which their false prophets contributed. Habakkuk adds, "*which ye will not believe, though it be told you,*" as Isaiah had had much to learn and teach of their unbelief. When not merely the outward theocracy, but the whole church-privileges of Israel were to be lost, Paul quoted Habakkuk, see Acts xiii. 40, 11. Ver. 6. "*I raise up,*" is the expression in Amos vi. 14 ; only that there the nation is not yet named, as it is here. "*The Chaldeans,*" in Hebrew Casdim, are a nation whose early history is still a matter of dispute, some authorities connecting them with Chesed, or even with Arphaxad, Gen. xxii. 22, x. 22, of the race of Shem ; others thinking them of Scythian, that is, Tartar descent. Their bitter and active spirit made them suitable instruments for going "*through the breadth of the earth*" (an expression taken up in Rev. xx. 9), in their efforts to found a universal empire, in the course of which they took possession of dwelling places that were not theirs, of Israel's among others. Vers. 7-9. In these, as the margin tells us, the prophet uses the singular "he" and "his," as again at ii. 5 ; it is difficult to do this in English (though the Revised Version secures it in i. 14-17, aided by the naming of the wicked man in ver. 13), and so we lose the definiteness and force which the original possesses by gathering the multitude into a representative individual, or by personification in an ideal man. Ver. 7 represents them as inspiring terror, executing judgement (the want of which in Israel had been confessed at ver. 4), and possessing a dignity, both of which things are said to proceed from themselves, perhaps with a hint that they are not from Jehovah, though He makes use of these ungodly agents. Ver. 8 compares them to certain beasts and birds of prey, which are all used by other inspired messengers, Hosea, Jeremiah, and Daniel, to describe one or other of the worldly powers which were to destroy the polluted fold of God ; indeed, the emblem of an eagle is as old as Deut. xviii. 49. "*Evening wolves,*" no doubt, are those who have lain concealed all day, and at night go out hungry to find their prey ; on the verb "*spread themselves,*" in the margin, "bear themselves proudly," see what was remarked on Nah. iii. 18. Ver. 9 speaks of their violence ; see what was said on vers. 2 and 3. The middle clause of the verse is very difficult to translate ; there is a noun which occurs only here, probably meaning "eagerness," and which in English takes the form of the adverb to

10 as the sand. Yea, he scoffeth at kings, and princes are a derision  
 unto him : he derideth every strong hold ; for he heapeth up dust,  
 11 and taketh it. Then shall he sweep by *as* a wind, and shall pass  
 12 over, and be guilty : *even* he whose might is his God. Art not  
 thou from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we  
 shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained him for judgement :  
 13 and thou, O Rock, hast established him for correction. Thou  
 that art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and that canst not look

suit the translation ; but I prefer the margin for the rest, "is towards the east" or "forwards." The multitude of their captives is compared to the sand, by a common figure of speech in happier circumstances applied to the promised seed of the patriarchs. Ver. 10. War is represented as a mere pastime to these men of eagerness and violence, a pastime in which kings and strong holds are looked upon with equal contempt ; of this contempt we have examples among their Assyrian predecessors in Isa. x. 8-14, xxxvi. 13-21, xxxvii. 10-13, 23-29. Ver. 11. This is almost entirely changed from the Authorized Version, and with much advantage, though possibly the first marginal rendering may be still better ; the general sense is that the invader shall pass on triumphantly, the attempt to stop him being as vain as an attempt to stop the wind ; yet that his very success shall be his ruin, as he becomes guilty by his worship of his own brute force. The Assyrian and Babylonian kings were very religious in their own way, as we see by their inscriptions ; but they attributed physical force rather than moral character to their gods, and of these gods they made themselves the representatives. The passages in Isaiah just named illustrate this.

I. 12-17. *Habakkuk's second complaint, that the remedy is in some respects worse than the evil of which he complained before.* Ver. 12. In opposition to those heathenish gods of force, the prophet appeals to Jehovah : Thou hast the natural attributes of the Godhead, for Thou art "*from everlasting,*" as Moses had said, Ps. xc. 2 ; yet Thou hast also the moral attributes, "*my God,*" in covenant, see Lev. xi. 45, whom therefore I name "*my Holy One,*" in accordance with the favourite title given by Isaiah. That prophet discovered in God's character the meaning of the discipline through which He put His backsliding people ; see passages such as Isa. x. 5-23, lxiii. 15, 16, lxiv. 4-9. And Habakkuk was being led in the same way when he added "*we shall not die,*" compare Ps. cxviii. 17, 18. No, for it is Jehovah who has "*ordained him,*" set him where he is, and with the power he exerts ; and "*established him*" (literally, founded him, see Isa. xxiii. 13, of these Chaldeans), for purposes of judgement, which was mentioned at vers. 4 and 7, and correction. A fourth description of God is then given, "*O Rock,*" a name learned from Moses, Deut. xxxii. 4, 15, 18, 37, adopted in the Psalms, and in Isa. xvii. 10, xxvi. 4, xxx. 29, xlv. 8 ; and well adapted to encourage and support Habakkuk. Ver. 13. Therefore he appeals to God, who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and who seemed to have brought a shade

on perverseness, wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy peace when the wicked swalloweth up the man that is more righteous than he; and makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them? He taketh up all of them with the angle, he catcheth them in his net, and gathereth them in his drag: therefore he rejoiceth and is glad. Therefore he sacrificeth unto his net, and burneth incense unto his drag; because by them his portion is fat, and his meat plenteous. Shall he therefore empty his net, and not spare to slay the nations continually?

CHAP. II. I I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will look forth to see what he will speak with me, and what I

over His perfect character, which cannot look upon perverseness, by actually doing so, see at ver. 3. Why does God use such vile instruments in carrying on His work of chastisement? Why does He look upon treacherous dealers, a common description of evil-doers in Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, in conformity with what is said in Scripture of the deceitfulness of sin? Why does He hold His peace (compare Ps. l. 21; Isa. xlii. 14) when the wicked Chaldean is swallowing up a man more righteous than he? **Vers. 14, 15.** This swallowing up is represented by the figure of a fisherman catching the simple fish, as in Eccles. ix. 12; the angle and the drag are less common words; in the Hebrew as in the English, special varieties of the net, used in particular cases. The helplessness of the victims is no doubt the principal idea, which is heightened by the mention of "*the creeping things that have no ruler over them,*" to protect and direct them, much as is said of the ants and the locusts in Prov. vi. 7, xxx. 27. Therefore the cruel and successful Chaldean rejoices and is glad. **Ver. 16.** This begins with another "*Therefore,*" in consequence of his atrocities and successes and rejoicing, he performs his religious duties; but he does this to "*his net and . . . his drag,*" to which he attributes his good fortune, making them his gods; compare his making a god of his might, ver. 11. **Ver. 17.** The prophet once more questions God, Is this coarse and cruel idolater to go on unchecked? The figure of emptying his net is made plain beyond any possible doubt: it is to slay the nations unsparingly.

**II. 1.** *The prophet's complaint passes into a soliloquy.* "*I will*" (the form of the Hebrew verb suggesting some earnestness or resolution) "*stand upon my watch,*" or ward, according to the translation in Isa. xxi. 8, at the end of a passage very similar to this in spirit; "*and set me upon the tower,*" the strong hold or fenced place where he can securely wait and watch, even amidst all the horrors and confusions of the time. Thence he will "*look forth,*" or, will keep watch, as in the Revised Version of Ps. v. 3 and the margin of Micah vii. 7; his special object being to watch for what Jehovah will speak<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The note near the end of the Introduction remarks upon the peculiar Hebrew construction here in "speak with me."

2 shall answer concerning my complaint. And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, 3 that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for the appointed time, and it hasteth toward the end, and shall not lie : though it tarry, wait for it ; because it will surely come, it will not

in reply to him, and what he, the prophet, will then answer concerning his complaint,<sup>1</sup> as made twice over in the first chapter.

II. 2-5. *The second reply of Jehovah: the vision is to be written plainly, that it may be read by all believing men, in the time of waiting which will distinguish them from the evil-doers.* Ver. 2. It is "a vision;" see what has been said on i. 1. "Write . . . and make it plain upon tables," so that there may be no mistake, and that it may be kept in remembrance, compare Isa. viii. 1, 2, xxx. 8, 9; the verb "make it plain" is found elsewhere only in Deut. i. 5, xxvii. 8, to which I cannot doubt that Habakkuk referred. The purpose stated, "that he may run that readeth it," exactly suits the word of God, which is meant for all men, the busiest, the humblest, the most unlettered, to take home to themselves and study for their own guidance. Ver. 3. Not that there would be no difficulties: spiritual understanding and patience were necessary then as now; but God gives these to His true people. His word is not to be understood all at once, nor does it apply only to the times in which the prophet lived, though we read in i. 5, "I work a work in your days." It "is yet for the appointed time . . . the end," expressions which occur in other prophets, yet specially in Dan. viii. 17, 19, xi. 35, etc., with which may be compared, in the New Testament, Rev. x. 6, 7, xi. 15, xxi. 5, 6. The general and comprehensive character of Habakkuk's prophecy, and the absence of local and temporary specialities, have been noticed in the Introduction: it is in thorough harmony with these characteristics that we read here of the vision stretching on, through all the changes of the worldly power (which in Habakkuk's age was represented by the Chaldeans) that opposed the kingdom of His anointed, who is named at iii. 13. The vision "hasteth towards the end," literally, it pants<sup>2</sup> towards it, everything intermediate being of very subordinate interest to those whose privilege it is to look for and hasten the coming of the day of God, 2 Pet. iii. 12, margin. This is the attitude of patient confidence described in the present verse, which knows the vision to be the word of God that cannot lie, and is content to wait for it (the Psalms often express the same idea and feeling), knowing that there will be no needless delay, even when

<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew, "the complaint of me," has a well-known double meaning; the Authorized understands it of the complaint made *against* the prophet, but the Revised understands it of the complaint made *by* him. Either is in itself quite justifiable, but the context makes me follow the Revised.

<sup>2</sup> The interpretation of the Jewish commentators, "it shall speak," is now generally abandoned: see this or a kindred word in the original at Ps. xxvii. 12; Jer. iv. 31. No doubt "speak" or "utter" is retained in Prov. vi. 19, etc., yet with the Revised marginal note that the Hebrew is "breathed out," which might have been taken into the text.

4 delay. Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him: but  
5 the just shall live by his faith. Yea, moreover, wine is a treacherous dealer, a haughty man, and that keepeth not at home; who

it seems to tarry; for Peter says, in the context of the passage quoted, that with the Lord one day and a thousand years make no difference. The word of God and God Himself come inseparably together in our thoughts upon this subject. When the Septuagint translation applies what is said here of the Word to God Himself, there is really no misrepresentation of the sense, see Zeph. iii. 8: and this, the commonly used translation at the time, is accordingly adopted in the quotation at Heb. x. 37, a quotation which is the more interesting to the interpreter, because at ver. 38 it goes on to the next verse of the prophecy. Ver. 4. This arranges men in two classes, as the manner of the Bible is, the believing and the unbelieving. The unbeliever's soul "*is puffed up, it is not upright in him;*" for Paul says of such, "they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God," Rom. x. 3. The term for "puffed up" is used again only once, of the congregation of Israel who had refused to go into the land of promise, and had brought on themselves the discipline of the forty years' wandering; not accepting this in faith and humility, "they presumed to go up," Num. xiv. 44. These puffed up or presumptuous souls, whose self-confidence from time to time marks their want of humble confidence in God, cannot be upright, or straight, in them; there can be no mutual pleasure between God and them, according to the Septuagint paraphrase. On the contrary, "*the just shall live by his faith.*" Looking forward to such times of trouble as Habakkuk's, Balaam had asked, "Alas! who shall live when God doeth this?" Num. xxiv. 23. The answer is given here, with reference no doubt to the standing of Abraham by faith, Gen. xv. 6: for it is these two texts of which Paul makes especial use in setting before us the offer of the gospel to sinners; and so also Heb. x. 38. Habakkuk once again has the honour of a foremost place in the New Testament quotations from the Old in the matter of the new dispensation of God's grace; although, of course, there are similar noble statements elsewhere, as in Isa. vii. 9, xxviii. 16, xxx. 15. Ver. 5. This enlarges the first part of ver. 4, with direct application to some things in the character of that puffed up unbeliever with whom especially the prophet and the Church of the time had to do; namely, the Chaldean, who was to be their scourge, and who is personified, as already was noted at i. 7. He is here called "*wine.*" Nahum, i. 10, iii. 11, had pointed to this characteristic in the earlier scourge of Israel, the Assyrian: classical writers bear testimony upon this point in the case both of the Assyrians and of the Babylonians. This "*wine,*" or wine-bibber, is "*a treacherous dealer,*" see at i. 13; he is "*a haughty man,*" a word found again only in the concentrated description, Prov. xxi. 24, but implied or asserted here already throughout i. 7-11; and he "*keepeth not at home,*" in his desire, which cannot be satisfied more than death and the grave, to found a

enlargeth his desire as hell, and he is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto 6 him all peoples. Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and that ladeth 7 himself with pledges! Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for

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universal empire, into which *all nations and . . . all peoples* shall be gathered, according to what was said at i. 6, 13-17. But the details of his character and conduct are brought out in what follows.

II. 6-20. *Five woes pronounced on the Chaldeans, though they be the instruments of God's vengeance.* See on the use of "woe" by the prophets what is said on Micah ii. 1; Nah. iii. 1. Each of these woes is in three verses. It is probable that the first three are more closely connected, forming as it were one stanza, and then the last two form another: for the third ends with the majestic consummation of the earth being filled with the glory of Jehovah, ver. 14, as the fifth ends with the call to universal nature to be silent before him in his holy temple, ver. 20. And the first and the fourth, beginning the two stanzas or sets of woes, end with the same words, forming the latter half of vers. 8 and 17 respectively.

II. 6-8. *First woe: because of his rapacity which cannot be satisfied.* Ver. 6. This opens with a description of the nature of these woes: in one sense, no doubt, they are a message from God; in another, all nations and peoples whom the Chaldean has been insatiably gathering under his sceptre, ver. 5, shall join and "*take up a parable against him,*" as is said in Micah ii. 4 and in Isa. xiv. 4; the latter passage in some respects strikingly parallel to Habakkuk's, since it is a long impassioned address of the conquered kings to their fallen oppressor, the king of Babylon, as he comes down to them in the nether world. "*A taunting proverb*" is the rendering of two Hebrew nouns: the one is generally translated "a riddle," though also, as in Prov. i. 6, "dark sayings;" the other occurs again only there, and in the Authorized Version it is "interpretation," but in the Revised "a figure," which is perhaps a more assured translation than "taunting." The figure, or speech with hidden meaning, appears in the use of a word nowhere found again, perhaps formed for the occasion, which is rightly rendered "*pledges,*" all his supposed gains being really pledges which involve him hopelessly in debt: while yet there is a play upon the word, for it might mean a thick piece of clay, as the Authorized Version has it, following a Jewish tradition, and some of the old translators. It is possible that there is another play of words in the phrase "*that which is not his?*" for it might mean, "*that which is not to be his,*" as Scripture repeatedly teaches that the wicked man toils to acquire what God will transfer to the righteous. Ver. 7. Observe the sudden retribution which is to come on him when others shall find "*booties*" (the plural is used for emphasis, as often in Hebrew) in what he has violently taken for himself. Those "*that*

8 booties unto them? Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall spoil thee: because of men's blood, and for the violence done to the land, to the city and to all that dwell therein.

9 Woe to him that getteth an evil gain for his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the hand of 10 evil! Thou hast consulted shame to thy house, by cutting off

*shall bite thee,*" are like the serpents which cannot be charmed, Jer. viii. 17; while again the play on words is kept up, with reference to the pledges or obligations with which he has loaded himself, for the verb is equally applicable to creditors who exact usury, as in the margin. The very rare verb translated "*vex*" may be more precisely rendered "toss thee to and fro," as in the margin; and so it is in the Revision with the noun, which occurs in Jer. xv. 4, xxiv. 9, xxix. 18, xxxiv. 17, and in other books. Ver. 8. This lesson of retribution is continued: the same verb represents first his act, "*spoiled*" many nations, and secondly their act of spoiling him; that is, the remnant of the peoples whom he has left undestroyed shall avenge what their countries have suffered. Such are the results of blood and violence; compare the New Testament statement, Rev. xiii. 10. This is said to have been "*done to the land, to the city and to all that dwell therein.*"<sup>1</sup> This I should not interpret of the land of Israel (or Judah) and its capital Jerusalem, but of any or every land: in fact, in Hebrew, as in Greek and Latin, the same word may be equally well translated "land" and "earth;" and in many passages the two meanings run into one another. The wider sense is required in this chapter by parts of it like vers. 14 and 20, by the mention of all nations and peoples as the sufferers at the hands of the Chaldeans, by the absence of the article from the Hebrew, and by the mention in the parallel statement, ver. 17, of the violence done to Lebanon outside the land of Israel.

II. 9-11. *The second woe: because this cruel and bloody rapacity aimed selfishly at being safe, and must therefore suffer.* Ver. 9. The kindred verb and noun, translated "*that getteth . . . gain,*" takes in both the state of mind, covetousness, and the consequence of the act, gain: it is accordingly rendered both ways, as the feeling or the practical result may be chiefly in view; also, to mark its moral character, the gain is called "lucre" in 1 Sam. viii. 3, and "dishonest gain," Ezek. xxii. 13, 27; here, however, the original itself has the adjective "evil." Ver. 10. Besides covetousness, there is the motive of safety: cut off these nations, and they will no longer be able to do

<sup>1</sup> The Authorized Version, "the violence of the land," etc., is quite grammatical, as at ver. 17, "the violence of Lebanon" (in the Revision, "the violence done to Lebanon"); but the sense of the whole passage favours the interpretation that the land and the city are the sufferers, not the actors: see the remark at i. 2, 3, on the violence done by Habakkuk's people coming back on themselves in aggravated form by God's instruments of chastening, who are now in turn to be punished, according to the teaching of passages like Isa. x. 12; Zech. i. 15.



11 many peoples, and hast sinned against thy soul. For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.

12 Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a  
13 city by iniquity! Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the

harm. There are two kinds of evil, namely, physical evil or suffering, and moral evil or sin: and in the figurative language, with double meanings, which we meet with again and again in this parable (ver. 6), the Chaldean is said to practise moral evil in the hope of escaping physical evil, which is represented as a foe whose hand he dreads. He would like thus to ensure safety to his house, that is, probably, his royal house or dynasty, and to set his nest on high, an emblematic expression met with already in Obad. 4. Ver. 10 takes up the undeniable position that in doing moral evil he was sinning against his own soul, and to do this was really to love death, Prov. viii. 36: safety was never to be attained in this course, and he who planned to do so was the worst adviser possible for his own interests, bringing disgrace as well as death upon himself. Ver. 11. This may be called an extravagant statement by those who do not believe in the righteous living God who was Habakkuk's trust, i. 12, who has made all nature, in a sense, instinct with life, able to recognise its Creator and Governor, and to hold some sort of converse with Him. In the first pages of the Bible it is recorded that He said to Cain, "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground:" and such a cry would rise up to heaven from the stones and timber of the Chaldean's palace.

II. 12-14. *The third woe: because his building his city with bloodshed and injustice stands in the way of the universal knowledge of the glory of Jehovah.* Cain, to whom this verse as well as ver. 11 may allude, had tried to build a city with his bloody hands, Gen. iv. 17. The beginning of the Chaldean's city had been made by Nimrod, the mighty hunter before Jehovah, Gen. x. 9, 10: and for very many centuries, in spite of a period of feebleness during the ascendancy of the Assyrians at Nineveh (a rival which may have been actually destroyed by the Chaldean king, or may only have been doomed to destruction at the time these woes were published, according to the date we assign to Habakkuk's prophecy), it had kept up the high ideal of a universal empire around the tower of Babel, no matter at what cost of human bloodshed and of injustice perpetuated. But it was Jehovah who had observed the plans of those first builders, and had confounded the language of all the earth, and from thence had scattered them abroad upon the face of all the earth, Gen. xi. 5-9. Ver. 13 points to the continuation of the struggle. Since that time he had chosen Abram, and brought him out of the land of the Chaldeans, and given him a new name, and had blessed his seed, and had established an everlasting kingdom in the house of His servant David. From that moment, or one may say, from the time of the exodus, as Balaam saw and prophesied, there were two rival

peoples labour for the fire, and the nations weary themselves for  
14 vanity? For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the  
glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

kingdoms. Israel was a people that should dwell alone, and not be reckoned among the nations; that should rise up as a lion, and not lie down until he ate of the prey and drank the blood of the slain; his kingdom should be exalted, and he should eat up the nations his adversaries; and a star and sceptre should rise out of Israel, one that should have dominion, and destroy the remnant from the city. Habakkuk here names the God of Israel "*Jehovah of hosts*," a name so frequently used, that we are apt to forget its meaning and its history. Its meaning stands in connection with the children of Israel whom He brought forth by their hosts out of the land of Egypt, and at the head of whose hosts He went to lead them and to fight for them: but I cannot doubt that it has more important connections, namely, with the hosts of heaven, both animate and inanimate. The history of the name is also not to be overlooked: it is never used till the time of Samuel, when the kingdom, which had been latent or dormant in Israel, was in the minds and mouths of all: Jehovah of hosts began to be spoken of at the same time as His anointed king, and in the family of His prophet Samuel, 1 Sam. i. 3, 11, ii. 10; and the two titles appear in this short book, ii. 13 and iii. 13. The second psalm indicates the habitual position of the kings of the earth and their peoples (this English noun represents a noun very rare in the Hebrew, except in the Psalms and Isaiah), namely, rebellion and resistance, the worldly power, whatever may be its form and name in any particular age, fighting against King Messiah: but the issue must be that they shall be dashed to pieces like a potter's vessel, and their powerlessness must be made manifest to all. The builders of the tower of Babel no longer go on with their self-imposed task so prosperously as they seemed to do at the beginning; and pessimism comes to be set forth by many as the true philosophy of life. So says the prophet, in language closely copied by Jeremiah, chap. li. 58. "*The peoples labour for the fire, and the nations weary themselves for vanity*:" it is impossible to represent fully the Hebrew preposition "*for*," used here twice; it tells of a sufficiency, yet of its all coming to nothing in vanity, in the flames. And the force of the statement is gathered up in the opening question, "*Behold, is it not of Jehovah of hosts?*" Himself unseen, and yet the real foe of these combined nations, whether in subjection to Babylon or in revolt against her, but never as yet submitting to Jehovah and His anointed. Even in this melancholy period of the history of God's people, the prophet holds firmly to what he has learned, that the triumphant, boastful heathen power has a commission only to correct, not to destroy, i. 12. Ver. 14. Here is the glorious issue. The evil is set forth in Isaiah's vision of universal judgement, in his second chapter, arising out of the failure of Israel to understand their calling and to make it good: neverthe-

15 Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that addest thy  
venom *thereto*, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest  
16 look on their nakedness! Thou art filled with shame for glory:  
drink thou also, and be as one uncircumcised: the cup of the  
LORD'S right hand shall be turned unto thee, and foul shame shall

less in his vision of the temple, Isa. vi. 3, he heard the continuous cry of the seraphim to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory." And in one of the noblest portions of his great prophecy, exhibiting the contrast between the false and the true universal kingdom, Isaiah also said, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea," chap. xi. 9. Habakkuk certainly had this utterance before him, and we may notice two slight changes made by him in using it: it is not merely "the knowledge of Jehovah," but more specially "the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah," in contrast with all the tawdry glory of the world, even as it was seen in Babylon; and "it shall be full" certainly, but he places an emphasis on the act, it "shall be filled," as if we saw the process going on, the loftiness of man bowed down as Jehovah alone was being exalted in that day. The comparative failure of Israel was very perplexing then, as the comparative failure of the Church of Christ still is. Yet we have to remember that all this was foreseen and announced from the beginning. For so Jehovah answered Moses, as he pled for the people condemned to wander forty years in the wilderness, to whom it should therefore be a chastisement for discipline, and not a destroying judgement, "I have pardoned according to thy word: but as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Jehovah," Num. xiv. 21.

II. 15-18. *The fourth woe: on account of his violence, treachery, and lust.* These verses present some difficulties in translation; but I am satisfied with the Revised Version. Ver. 15. "*He giveth his neighbour drink;*" to which drink he has added his "*venom,*" poisonous materials to make its intoxicating power the greater; and the object of this treacherous cruelty is to seduce and disgrace his victim. There is room here, as elsewhere, for difference of opinion as to what is meant, ordinary immorality or enticement to idolatry and to the adoption of the Babylonian system, as was explained at Nah. iii. 4, and in the Introduction to Jonah there referred to. Either meaning may be plausibly defended here; yet in the whole context there does seem to be the notion of immorality and its consequent disgrace and misery. Ver. 16. Once more the law of retribution comes in; the Chaldean shall suffer what he has inflicted. The figure of the intoxicating cup of Jehovah's wrath, which they must drink in retribution, has already been considered at Obad. 15, 16. It "*shall be turned unto thee,*" perhaps more precisely "*shall be turned round,*" going the round and coming last of all to the great sorcerer or seducer, as in Jer. xxv. 26; and Habakkuk shows his skill in vivid description by naming it "*the cup of Jehovah's*

- 17 be upon thy glory. For the violence done to Lebanon shall cover thee, and the destruction of the beasts, which made them afraid; because of men's blood, and for the violence done to the land, to the city and to all that dwell therein.
- 18 What profiteth the graven image, that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and the teacher of lies, that the
- 19 maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols? Woe

*right hand.*" Another example of the play upon words occurs in the mention twice of "shame;" the second time it is a curious intensive form of the noun, rendered "foul shame," while yet it is quite possible to give the rendering of the Authorized Version, "shameful spewing;" and indeed this would suggest itself to any one who read or heard. Ver. 17. Here is the cause, namely, "violence . . . and . . . destruction," or more exactly "spoiling," as at i. 3, where these two nouns are used in reverse order; see what is remarked on that passage. It is a peculiar clause, none the less on this account characteristic of Habakkuk, that in speaking of the violence done by these disturbers of the world to Lebanon (compare the mention of the sufferings of Lebanon in the triumph over the king of Babylon, Isa. xiv. 8, and at chap. xxxvii. 24 in the boastings of the king of Assyria) he should take notice of "the destruction of the beasts." The noun is that habitually used for tame beasts, or those who might be tamed, as when Micah v. 8, speaks of "a lion among the beasts of the forest . . . a young lion among the flocks of sheep." Doth God take care for oxen? Certainly He does, though much more for men, and most of all for His own children, according to Matt. vi. 26; see also Jonah iv. 11. But this ruthless spoiler dealt with man and beast alike. The end of the verse, which finishes the first woe of the second stanza, is the same as that of ver. 8; the first woe of the first stanza corresponds to the first woe of the second.

II. 18-20. *The fifth woe: on account of his idolatry.* Ver. 18. Here is an introduction to the woe; the word not being pronounced till the next verse, perhaps because the universal prevalence of idolatry made him begin by explaining its hatefulness to God and its degradation to man. "What profiteth" this idolatry? It is utterly vain, whether the image be graven or molten, the two common varieties of idols, made of the cheapest or of the most precious materials. Three evils are named. (1) It is a "teacher of lies," for in worshipping it, whatever might be their intentions or pretences, it has always been found that the use of images has led to a practical denial or forgetfulness that God is a Spirit, and that they who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth. Consult the note chap. i. 4 on the verb translated "teach" here and in ver. 19; the rendering is true so far as it goes, but imperfect; the central idea is that of authority in the instruction given. (2) "The maker of his work trusteth therein:" man is degraded by worshipping that which his own hands have made; a sad truth presented in many forms by the psalmists and prophets. (3) This work of men's hands, however admirable it may be considered as a piece of art (many

unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise! Shall this teach? Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it. But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.

CHAP. III. 1 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, set to Shigionoth.

objects of Greek idolatry which have come down to us being in this respect unsurpassed), is contemptible when viewed in relation to the use made of it; one and all they are "*dumb idols*." The noun "idols" seems to mean cyphers or "things of nought," as sometimes in the text or margin, Lev. xix. 4; Ps. xcvi. 5; Jer. xiv. 14. **Ver. 19.** Here the woe is pronounced. Instead of being made of gold or silver, it may only have a coating of these metals, and be in reality mere wood or stone; yet, be the material what it may, there is always the fatal defect, "*There is no breath at all in the midst of it.*" What fools then are its worshippers, such as Elijah mocked for deserting Jehovah, when they cry to it for help and sympathy, saying, "*Awake! . . . Arise!*" Returning to its being a "teacher of lies," the prophet asks, "*Shall this teach?*" It is possible, though less natural, to make this an exclamation of the worshipper, as in the Authorized Version, "It shall teach." **Ver. 20.** Contrast with all this the condition of those who trust in the everlasting God, and know that in Him they have life for ever, according to i. 12. This close of the second stanza is to be read in connection with the close of the first stanza at ver. 14, as the vanity of idols and idolaters here, vers. 18, 19, answers to the vanity of the labours of the people at ver. 13. The kingdom belongs to Jehovah, and it shall fill the earth. Whether the prophet regards this kingdom as actually come, or only as coming, makes no essential difference. He sees Jehovah in His holy temple, with His glory filling the earth, as Isaiah, chap. vi., had seen Him; and he bids "*all the earth keep silence before*" this great King. The Hebrew is startling in its shortness and force, "Hush before Him;" an expression found also in Zeph. i. 7, and much the same again in Zech. ii. 13.

## SECOND SECTION, CHAP. III.

**III. 1. The title.** This has been explained in the Introduction. The prophet has been moved by the vision in the first two chapters, no doubt especially by the parable against the Chaldean, taken up by the peoples, ii. 6, which in part is taught by God and in part is the outcome of their feelings; Habakkuk also has his own feelings, which he expresses in the lofty poetry of this chapter. It is called "*a prayer*," in the sense in which this name is given to several psalms. But it is no mere expression of individual feeling, the things he himself wished; he is careful to claim for it the authority due to the word of God, when he expressly names himself "Habakkuk the prophet."

- 2 O LORD, I have heard the report of thee, and am afraid :  
 O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years.  
 In the midst of the years make it known ;  
 In wrath remember mercy.

III. 2. *The prayer, strictly so called.* He addresses Jehovah by name, and says, "*I have heard the report of Thee,*" as it was the duty of a prophet ever to do. In this case it had been trying to flesh and blood : in consequence, "*I am afraid.*" And yet he feels that if this be a holy awe of God, he is a gainer by it ; it gives a motive and an earnestness as he prays. Again he names Jehovah, and says, "*Revive Thy work,*" or, as others prefer, "Put life into Thy work ;" it makes little difference, for life is never wholly absent from His work, though times of blessing are called by us revivals, because they are like life from the dead. God had said, i. 5, "I work a work in your days," and the particulars of it had made Habakkuk afraid, notwithstanding its glorious issue ; let there be more life in His people, and the work will assume a proportionately brighter and happier character. Revive it "*in the midst of the years,*" because he had heard, ii. 3, that it was for the appointed time, and might tarry ; and if so, he might have long to wait. He has seen the beginning of it, and he knows the glorious issue, for it hastes toward the end, and it shall not lie ; but can nothing be done to hasten it still more, to shorten the dreary interval ? Twice over, therefore, he pleads for the work in the midst of the years, to revive it, to make it known. And who can think that the Lord would listen unsympathetically, who has read passages like Matt. xxiv. 22 ; 1 Cor. vii. 29 ; 2 Pet. iii. 12 ; Rev. vi. 9-11 ? Our Lord says of such an intermediate period, with its critical moments, "These are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled," Luke xxi. 22. The prophet knows this ; yet he adds, "*In wrath remember mercy.*" The Hebrew noun for wrath is very comprehensive, involving any violent emotion, somewhat as our general word, "a passion," has come to be very much restricted to anger ; the corresponding verb, however, is translated "tremble" at vers. 7 and 16. It is God's prerogative in judgement to remember mercy, of which attributes in combination the Psalmist sings, Ps. ci. 1 ; we even read in Jas. ii. 13, that "mercy glorieth against judgement."

III. 3-15. *The prophet's confidence, arising out of the manifestations of Jehovah in the past.* It may be difficult to arrange these verses with precision, but there is probably a break between vers. 7 and 8, and again between vers. 11 and 12. Throughout I prefer the present or future rendering of the tenses ; see the marginal note on ver. 3.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The difference of the two renderings is not much to the general reader. If he takes the past tense, as in the text, the prophet tells what has taken place, and thinks how God is now and ever will be to His people what in the past He has shown Himself to be ; if he takes the present tense, as in the margin, he thinks of the former manifestations, and he expressly declares that the like is now occurring anew, or is about to occur. The Hebrew language has only two tenses (though

## 3 God came from Teman.

And the Holy One from Mount Paran.  
His glory covered the heavens.

[Selah]

III. 3. It is remarkable that he begins by using the divine name "God," and not Jehovah till ver. 8 : perhaps he looks back on Ex. vi. 2, 3, and notices the turning-point at the exodus from the more general to the more special name for the God of redemption, or God in covenant with His people. Yet the Hebrew is noteworthy, because the name of God, a thousand times occurring in the plural form, is here used in the singular, as it is in i. 11, but with extreme rarity elsewhere, except in the lofty poetry of the Book of Job. He places parallel with this the title "*the Holy One*," which he had used at i. 12. This God "cometh from Teman," and "from mount Paran," borrowed, with some changes, as of the tense, from Deut. xxxiii. 2 : for he goes back to the exodus, the foundation of all the hopes of Israel as God's people, and especially to the appearance at mount Sinai. He may also have had in his mind other passages which go back upon the blessing of Moses, like Judg. v. 4 and Ps. lxxviii. 7, 8 ; and more generally, to Ps. xviii., and lxxvii. in the latter part, which present various points of resemblance to this chapter. The language in Deuteronomy as well as here favours the idea that the "*glory*" and the "*praise*" of Jehovah spread at that moment through earth and heaven, as indicated by Habakkuk's mentioning Paran in the north and Teman in the north-east of the peninsula of Sinai, the mountain itself being in the south : so that the whole wilderness of Sinai was at once ablaze with that old manifestation which shall yet be repeated, compare Luke xvii. 24. Habakkuk watches it with his prophetic eye ; see ii. 1 : and as he views the fulfilment of his hopes, he uses the two verbs occurring already in ii. 14, and

the word "tense" is rejected by good grammarians) not corresponding with any of ours ; the one is the perfect, or finished, either as an actual external event, or as so thought of by the writer or speaker ; the other is the imperfect, or unfinished, again either actually or ideally. The former is most nearly connected with our past tenses, though sometimes our present expresses it better ; the latter includes both the future and the present, since neither of them is as yet completed. The imperfect is the tense that runs through these verses ; and it is all the more marked because Habakkuk in ver. 3 quotes a perfect, and changes it into an imperfect. No doubt the prophets often use a perfect where we should have expected the future tense, and this has received the name of the prophetic perfect ; but in such cases the reason is obvious, that their eye is opened to see all time, the future as truly as the past, and they express what is to be the fact as if it already existed, although as yet the process is only commencing. We cannot from this infer that these writers did the opposite, using the future tense to express an event that had already taken place. No doubt there are some perfect tenses in these verses, 3, 6, 7, 10, 13, 14, 15 (in ver. 4 and at the end of ver. 6, and in the middle of ver. 9 and at the end of ver. 14, the tense is not marked at all in Hebrew, and the Authorized Version is careful to manifest this by the use of italic type) ; but these may be prophetic perfects, or we may express them in English by the present perfect tense as distinguished from the aorist or tense of narration.

- And the earth was full of his praise.  
 4 And *his* brightness was as the light ;  
 He had rays *coming forth* from his hand :  
 And there was the hiding of his power.  
 5 Before him went the pestilence,  
 And fiery bolts went forth at his feet.  
 6 He stood, and measured the earth ;  
 He beheld, and drove asunder the nations :  
 And the eternal mountains were scattered,  
 The everlasting hills did bow ;  
 His goings were *as of old*.

exclaims, "His glory has covered the heavens, and the earth is full of His praise."

III. 4. The word "*brightness*" is repeatedly used of superhuman brilliancy. The "*rays [coming forth] from His hand,*" is seen in the Hebrew unmistakably to refer to the face of Moses, which shone, in the Revised margin "sent forth beams (Heb. horns)," Ex. xxxiv. 29-35 ; from mistaking the figurative word for a literal statement, some translators, from the Latin Vulgate downwards, used "horns" in the history of Moses or in this prophecy. What Moses had occasionally by a reflection of the divine glory, was seen by Habakkuk to belong essentially to God. For this was but "*the hiding of His power ;*" as John says, "We beheld His glory, glory as of the Only-begotten from the Father," when this was hidden by the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us, John i. 14, as the sun's rays are softened by coloured glass. See also the thought at Job xxvi. 14.

III. 5. "*Pestilence,*" which He had threatened to Pharaoh in the struggle embodied in the ten plagues, Ex. v. 3, ix. 15, etc., and "*fiery bolts,*" or "burning coals," a rare word, applied to the seventh plague in Ps. lxxviii. 48, perhaps here borrowed from Deut. xxxii. 24, appear as the attendants upon the Holy One : for if He is life to His people, to Him alone "belong the issues from death," Ps. lxxviii. 20. Both the verbs here are futures.

III. 6. All nature, animate and inanimate alike, recognised its Lord, and was moved at His presence : earth, and its nations, and its strongest parts, those everlasting hills and mountains, which fled before Him, or sank out of His sight. The verbs employed are intentionally peculiar. There has been a long-continued controversy, whether He "*measured the earth,*" as in the text, or "shook" it, as in the margin ; to say that He "*drove asunder*" the nations is an expression without a parallel, though the translation seems to be correct. The verbs here are perfects : only the last clause has no verb expressed. "His ways [are] everlasting," in the Authorized, differs little from the Revised in meaning, "*His goings were [as] of old :*" the only other statement about His ways in Scripture is, that His people have seen them in the sanctuary, Ps. lxxviii. 24 ; and those who have seen them there know that they are the same from age to age.



- 7 I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction :  
The curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.  
8 Was the LORD displeased against the rivers ?  
Was thine anger against the rivers,  
Or thy wrath against the sea,  
That thou didst ride upon thine horses,  
Upon thy chariots of salvation ?

III. 7. "*I have seen the tents of Cushan<sup>1</sup> in affliction,*" this being the noun rendered "iniquity" at i. 3; it suggests that the physical and moral evil which had grieved Habakkuk in his own people, now lies heavy on their powerful heathen neighbours. "*The curtains of the land of Midian tremble,*" that Midian which joined with Moab to bring a curse on Israel by the help of Balaam: "tremble" is the verb connected with the noun translated "wrath" at ver. 2.

III 8-11. These verses may come in as an explanation, in answer to the question which begins the paragraph. I should translate every verb in the present, except the first in ver. 10, and the first in ver. 11, "have seen," "have stood still." Ver. 8. Is it conceivable that "*the rivers,*" which are twice named, and "*the sea,*" are the objects of His displeasure? The strength of the prophet's excitement explains his speaking first of Jehovah in the third person, and then to Him in the second. There are three rivers especially named by the writers of the Old Testament: two are very great ones, namely, the Nile, which runs through Egypt, and the Euphrates, which runs along, or through, Assyria and Chaldea; and a third river very much smaller, yet closely connected with the Israelites themselves,—the only river of their country, in our sense of a river, one that runs all the year round,—the Jordan. The first two of these are often called each "the river," without any further designation. The Nile and the Jordan are the two which we should specially expect to be in the prophet's mind, on account of the plagues connected with the Nile, and the dividing of the Jordan when the people passed into Canaan; as the dividing of the Red Sea is also referred to here the more readily, since the prophet had gone back to the exodus in ver. 3: but as he views the future in the light of the past, we need not feel surprised if he takes in the Euphrates, as about to be divided or dried up in the judgements on the Chaldean of which he had spoken in chap. ii.; compare Isa. xi. 15, 16, in the Revised Version. "*Upon thine horses, upon thy chariots of salvation,*" in strong contrast to Pharaoh's horses and chariots, in which he trusted, but which brought

<sup>1</sup> This word occurs nowhere else, unless there is a reference to the oppressor of Israel, Cushan-rishathaim, Judg. iii. 8-10; which is unlikely. Commonly it is reckoned to be some modification of Cush, the well-known name of powerful nations of the race of Ham, see Gen. x. 6-8, etc. As there is pretty clear evidence of both an Arabian and an African Cush (the latter generally in the English Bible is called Ethiopia), it is possible that we have here a shortened dual termination, as in Dothan, meaning Cush in all its extent, both the Asiatic and the African Cush.

- 9 Thy bow was made quite bare ;  
The oaths to the tribes were a *sure* word. [Selah  
Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers.
- 10 The mountains saw thee, and were afraid ;  
The tempest of waters passed by :  
The deep uttered his voice,  
And lifted up his hands on high.
- 11 The sun and moon stood still in their habitation ;  
At the light of thine arrows as they went,  
At the shining of thy glittering spear.

ruin and disgrace. Ver. 9. "*Thy bow is made quite bare,*" continuing the description of Jehovah as a warrior: His bow, not that of His people, Ps. xlv. 3 and 6, was made bare, that is, was uncovered for use. "*The oaths to the tribes are a [sure] word.*" This noun "a word" is a rare form, apparently used here of God's triumphant word of promise or victory, as it is in Ps. lxxviii. 11, lxxvii. 8; in the latter passage it is actually translated "promise." Unquestionably such a divine word secured by oath the blessings to Abraham and his seed. Nevertheless, "the oaths to the tribes" is a form of expression which is found nowhere else; and this consideration in so far favours the marginal rendering, which in itself is unobjectionable, "Sworn are the chastisements<sup>1</sup> of [Thy] word," though there is really no great difference in the idea conveyed either way to an ordinary reader. "*Thou dost cleave the earth with rivers*" may refer to such miracles as are recorded in Ex. xvii. and Num. xx.; compare Isa. xli. 17, 18. Ver. 10. The lofty poetry of this verse, even more striking in the original than in the translation, is most naturally understood as referring to the flood of Noah, when "the deep," or, the abyss (Gen. i. 2, vii. 11, viii. 2, etc.), had its fountains broken up. As if the prophet had said: you ask if the rivers and the sea are to be the objects of His wrath? Yes, they were so at the exodus, and shall be again; but more than this, before Israel stood forth as His chosen people, there had been more marvellous exhibitions of the power of His wrath against sin, in the appalling events of the deluge. Ver. 11. Here again we have the description of Jehovah armed for war, as in vers. 8 and 9; the nouns "*light*" and "*shining*," however, carry us back to ver. 4, where the latter was rendered "brightness." At this manifestation of the divine glory "sun and moon stood still in their habitation," or perhaps more exactly, going into their habitation.

III. 12-15. These verses resume the vision of the coming glory, which had been interrupted by the question in ver. 8: and the verbs are futures, or presents to the prophet's eye, except those in vers. 13 and 15, with the first in ver. 14; which may be translated in the present perfect, as shown in the margin. Jehovah, who has to the prophet's vision repeated and surpassed His wondrous works at the

<sup>1</sup> The noun in Hebrew means "rods" or "staves," as it is translated at ver. 14; and there are examples in abundance of its two derivative meanings, "tribes" and "chastisements."

- 12 Thou didst march through the land in indignation,  
Thou didst thresh the nations in anger.
- 13 Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people,  
For the salvation of thine anointed ;  
Thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked,  
Laying bare the foundation even unto the neck. [Selah]
- 14 Thou didst pierce with his own staves the head of his warriors :  
They came as a whirlwind to scatter me :  
Their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly.

exodus, now "*marches through the land*" (or, through the earth, as observed at ii. 8), and "*threshes the nations in anger,*" doing more than He had done through Joshua : for the emblem of threshing, see Isa. xli. 15. **Ver. 13.** "*Thou art come forth for the salvation of Thy people,*" as the captain of Jehovah's host came in the history of Joshua, chap. v. 14, and as prophecy sees this repeated gloriously, Isa. lxiii. 1-6. More specially, it is "*for the salvation of Thine anointed,*" who is the recognised head of the people of Jehovah ever since the times of Samuel and David, as in Hannah's song, 1 Sam. ii. 9, 10. "*Thou hast wounded the head out of the house of the wicked,*" an adjective which in Habakkuk's mouth might have reference first of all to the Chaldean oppressor, i. 13, though it is to be extended to all the adversaries of the kingdom of the anointed : the verb "hast wounded" being an emphatic one, as used in the prophecies of Balaam to describe Israel and Israel's king smiting the enemy, Num. xxiv. 8, 17 ; see also its use in Deut. xxxii. 39, xxxiii. 11 ; Job v. 18, xxvi. 12 ; Ps. xviii. 38, lxxviii. 21, 23 (where it is rendered "dip"), cx. 5, 6. "*Laying bare the foundation even unto the neck :*" though Jehovah Himself had founded them for purposes of judgement, as was observed at i. 12, yet the turn must come for the house of the wicked to pass through a trial, from base to top ; perhaps there is reference to figures of speech made familiar to the believing people by Isaiah, chap. viii. 8, xxviii. 16, 17, which contrast that foundation with the sure one laid in Zion. **Ver. 14.** When this turn, or time of retribution, did come to the enemy, it should be a marked punishment from no mere human hand, for "*thou hast pierced with his own staves*" this boastful and dangerous foe, as is recorded in several cases ; see 1 Sam. xiv. 20 ; 2 Chron. xx. 23, 24 ; Ezek. xxxviii. 21 ; Zech. xiv. 13. There is another puzzle to translators in the word rendered "*warriors*" in the text, with a choice of "hordes" or "villages" in the margin ; but the general sense is little altered, whichever translation is preferred. "*They come as a whirlwind to scatter me :*" compare their object with what is said at Nah. ii. 1, on "He that dasheth in pieces ;" and their manner of reaching it, "like a whirlwind," is mentioned in other prophets, Isa. liv. 11 ; Hos. xiii. 3 ; Zech. vii. 14. This agency of human malice, however, is a poor attempt to resist Jehovah, whose way is in the whirlwind and in the storm, Nah. i. 3 ; see the promise to His people in Isa. xli. 16. What success, indeed, can such malice have when "*their rejoicing*"

- 15 Thou didst tread the sea with thine horses,  
The heap of mighty waters.
- 16 I heard, and my belly trembled,  
My lips quivered at the voice ;  
Rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in my place :  
That I should rest in the day of trouble.  
When it cometh up against the people which invadeth him in  
troops.

[*is*] as to devour the poor secretly," a course of conduct denounced in Ps. xvii. 8-12, and elsewhere ; for it is ever being repeated. Ver. 15. The majesty and power of God are strikingly set before us by this language. "Thou hast trodden the sea," as at other times the high places of the earth, Amos iv. 13 ; Micah i. 3 ; for earth and sea are quite alike to Him their Creator. Our Lord's walking on the lake of Tiberias in the storm, reminds us of the description here, when the sea is a "heap of mighty waters," swollen and surging up, as the margin explains. The expressions remind us of Ps. lxxvii. 19 ; as, in fact, the whole of this prayer of Habakkuk presents resemblances to the latter part of that psalm, which have led critics to think that the one is so far borrowed from the other.

III. 16-19. *The state of the prophet's mind in consequence of this manifestation of Jehovah: he rejoices with trembling.* Ver. 16. "I heard," namely, in ver. 2 and onwards, "and my belly" (more literally, "my under-parts") "trembled," see at ver. 7. This trembling or strong disquieting emotion is the first and most striking effect of the view of the future which has occupied the prophet's mind, and the verb is therefore used a second time in this verse : so frequently, in the manifestation of God to even the holiest of His servants who have the sense of their own sinfulness pressed home on them, and find their whole nature turned, as it were, into "rottenness" or corruption, Isa. vi. 5 ; Dan. x. 8, etc. This, however, leads on to the effort to be patient in faith, "that I should rest in the day of trouble," or, as in the margin, waiting for it ; for so he had been taught to do, ii. 3. He had been very earnest in his prayer that Jehovah would revive His work in the midst of the years, ver. 2 : he now inclines to hope and quietly wait for the salvation of Jehovah, according to Lam. iii. 26 ; Ps. xciv. 12, 13, etc. The last clause of the verse is singularly brief in the original, and it is difficult to choose between the renderings in the text and in the margin : some niceties of Hebrew grammar are brought into the discussion ; on the whole, I prefer the margin. Moreover, it makes "the people" to be the prophet's people, as usual ; and it joins better on to what goes before, for it is not an expression found elsewhere that the day of trouble comes up against any one. "Invade him in troops" is a verb found again only in Jacob's blessing of God, to which the prophet may very naturally allude, Gen. xlix. 19 ; though he might have in his eye a closely connected verb in Ps. xciv. 21 ; Micah v. 1. Ver. 17. No doubt, in this day of trouble, through which he needs to rest and

- 17 For though the fig tree shall not blossom,  
 Neither shall fruit be in the vines ;  
 The labour of the olive shall fail,  
 And the fields shall yield no meat ;  
 The flock shall be cut off from the fold,  
 And there shall be no herd in the stalls :
- 18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,  
 I will joy in the God of my salvation.
- 19 Jehovah, the Lord, is my strength,  
 And he maketh my feet like hinds' feet,  
 And will make me to walk upon mine high places.
- For the Chief Musician, on my stringed instruments.

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wait, there must be desolation and misery, such as is described in a similar waiting time, Isa. vii. 17-25. The fig tree, the vine, and the olive, are often brought together,—fruit-trees which are cultivated not merely for luxury, but for important articles of daily food in that country ; but this meaning stands out the more plainly when the corn-fields, the flock, and the herd are also mentioned. Ver. 18. "*Yet I will rejoice in Jehovah,*" the counterpart to the malicious rejoicing of the wicked in ver. 14 ; in both cases (though there is a trivial difference in the form of the Hebrew word) it is an emphatic word, to exult. "I will joy in the God of my salvation : " he uses the second of the two verbs in which he had described the rejoicing of the Chaldean in the success of his net, i. 15 ; but his joy is in the God of his salvation ; see his right to give this title to God in vers. 8 and 13. It is a favourite exercise of the Psalmists ; see especially Ps. xviii., in which vers. 32 and 33 furnish almost everything in the conclusion of Habakkuk's prayer. Ver. 19. "*Jehovah, the Lord,*" a combination of titles used for emphasis ; see at Obad. i. "*Is my strength,*" a very comprehensive noun, rendered strength, valour, host, substance, wealth, etc. "*He maketh my feet like hinds' feet ;*" as the prophet at ver. 16 alluded to the blessing on God, so he may now allude to that on Naphtali, Gen. xlix. 21. "*And will make me to walk upon my high places,*" with a peculiar verb, literally, "to tread," as in ver. 15 ; otherwise taken from the song of Moses and his blessing, Deut. xxxii. 13, xxxiii. 29 ; only that the peculiar pronoun is introduced, "mine high places," because the meek now inherit the earth, see on Micah i. 3. The position at the end of what corresponds to the title at the beginning of psalms is singular ; perhaps it indicates that this prayer has issued in praise and perfect satisfaction.

## ZEPHANIAH.

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FROM the first verse of the book we learn the genealogy of this prophet, of whose personal history we know absolutely nothing. There is no other genealogy of a prophet recorded; and, from this circumstance, it has been inferred that he was a man of some distinction. It has even been supposed by many that he traces his descent up to king Hezekiah. There is nothing impossible in this; and we do not know how far that name was in common use. It can be only a conjecture, however, which many reject positively, because they would have expected Hezekiah to be named "the king." The difficulty of five generations (including both extremes) from him to Zephaniah, whereas there are only four from him to king Josiah, is not decisive, and need not have much weight, considering the extreme length of Manasseh's reign.

It is expressly said that Zephaniah prophesied in the days of Josiah: and there has been much ingenious discussion of the question whether it was before or after the eighteenth year of that king's reign, which was the great turning-point in his reformation of religion; while some have placed his activity especially in the interval, between the twelfth and the eighteenth year, see 2 Chron. xxxiv. 3, 8, so that he might have been one of the great instruments in producing that reformation. It is easy to point out numerous resemblances in thoughts and expression which connect him with Jeremiah, who was called to the prophetic office in the thirteenth year of Josiah: such are, the mixed worship of Jehovah and of idols; the violence done to the law by those who ought to have been its guardians; the deep moral corruption of all the three orders of the theocracy; the shamelessness of the people in their sin; Jerusalem as rebellious, stained with blood, and guilty of oppression and robbery, etc. But we know too little of the details of history to arrive at certainty in answering this question. There were, no doubt, important elements of a healthy kind still to be found in Jewish society before the reformation commenced: and after it had reached its highest point, there was much to be seen in it that was only outward, probably dependent largely on the personal influence of good Josiah, so that it is written, "Notwithstanding, Jehovah turned not from the fierceness of His great wrath, wherewith His anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked Him withal" (2 Kings

CHAP. I. I **T**HE word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of

xxiii. 26). One expression has been used to prove that Zephaniah prophesied after the reformation : we read, "I will cut off the remnant of Baal," i. 4, which suggests that only a remnant could be found at the time this was written. Yet the reply has been made, not without plausibility, that this is simply a prophecy that the worshippers of Baal, however numerous at present, shall be cut off to the very last man. Perhaps Zephaniah died young, else Josiah might have sent the message to him which he sent to the prophetess Huldah, 2 Kings xxii. 14.

The prophecy is remarkable on account of its general and comprehensive character : there is no reference to any special enemy, as there is to the Chaldean all through the prophecy of Habakkuk, who was either his contemporary or a little before him. It has been supposed, indeed, by several writers that his threatenings of judgement are somehow connected with the great invasion of Media and south-western Asia by the barbarous Scythians, who lay as an incubus on those countries for some twenty-nine years, and then melted away as other hordes of Tartar invaders have done. But these Scythians are much less referred to now than they were by certain expositors two generations back ; it is doubtful whether they appreciably influenced prophets like Jeremiah and Zephaniah. And while Zephaniah never once names any enemy, it is striking that he makes very sparing allusion to war and its miseries ; see i. 13, 16, perhaps i. 10 and iii. 15. When he has to deal with God's judgements on the heathen nations in his second chapter, he simply chooses four of them as representatives : namely, two small ones close beside Israel, the Philistines on the west, and the children of Lot on the east ; and two great ones as far remote as the common knowledge of his people extended, Ethiopia to the south, and Assyria, which he places in the north, ii. 13. He begins with all mankind in a state of sin and misery, first the Gentiles, and next the Jews ; and he ends with a state of grace and glory which embraces both Jews and Gentiles, apparently incorporated, no longer two but one. His breadth of vision and his order of arrangement remind one of Paul's Epistle to the Romans ; but he has less to say than almost any other of the Old Testament prophets regarding the person and work of Christ, at least directly.

#### FIRST SECTION, CHAP. I.

Judicial sentence on the whole world, and especially on God's professing people gathered at Jerusalem.

I. 1. *The title.* This has been considered and partly explained already in the Introduction. "*The word of Jehovah which came unto*" is in the Hebrew word for word the same as in Micah i. 1. Of

Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.

- 2 I will utterly consume all things from off the face of the ground,  
 3 saith the LORD. I will consume man and beast; I will consume  
 the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the  
 stumblingblocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off  
 4 the face of the ground, saith the LORD. And I will stretch out  
 mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem;  
 and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the  
 5 name of the Chemarim with the priests; and them that worship

course, it is the title of the whole book; for the divisions do not break up its unity.

I. 2-7. *The judicial sentence on sinners.* Vers. 2, 3. In general, "*I will utterly consume,*" according to the common Hebrew emphatic form, which might equally be rendered, "I will certainly consume:" the expression occurs also in Jer. viii. 13. The threat to consume is uttered three times here: first it is "*all things from off the face of the ground,*" reminding us of the Flood of Noah, Gen. vi. 7; secondly, it is "*man and beast,*" the third time it is "*the fowls of heaven, and the fishes of the sea.*" This last is more far-reaching than the statement regarding the Flood; since no provision was made or needed in the ark for the fishes, to whom the waters were life and not death: but here the agent of destruction is "the fire of His jealousy," ver. 18; compare 2 Pet. iii. 6, 7. And along with these are mentioned "*the stumblingblocks with the wicked,*" carrying our thoughts on to what Christ says in Matt. xiii. 41. Two further particulars deserve notice. There is the solemnity of the utterance, "*saith Jehovah.*" See the comment on this peculiar phrase at Micah iv. 6: Zephaniah uses it again at ver. 3, ver. 10, and ii. 9. There is also the repetition, at the end of ver. 3, of the threat on man, with which it began; showing that man is the proper object of the wrath of God, and that the creatures suffer in connection with him: but there is a change of the verb, it is now "*I will cut off.*" Vers. 4-6. In particular, those who have had the highest privileges are the most guilty, according to the principle laid down in Amos iii. 2, and expounded by our Lord, Luke xii. 47, 48. Therefore, in the course of the universal judgement, "*I will stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem;*" and the verb "I will cut off" is taken up from ver. 3, and is applied, first to the names of different styles of worship, and next to three classes of worshippers. The objectionable names mentioned first of all are the false god of Ahab and Jezebel, "*Baal,*" about whose remnant something has been said in the Introduction; and next "*the Chemarim,*" a word occurring elsewhere only in 2 Kings xxiii. 5, Hos. x. 5, from which passages we infer that they were the priests at the unlawful altars set up in the course of defection in Israel and Judah; and they are here connected somehow "*with the priests,*" perhaps the legitimate priests who formed an alliance with those Chemarim, as we read of curious mingling of the lawful



- the host of heaven upon the housetops ; and them that worship,  
 6 which swear to the LORD and swear by Malcam ; and them that  
 are turned back from following the LORD ; and those that have  
 not sought the LORD, nor inquired after him.  
 7 Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD : for the day  
 of the LORD is at hand : for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice,  
 8 he hath sanctified his guests. And it shall come to pass in the  
 day of the LORD'S sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the  
 9 king's sons, and all such as are clothed with foreign apparel. And

and unlawful services in ver. 5. This verse names two classes of worshippers who are to be cut off: "*them that worship the host of heaven,*" a very ancient form of idolatry, and practised greatly in Jerusalem "*on the house-tops,*" or flat roofs, Jer. xix. 13, xxxii. 29 ; and "*them that worship, which swear to Jehovah, and swear by Malcam,*" some form of eclectic worship, as people still try to have concord between Christ and Belial. Malcam is found in Jer. xlix. 1, 3, apparently as the name of an idol, presumably the same as Milcom, 1 Kings xi. 5, 33, 2 Kings xxiii. 13, both being forms related to the commoner Molech, 1 Kings xi. 7, etc., the god of the Ammonites ; others prefer to translate the word, as in the margin, "their king ;" which makes no practical difference, for the idol was regarded by his worshippers as their king. Swearing is a special act of worship ; see Jeremiah's condemnation of this promiscuous swearing, chap. v. 2, 7 ; the swearing *to* Jehovah implied something more of devoting themselves to Him than the swearing *by* Malcam. In ver. 6 the third class is named (probably one class only, for the second "those" is accurately printed in italic in the Authorized Version, and perhaps might better be omitted) as to be cut off : those who were giving up all acts of worship, the lapsed masses of that day, who may form part of the ungodly spoken of in ver. 12. Ver. 7. The opening words, literally, "Hush ! at the presence of," etc., are borrowed from Hab. ii. 20 ; or if they were contemporaries, it was an expression which they both may have loved to use amid the noise and bustle of the careless world, which forgets that God is present, and does not recognise His most decisive working. "*For the day of Jehovah is at hand,*" or, near, ver. 14 ; a declaration borrowed from Joel i. 15, or Obad. 15, which see. "*Jehovah hath prepared a sacrifice, He hath sanctified His guests,*" language copied from Isa. xxxiv. 6 and xliii. 3. The figure is wrought out in later prophecies, Ezek. xxxix. 17-22 ; Rev. xix. 17-21.

I. 8-13. *The universal judgement as it settles down on Jerusalem.* The events of this day of Jehovah are now revealed, and the nature of this sacrifice is explained. Vers. 8, 9. The highest classes shall not escape. "*I will punish ;*" the Hebrew expression in the margin is, "I will visit upon," as at ii. 7, perhaps iii. 7, a phrase familiar to historians and prophets from the time that the second commandment was spoken. "*The princes, and the king's sons ;*" the latter expression, as at 2 Kings x. 13, is not to be confined to the sons of the reigning

in that day I will punish all those that leap over the threshold,  
 10 which fill their master's house with violence and deceit. And in  
 that day, saith the LORD, there shall be the noise of a cry from  
 the fish gate, and an howling from the second quarter, and a great  
 11 crashing from the hills. Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh, for all  
 the people of Canaan are undone: all they that were laden with

king; it means, as we might now express it, the royal family. The king at the time was a pattern of godliness, and is not named; perhaps no sons were yet born to him, and in any case they can scarcely have been old enough to manifest the depravity which did in the end characterize them. "*And all such as are clothed with foreign apparel,*" a phrase of which we have no particular explanation, but which may with confidence be understood of aping foreign customs, including the religions and the morals of the heathen. Much greater obscurity hangs over the next expression, "*all those that leap over the threshold.*" Some have connected it, though it is difficult to see in what way, with the superstition of the priests and others who went into Dagon's house at Ashdod, not treading on the threshold on which their mutilated idol lay before the ark of Jehovah, 1 Sam. v. 4, 5. Another explanation, probably simpler, makes it describe the eagerness and boldness with which the servants or companions of these princes "*fill their master's house with violence and deceit,*" violence and false judgement being crimes on which much stress is laid in the complaint of Habakkuk, chap. i. 2, etc.: in order to accomplish their unrighteous ends, their feet run to evil, and they spring over the threshold of another man's house, which ought to be held sacred. **Vers. 10, 11.** It is easy and common to denounce the crimes of the great; but "*saith Jehovah*" (on which phrase see at i. 2) on that day there shall be distress, and the expression of it everywhere, "*a cry . . . an howling . . . a great crashing,*" since there is sin among all classes or conditions of society. The different localities of Jerusalem named in Scripture cannot be said to be settled definitely; there is a fundamental matter, indeed, on which controversy is keen even at present, whether Zion was the mount on the south-west, its traditional position, or on the south-east, on Ophel, the southern continuation of mount Moriah. But "*the fish gate*" was certainly in the north wall; and if "*the second quarter,*" 2 Kings xxii. 14, was the north-western part of the city, built on the hill named Acra by writers later than the Old Testament, "*the hills*" might be any of the heights round about Jerusalem, yet most naturally those outside of Acra, from which the invading enemy is conceived as pressing forward; and *Maktesh*, meaning the mortar (possibly with a reference to the people being pounded to dust in it, Prov. xxvii. 22, whereas a cry of faith might have brought them such deliverance as came to Samson, Judg. xv. 19; at least these are the only other places where this word is found), may be the long valley, the Tyropæon, which ran from north-west to south-east, cleaving Jerusalem from end to end. "*The people of Canaan . . . they that were laden with silver,*" may be all

12 silver are cut off. And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles; and I will punish the men that are settled on their lees, that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil. And their wealth shall become a spoil, and their houses a desolation: yea, they shall build houses, but shall not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but shall not drink the wine thereof. The great day of the LORD is near, it is near and hasteth greatly, *even* the voice

one class. The literal people of Canaan were keen merchants, and the name is here given to those who were the seed of Israel by blood, because they had become Canaanites at heart; compare Hos. xii. 7 and its margin with the text and margin here; compare also the popular use among ourselves of the name "a Jew." Their silver, however, shall be a load to burden them, not to help or to deliver them; see again at ver. 18. **Vers. 12, 13.** No one and nothing can escape at that time. "*I will search Jerusalem with candles;*" these last words giving a vivid emphasis to a verb (not very common) which in itself is as emphatic as our verb "rummage;" see its use in passages like Gen. xxxi. 35, xlv. 12; 1 Sam. xxiii. 23; Ps. lxiv. 6, lxxvii. 6; Prov. ii. 4, xx. 27; Amos ix. 3; Obad. 6; some of which may have been in Zephaniah's mind. "*And I will punish*" (see at ver. 8) "*the men that are settled on their lees,*" another bold and peculiar figure of speech: the verb occurs only three times more, Ex. xv. 8, Job x. 10, Zech. xiv. 6, and literally means curdled or thickened, as in the margin; but the entire phrase recalls what is said of Moab in Jer. xlviii. 11. It is written of some, "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God," Ps. lv. 19, a text quite in the spirit of this verse. For it adds, "*That say in their heart, Jehovah will not do good, neither will He do evil.*" These are the ungodly, common enough among ourselves, who either deny the existence of God, or shut Him up in the prison of natural laws, and form a conception of Him such as the psalmists and prophets think suitable for the idols, but which they emphatically reject as a conception of our God, Ps. cxv. 1; Isa. xli. 23; Jer. x. 5. They shall be convicted of their error when He rises to judgement. Of this judgement ver. 13 gives specimens. "*Their wealth . . . and their houses,*" in which they trusted and sought happiness, "*shall become a spoil . . . a desolation:*" the latter noun occurs often, and is used by Zephaniah at ii. 4, 9, 13; the former is comparatively rare, but appears in Hab. ii. 7, represented to the English reader by "booties." The touching announcement as to "*houses*" and "*vineyards*" never to be enjoyed by their owners, goes back on what Moses had threatened, Deut. xxviii. 30, 39, already applied to the Ten Tribes in Amos v. 11, and to Judah in Micah vi. 15.

**I. 14-18.** *The description of the great day of Jehovah, which is near;* the opening words of ver. 14 repeat those in ver. 7. **Ver. 14.** It is not near in some loose sense, it "*hasteth greatly,*" as in Hab. i. 6, the immediate agents of vengeance are named "that bitter and hasty

- of the day of the LORD; the mighty man crieth there bitterly.
- 15 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,
- 16 a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm,
- 17 against the fenced cities, and against the high battlements. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as dung.
- 18 Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make an end, yea, a terrible end, of all them that dwell in the land.

nation," we find the bitterness here in the cry of even the mighty man, compare Isa. xxxiii. 7. Ver. 15 heaps up words to describe its gloom and desolation; but much of the beauty and pathos of the original can scarcely be transferred to a translation. Zephaniah goes back upon the descriptions of the day of Jehovah in Joel ii. 2; Amos v. 20; but his is fuller, and in the forefront he places, as most awful, the fact that it is a day of wrath; and to this he returns in ver. 18, and with different words at ii. 2, 3, iii. 8. Ver. 16 brings in the description of war, to which that day owes many of its terrors; although the secondary place given to these implies that there are more important elements involved in those unutterable terrors. "*A day of the trumpet and alarm,*" both nouns occurring in Amos ii. 2, though the latter is rendered "shouting." Nothing is too strongly fortified to resist the unnamed assailants. Ver. 17. The first two clauses in this verse, like the last in ver. 16, carry us back to the language of Deut. xxviii. 29, 52, from that same great discourse of which use was made at ver. 13. And as Zephaniah placed wrath at the head of his description of the day of Jehovah, ver. 14, so he places at the end of it, "*because they have sinned against Jehovah.*" Sin and misery are ever cause and effect in the teaching of Scripture. "*And their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as dung.*" For the wages of sin is death, seen already in the body, though this is but a small instalment of the penalty. Life, which is the most precious thing to each of us, shall be of no more account than the commonest or the vilest things. Ver. 18. In this day of Jehovah's wrath, "*neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them;*" indeed the effect will be the opposite, as was hinted in vers. 11 and 13. This part of the verse is repeated very nearly word for word in Ezek. vii. 19, and is explained. "*But the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy,*" to which figure of fire a reference was made in the comment on i. 2, 3. Such a fire would melt down all their silver and gold, as it would burn up all their works. But it is no merely material fire. Moses had said, "Jehovah thy God is a devouring fire, a jealous God," Deut. iv. 24; see at Nah. i. 2 on His being jealous or zealous, for these two words are really the same. Hence, in regard to all them that dwell in the land, "*He shall make an end, yea, a terrible end.*"

CHAP. II. 1 Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O  
 2 nation that hath no shame; before the decree bring forth, *before*  
 the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD  
 come upon you, before the day of the LORD'S anger come upon

I cannot doubt that this is a reference to well-known expressions in Isaiah, especially chap. x. 23; although this is not plain to the English reader, because there a more expressive noun is used to render the Hebrew, "a consummation;" see what is said on Nah. i. 8, where the translation is "a full end." The adjective which Isaiah coupled with this noun was "determined;" Zephaniah uses another, the full meaning of which requires, perhaps, both the text "terrible" and the margin "speedy" to do justice to it; Isa. lxxv. 23 uses the kindred noun to describe that from which redeemed Israel is set free, "calamity," in the margin "sudden terror." There is, as often happens, room for difference of opinion whether "land" or "earth" best expresses the idea twice coming up in this verse; neither of them is to be called erroneous, though at iii. 8, where the phrase is repeated, it is necessary to translate "earth."

#### SECOND SECTION, CHAP. II.

The respite to Jerusalem, while the sentence is carried out on the nations.

II. 1-3. *Jerusalem is called to humble herself and repent during a period of respite.* Ver. 1. There are some difficulties of language in both the members of this verse. "*Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together,*" is a doubling of the verb for which Hebrew scholars find parallels, as Hab. i. 5, and perhaps Isa. xxix. 9; yet in the passage in Isaiah, they are much divided in opinion whether there is a resemblance in meaning as well as in sound; here, good authorities have taken the one form of the verb metaphorically and the other literally, the nation being summoned to collect themselves, as we speak of a person being collected. "*O nation that hath no shame*" is certainly a rendering that may be rejected for the marginal one, "*that hath no longing,*" which is ancient, defensible from the point of view of language, and familiar (in two forms) in the text and margin of the Authorized Version. But in a doubtful case the Revision presents a probable meaning; iii. 11 speaks of their being finally delivered from the feeling of shame; and passages like Jer. iii. 3, vi. 15, etc., impute it to the people of Jerusalem as a disgrace that at present they felt no shame. Ver. 2. But this is a duty specially urgent. The effort must be made at once to escape from the sentence of death which has been pronounced; as is made plain by the use of "before" three times, if the marginal rendering is preferred, and four times if we keep by the text. "*Before the decree bring forth,*" namely, its fruit, its appointed results; see the difficult text, Micah vii. 11. "*The fierce anger of Jehovah . . . the day of Jehovah's anger*"

3 you. Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgement; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it  
4 may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger. For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation: they shall drive out

(this latter expression being repeated in ver. 3); see at i. 15, and what was remarked there. Ver. 3. Here the duty of *seeking* is three times urged, in three respects. To begin with, of course, "seek ye Jehovah;" for the neglect to do this had been a crying sin, i. 6; there is the same command, for the same reason, in Amos v. 6. But under this duty there are embraced two others, "*seek righteousness, seek meekness*;" two moral qualifications which are combined closely in the description of the king, Ps. xlv. 4, and which, taken along with the general duty, would cover much the same ground as the well-known description of practical religion in Micah vi. 8. The persons called to this duty are "*all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought His judgement*;" for really it is only the meek who actually seek meekness, though no doubt it is the duty of all to do so; and it is only those who seek His judgement who can be of use in turning aside His judgements, like the righteous men sought for in Sodom. But even so much is not expected here; the utmost is that they shall deliver their own souls, as is said in Ezek. xiv. 12-21: "*it may be ye shall be hid*" in that day. Often God's people have had no more than this "it may be," as Amos v. 15, or a "who knoweth," like Joel ii. 14; Jonah iii. 9. I incline to the idea that Zephaniah in this conditional promise refers to his own name, meaning "one whom Jehovah has hidden;" the verbs, indeed, are not the same, but their meaning differs little; and they are combined in descriptions like those in Ps. xxvii. 5, xxxi. 19, 20.

II. 4-15. *The sentence of judgement is carried out on the nations.* It has been explained near the end of the Introduction that four heathen nations are selected as examples; two of them are small and close at hand, the Philistines perhaps coming first, as actually within the promised land, receiving, in ver. 5, the name of Canaan, which had been metaphorically applied to Israel themselves at i. 11; two of them are large, and at a distance, the last, Assyria, being in Zephaniah's time the great enemy of God's people, who had destroyed the kingdom of the Ten Tribes, and had brought that of the Two Tribes to the brink of ruin. Or they may be arranged according to the four points of the compass, often in Scripture called the four winds, west, east, south, and north. The Apostle Peter teaches us that judgement begins at the house of God: yet perhaps this is to be chiefly understood of slighter judgements, for correction; at least, when we have to do with those severe judgements which remove a candlestick out of its place, it would seem a common order of procedure that the judgements travelled around the professing Church, falling first upon "them that are without," and only in the last instance falling on the Church itself; so it is in Amos, chaps. i. and ii., and so it is here. The execution of the sentence on Jerusalem is suspended till

- 5 Ashdod at the noonday, and Ekron shall be rooted up. Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea coast, the nation of the Cherethites! The word of the LORD is against you, O Canaan, the land of the Philistines; I will destroy thee, that there shall be no inhabitant.
- 6 And the sea coast shall be pastures, with cottages for shepherds  
7 and folds for flocks. And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed *their flocks* thereupon:

we come to iii. 1; in this chapter we have it executed on the heathen.

FIRST JUDGEMENT: *The Philistines*, ii. 4-7. Ver. 4. There is ruin coming on their cities. Four of the five which are habitually mentioned together are named here: why not the fifth? Possibly for the sake of that parallelism which is common in Hebrew poetry and lofty prose. But if so, we cannot tell why Gath should be the one not named; it is, indeed, the only one whose site is doubtful to modern explorers, and after the time of David it is never mentioned in Scripture, except at Amos vi. 2; Micah i. 10; so it may have sunk very much out of notice. Two of the four cities named here have their punishment expressed by a play upon words in the Hebrew: see what is said about such plays on words, Micah i. 10-16. The judgement was to come on "*Ashdod at the noonday*," compare Jer. xv. 8; perhaps in the most daring manner, like robbery in broad daylight; but more probably, at the time when in hot climates people are accustomed to rest and do nothing. Ver. 5. "*Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea coast*," or better in the margin, the region of the sea, as also in vers. 6 and 7. The four cities named lay in a line from south to north, none of them five miles from the coast. "*The nation of the Cherethites*," a name found again only in the history of David's bodyguard, 1 Sam. xxx. 14, and Ezek. xxv. 16: in Ezekiel it seems to be introduced for the sake of a play on the word translated "cut off;" Zephaniah also may have had this in view, since he uses that verb at i. 3, 4, 11, iii. 6, 7. Many suppose the people to have been a branch of the Philistine race that came from the island of Crete. "*O Canaan*;" see what is said on this word in the general statement prefixed, on ii. 4-15. Vers. 6, 7. The region of the sea had not been occupied by the Israelites, in spite of certain victories won by Joshua; see Josh. xi. 22, xiii. 3. The promise here is that Israel shall yet have it all. "*Pastures, with cottages for shepherds*:" one word is very obscure, a noun never found elsewhere being used here perhaps for a play on words with the Cherethites; perhaps the marginal "caves," or pits dug (compare ver. 9), may be more exact, such dwellings underground being common enough. This region "*shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah*," an expression which returns in a fuller form at ver. 9: it was a doctrine much insisted on by the prophets, as far back as Amos v. 15, vii. 1-6, but especially by Isaiah and his successors, Isa. iv. 3, vi. 13, x. 20, 21, etc., that judgements must sweep away the mass of God's professing people, yet that a remnant

in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening ; for the LORD their God shall visit them, and bring again their captivity. I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the revilings of the children of Ammon, wherewith they have reproached my 9 people, and magnified themselves against their border. Therefore as I live, saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah,

graciously preserved should become the heirs of all the promises : see what is said at Micah ii. 12. "*In the houses of Ashkelon they shall lie down in the evening ;*" this safety at night, in such a hostile place, stands out in contrast with Ashdod being driven out at the noon day, ver. 4. See as to Israel possessing the Philistines, at Obadiah, ver. 19. "*For Jehovah their God shall visit them,*" an expression used almost invariably in a favourable sense ; whereas "to visit upon" is for chastisement or punishment, as at i. 8, 12. "*And bring again their captivity,*" a phrase repeated at iii. 20 ; it is found in Deut. xxx. 3, and is especially dear to the psalmists and to Jeremiah, though it occurs elsewhere. There are differences of opinion as to the rendering of both the verb and the noun, and it is certainly far from clear that it implies a return from a captivity in the sense of exile ; but the general meaning is not altered, a restoration to a former happy condition.

SECOND JUDGEMENT: *Moab and Ammon*, ii. 8-11. These might almost be called twin nations ; in some respects they were even practically one people, as is seen in Jephthah's arguing and acting, Judg. chap. xi. Both were descended from Lot, and they had thus a certain kinship to Israel, by whom their territory was scrupulously respected, in obedience to the stringent command recorded in Deut. ii. 9, 19. That territory lay immediately to the east of Canaan. They did not at any time show kindness to Israel in return ; on the contrary, when the fortunes of the eastern tribes sank low, they grasped the land of Reuben and Gad. They were denounced by Amos, i. 13-ii. 3 ; but the great prophecy against them is contained in Isa. xv. and xvi., which has been wrought up in Jer. xlviii., xlix. 1-6 ; Ezek. xxv. 1-11. Ver. 8. The language implies that their sin was against Israel as the people of Jehovah ; the same is implied in the language of those other prophecies. "*Reproach . . . revilings,*" with verbs accompanying them to enhance the vigour of the statement, are expressions found in the prophets, the latter (which is rare) chiefly in Isaiah, who brings the two together in chap. li. 7. Ver. 9. "*Therefore, as I live, saith Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel.*" All here is emphatic : the oath, which is not uncommon when God is "minded to show more abundantly unto the heirs of the promise the immutability of His counsel," and which, I suppose, must be so understood here, though it takes the unusual form of an oath against His and their enemies ; the combining of three divine names ; and the use of the special word for "saith," as to which see on i. 2. "*Shall be as Sodom . . . as Gomorrah,*" which are set forth for an



a possession of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation : the residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my nation shall inherit them. This shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of the LORD of hosts. The LORD will be terrible unto them : for he will famish all the gods of the earth ; and men shall worship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the

example, both in the Old Testament and in the New, suffering the punishment of eternal fire ; see Deut. xxix. 23 ; Amos iv. 11 ; Isa. i. 9, xiii. 19 ; Jer. xlix. 18, l. 40. "*A possession of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation.*" The marginal rendering for "nettles" is preferred by some naturalists ; nettles, however, are notorious for growing in the ruins of human habitations ; the word is used again only in Job xxx. 7 ; Prov. xxiv. 31. "Saltpits" are to be expected abundantly by the Dead Sea ; and salt on the ground was a recognised emblem of barrenness, see Jer. xvii. 6 ; Judg. ix. 45. "A desolation," repeated at ver. 13, regarding Nineveh, as already at ver. 4 regarding Ashkelon, as in the beginning, i. 13, regarding Jerusalem. All are on a level, except that here it is said to be perpetual. For this is God's quarrel. "*The residue of my people . . . and the remnant of my nation ;*" see as to the remnant at ver. 7 ; and as for the repetition, see in ver. 10, "the people of Jehovah of hosts." "*Shall spoil them . . . shall inherit them,*" as the earlier prophets had told of retribution, in passages like Obad. 15. The way in which Israel should inherit these nations is explained in Isa. xiv. 2, lxi. 5. Ver. 10. This very much repeats the statement of ver. 8 ; only that it directly names their sin, "*This shall they have for their pride,*" a noun which can have both a bad and a good sense, "excellency," see at Nah. ii. 2. It must be the bad sense here. Ver. 11. "*Jehovah will be terrible unto them ;*" a feature in His character which even His own people dare not overlook, Heb. xii. 28, as Deut. x. 17, and often in the Psalms ; but it must be predominant in the intelligent view of him taken by any who are sinners and enemies, such as are here described. "*For he will famish all the gods of the earth,*" a bold figure, yet very suggestive of these false gods falling into consumption and dying out of the world, as the tendency of Jacob's glory in days of backsliding is described in the only other passage where the verb is found, Isa. xvii. 4 ; though at chap. x. 16 the kindred noun is used of the proud Assyrians wasting away. "*And men shall worship Him, every one from his place.*" Zephaniah does not contemplate the failure of all religion ; on the contrary, the wasting away of the idols brings out the glory of Jehovah before all mankind, who turn to worship Him. It is difficult to decide whether "from his place" applies to men at rest, each in his own home, or to men moving from their place and going up to Jerusalem : the language admits of either representation, and both are scriptural ; in fact, in a spiritual sense, they run into one another. "*All the isles of the nations,*" or better in the margin, "the coastlands of the nations."

12 nations. Ye Ethiopians also, ye shall be slain by my sword.  
 13 And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like the  
 14 wilderness. And herds shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations: both the pelican and the porcupine shall

It is Isaiah who revels in the use of this noun, "the isles," in his descriptions of coming glory, chap. xi. 11, xxiv. 15, xlii. 4, etc.; but when he adds anything, it is "the isles of the sea," as no doubt the islands and maritime countries of the Mediterranean were familiar to him and to those to whom he ministered. Zephaniah changes the phrase into "the isles of the nations," in his eagerness to set forth the conversion of the nations. This bright vision may be compared with that in Hab. ii. 14, as we saw that at i. 7 he referred to Hab. ii. 20.

THIRD JUDGEMENT: *The Ethiopians*. Ver. 12. These people of a distant country, south of Egypt, named with other remote African nations in Nah. iii. 9, and repeatedly appearing in the prophecies of Isaiah, see also what is said of Cushan at Hab. iii. 7: Zephaniah mentions them again at iii. 10. It was the king of Ethiopia ruling over Egypt who had been the object of hope and trust against Assyria by many in Jerusalem at the time of Hezekiah. But the prophet does not think it worth while to dwell on them. "*Ye shall be slain by my sword,*" very probably with an allusion to Isa. lxvi. 16. It is impossible to give the rugged Hebrew construction, unless we regard it as a change of person in contempt. As if he said, "Also ye Ethiopians! No, I cannot address *you*: ye are dead and gone: *they* are those slain by my sword."

FOURTH JUDGEMENT: *Assyria and Nineveh*, ii. 13-15. Ver. 13. In Isa. xvii. 12-14 and xviii., we have Assyria and Ethiopia: here the order is inverted. It is quite grammatical to make ver. 13 depend on ver. 12, translating "they are those slain by my sword: that He may stretch forth His hand," etc., putting the southern kingdom out of His way, says the prophet, that He may apply Himself to the old and strong enemy of His people, to Assyria. It is simpler to take ver. 13 by itself; only in this case there is an emotion and activity in the prophet's mind, which translators have generally been content to leave unexpressed. The prophet gives utterance to his wish and hope, as is seen in the Revised margin of Ps. lxxii.: one might endeavour to translate it thus, "May He stretch out," or, "Let Him stretch out," etc. The judgement is then expressed in language repeated from parts of vers. 4 and 9, only with an emphatic addition, "*a desolation, and dry like the wilderness:*" the same two ideas are brought together in Joel ii. 20, but not to the English reader, because "dry" is there represented by "barren." Ver. 14. "*And herds shall lie down in the midst of her,*" only not flocks of sheep, as in ver. 7: now it is beasts of prey, "*all the beasts of the nations,*" a phrase not occurring elsewhere, and rendered by good authorities as in the margin, or even "beasts in troops." "*Both the pelican and the*

lodge in the chapters thereof: *their* voice shall sing in the windows; desolation shall be in the thresholds: for he hath laid bare the cedar work. This is the joyous city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none else beside me: how has she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand.

CHAP. III. 1 Woe to her that is rebellious and polluted, to the 2 oppressing city! She obeyed not the voice; she received not

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*porcupine shall lodge in the chapters thereof,*" so that these chapters must belong to pillars lying prostrate on the ground. The second of these animals are named in Isa. xiv. 23, and both in chap. xxxiv. 11, which may well have been in the mind of Zephaniah, as also Isa. xiii. 21, 22, when he wrote the weird description in this verse and the next. Ver. 15. Here again the description goes back upon Isaiah. "*The joyous city,*" an adjective found only here and at iii. 11, and in Isa. xiii. 3, xxiv. 8; and of a city, as here, chap. xxii. 2, xxiii. 7, xxxii. 13. "*That dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none else beside me,*" from Isa. xlvi. 8, the Hebrew being somewhat peculiar. "*A desolation*" is a kindred word to that which has been used at i. 13, ii. 4, 9, 13; it is a favourite form in Jeremiah, sometimes being translated "an astonishment," as at chap. xxv. 9, 11, 18. The word "desolation" in ver. 14, however, is entirely different; it is elsewhere translated "waste," as is the kindred verb at iii. 6; possibly, the marginal "drought" is better. "*Every one that passeth by shall hiss and wag his hand,*" an idea that perhaps runs through the prophecy of Nahum. All the three verbs are found in Lam. ii. 15; and both hissing and wagging are again and again used of mockery; though elsewhere it is the head that is said to be wagged, not the hand.

### THIRD SECTION, CHAP. III. 1-8.

The respite at an end, the sentence executed.

III. 1-4. *The vile and hopeless state of Jerusalem.* Ver. 1. "*Woe,*" as at ii. 5, and often in beginning a prophecy; see on Micah ii. 1. "*To her that is rebellious and polluted.*" The first adjective, a most rare word, whose meaning has been much disputed, is probably a variation of a well-known word bearing this meaning; see the same complaint in Jer. iv. 17, v. 23, xxv. 3-7: the reference might be to the law in Deut. xxi. 18, 20, for stoning a son accused by his parents of being stubborn and rebellious, so as to put away the evil from the midst of them; for there they complain that he "will not obey the voice of" his parents, words which come in here at ver. 2. "*To the oppressing city,*" a rather uncommon verb, to the use of which Jeremiah is partial. Ver. 2. This disobedient city "*received not correction,*" or "instruc-

correction; she trusted not in the LORD; she drew not near to  
 3 her God. Her princes in the midst of her are roaring lions; her  
 judges are evening wolves; they leave nothing till the morrow.  
 4 Her prophets are light and treacherous persons: her priests have  
 5 profaned the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law. The

tion," as in the margin; <sup>1</sup> another reference to Deut. xxi. 18, though the translation there is "chasten." "*She trusted not in Jehovah; she drew not near to her God,*" while the order of words in the original suggests that she might be ready to trust and to draw near to other gods. Here was the root of all her evil state, namely, her want of faith and of worship in spirit and in truth. See the complaint from the first, i. 6. Vers. 3, 4. All the three orders of *the theocracy were hopelessly corrupt*. Three channels had been prepared by Jehovah, along which His grace for Israel was habitually to run; and the holders of those offices, prophets, priests, and kings, were anointed outwardly with oil and inwardly with the Holy Spirit, for the discharge of their functions. In the perfect arrangements of the New Testament these offices are united in the Son of God, who is the Anointed, or, using the Greek and Hebrew terms, the Christ or the Messiah. In the dispensation of the Old Testament these offices were jealously kept apart, being held by mere men, individuals among whom were continually showing themselves incapable and unworthy. But it came to be a case of despair when the corruption had poisoned all the three, as is the case here; so, earlier, in Micah iii. 11, and later, in Jeremiah often. Observe a possibility of hope in Zephaniah's language; the princes and judges are named, but not their head, king Josiah, himself a man eminent for his godliness. "*Roaring lions . . . evening wolves;*" compare Jer. xii. 8; Hab. i. 8, etc. "*Light and treacherous persons.*" The first adjective is used again only in Judg. ix. 4 to describe Abimelech's associates in murdering his brothers: but kindred nouns describe Reuben's instability, Gen. xlix. 4; and the want of moral earnestness in the prophets, as denounced by Jehovah through Jeremiah, chap. xxiii. 32, where the Revision has changed "lightness" into "vain boasting." The second adjective is in use with reference to those who were unfaithful to their God, especially in Psalms, Proverbs, and Jeremiah. "*Her priests have profaned the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law,*" language copied very closely, yet in transposed order, in Ezek. xxii. 26. There is a special adaptation of the charges to each of the three classes,

<sup>1</sup> This word (noun and verb may be taken together) is very frequent in Proverbs and in other didactic parts of Scripture; and very generally it is accompanied by a marginal rendering, because the meaning ranges from the gentlest admonition, with predominating instruction, to the sternest rebuke, even with the inclusion of chastisement: perhaps the whole range of meaning ought always to be kept in view, though this or that particular aspect may be the most prominent on different occasions. I think it a pity that "instruction," which is fairly included in it, should be confusingly connected with the term for "law" by many writers, and at times in the Revised margin; see footnote at Hab. i. 4.

LORD in the midst of her is righteous ; he will not do iniquity ; every morning doth he bring his judgement to light, he faileth not ; 6 but the unjust knoweth no shame. I have cut off nations, their battlements are desolate ; I have made their streets waste, that none passeth by : their cities are destroyed, so that there is no 7 man, that there is none inhabitant. I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive correction ; so her dwelling should not be

that evil being charged which ought to have been felt especially vile in them ; compare what Malachi says of the priests, i. 6-ii. 9.

III. 5. "*Jehovah in the midst of her,*" repeated at ver. 17 : this is what constitutes her a Church, and keeps the burning bush from being consumed. "*He is righteous,*" as the living and true God is, and must manifest Himself to be ; contrast the false notions men have of Him, for their thoughts are revealed in i. 12. Zephaniah goes back on the great text, Deut. xxxii. 4, in the song of Moses : there we have the three characteristic words of this verse, namely, "righteous," "iniquity" (more precisely, "unrighteousness," or "injustice," for it is the kindred adjective which is immediately after translated "unjust"), and "judgement." And all his character and work are manifested from day to day, and without fail ; Moses there had described Him as a God of faithfulness, whose work is perfect. "*But the unjust knoweth no shame,*" see what was said on ii. 1. Zephaniah goes back on Isa. xxvi. 11, "*Jehovah, Thy hand is lifted up, yet they see not : but they shall see [Thy] zeal for the people, and be ashamed ; yea, fire shall devour Thine adversaries ;*" though he does not mention the devouring by the fire of God's zeal, or jealousy, till ver. 8.

III. 6, 7. *The dealings in vengeance with the nations, and the more gracious dealing with Jerusalem herself, have been worse than useless.* Ver. 6. "*I have cut off nations,*" part of the judgements predicted, by the use of this verb, in i. 3, 4, to be used once more in ver. 7 ; of which additional particulars have been unfolded in ii. 4-15. The following words have occurred already : "battlements" at i. 16 ; "desolate" and "waste," as verbs, at ii. 13, 14 ; "passeth by" at ii. 15 ; "that there is none inhabitant" at ii. 5. "*Are destroyed*" represents the only new Hebrew word, and one extremely rare, if it really occur again : probably its rarity was intended to give additional force. Ver. 7. "*I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive correction,*" or "instruction," as explained at ver. 2. This generous expectation of good results from His providential dealings, especially when mingled with grace, is found elsewhere in the prophets ; and the sin which breaks through all these restraints is spoken of as a disappointment to Him, for instance, in Isa. v. 4 and Jer. v. 2, 11-13, 21 : we must not think of this in a manner unworthy of God's perfections, but neither must we explain it away. "*So her dwelling should not be cut off,*" a sudden change from the second person to the third ; God speaks no longer to her, but to Himself. The temple often receives the name, "His dwelling" or "habitation," this same noun : but I am

cut off, *according to* all that I have appointed concerning her :  
 8 but they rose early and corrupted all their doings. Therefore  
 wait ye for me, said the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the  
 prey : for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may  
 assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation,  
 even all my fierce anger ; for all the earth shall be devoured with

doubtful of its being ever in the Old Testament called the dwelling of the people, though, perhaps, it might have been so, judging from Ps. xxiii. 6 ; Matt. xxiii. 38. “[*According to*] all that I have appointed concerning her,”<sup>1</sup> perhaps taking in both His original precepts (for this English word uniformly represents the Hebrew cognate noun) and the appointments in His providence. “*But they rose early and corrupted all their doings.*” The Hebrew conjunction is not very common, and deserves a more emphatic rendering : it repeatedly is rendered “surely.” Jeremiah many a time speaks of God rising early and sending His prophets to teach and warn : Zephaniah insists that there was a counterpart effort to resist every good impression. And this effort, which prevented their being made better, ensured their becoming greatly worse.

III. 8. *Therefore Jerusalem must take her place among the nations on whom the universal sentence is executed.* So Isaiah, chap. xxii., had classed Jerusalem among the heathen nations on whom he laid his burdens ; in chap. xvii. he had gone even further with the kingdom of the Ten Tribes, slumping it up with, or rather, swallowing it up in, the heathen kingdom of Damascus. “*Therefore wait ye for me, saith Jehovah.*” on the latter expression, see at i. 2 ; on the former, compare Isa. xxx. 18 ; Hab. ii. 3. “*Until the day that I rise up to the prey.*” His rising up is often mentioned in the prophecies and psalms ; and also the taking of the prey by His redeemed people. It is one of Zephaniah’s bold figures to combine the two, and to attribute the whole directly to God : yet in the similar passage, Num. xxiii. 24, what is done by the people of Israel is “*what God hath wrought,*” according to the preceding verse. “*For my determination is,*” not altogether a satisfactory paraphrase of the Hebrew, which is presented in the margin. Perhaps it is safest to say, “*my judgement [consists in]*” what follows : the word goes back upon ver. 5, “*every morning doth He bring His judgement to light.*” As the judge, the supreme judge, He summons the whole world to his bar, pronounces sentence, and directs that it be carried into execution. “*To gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms,*” as we read in Joel iii. 2 ; Isa. lxvi. 18 ; only that in those passages Israel is not judged, but saved. “*To pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce wrath ;*” see on this

<sup>1</sup> A very difficult clause to translate. The Hebrew student, however, may look at the use of this verb in Job xxxvi. 23 ; 2 Kings v. 24 ; perhaps 1 Sam. xv. 2, and various passages in which it is rendered “appoint,” namely, to an office, Num. xxvii. 16 ; Jer. xlix. 19, l. 44, li. 27. The rendering in the Authorized, and in the Revised margin, is difficult grammatically, and I like the sense less.

9 the fire of my jealousy. For then will I turn to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, 10 to serve him with one consent. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall

at i. 15, 18. "*For all the earth . . . fire of my jealousy,*" repeated from i. 18; where, however, the translation is "land," which is quite possible there, whereas "earth" is necessary here.

#### FOURTH SECTION, CHAP. III. 9-20.

The results, through grace, to the whole world.

It is scarcely possible to analyse this description, full of tenderness and power, in which grace and glory are not kept clearly separate, so that it is hard to say how far it can be realized in this life and when it carries us over death into the life to come. It is as if the prophet were setting before us all that Israel might have been and had, if from the first they had lived a life of faith and acted up to their ideal, "as the days of heaven upon earth," Deut. xi. 21. For all that is necessary in this exposition, it may be enough to follow the divisions marked by "then," ver. 9; "in that day," vers. 11 and 16; "at that time," vers. 19 and 20.

III. 9, 10. "*For then will I turn to the peoples a pure language.*" The execution of the sentence has been a blessing in disguise, not by natural inherent power, but by a suitable working of supernatural grace. The heart no doubt must be purified, that the language may be so; for the Hebrew is "purified" rather than "pure." The verb implies an overturning, or at least a turning over; but here it may be used with an allusion to the same verb in 1 Sam. x. 9, where the translation is, "God gave him another heart." But from the rest of the verse we see that Zephaniah had a much greater act of God in his mind, a complete reversal of the consequences of the miracle at the tower of Babel, when the people all had one language, and used it for an ungodly combination. The prophet's thought is something like this. Long the nations have been scattered abroad over the earth, their language being confounded, that they might not understand one another's speech. Now Jehovah turns to the peoples a purified language, and why? "*That they may all call upon the name of Jehovah, to serve Him with one consent,*" in a new and better unity, when Jew and Gentile shall be made one new man in Christ Jesus. The beginning of public calling on the name of Jehovah had been at the first separation of the Church from the world, Gen. iv. 26; the beginnings of reunion of serving Him had been predicted in Isa. xix. 23-25, when Israel should be united at once with both Egypt and Assyria. Now Zephaniah looks beyond Egypt, "*beyond the rivers of Ethiopia,*" or Cush, on which He had pronounced sentence, ii. 12; and he certainly could not forget how the first beginning of Babel was from Nimrod of the line of Cush, Gen. x. 8-10. "*Shall*

11 bring mine offering. In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee thy proudly exulting ones, and thou shalt no more be haughty in my holy mountain. But I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and 12 poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD. The 13 remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall

*bring mine offering.*" The promise in ver. 10 undoubtedly is that this universal worship shall be offered, of which an example is given from one of the remotest and least known regions of the earth, one which at the day in which we live is only beginning to be known to us. And I do not doubt that there is some reference to Isa. xviii. 1, 7, and especially to lxi. 20. But what of the intermediate words, "*my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed*"? Are these the persons who bring the offering, according to the translation in the text; or are they the offering which is brought, according to the margin? It is a question of some nicety; and in a spiritual sense both may be quite true. But I think the margin the more likely, according to the usage of language in Scripture: the children of Israel, broken up by judgement, are named much more naturally than the heathen "the daughter of my dispersed:" compare the same idea in different words at ver. 19; also the great fundamental promise in Deut. xxx. 1-5, to which and to the following verses Zephaniah alludes throughout this fourth division of his prophecy.

III 11-15. *Purification, security, and gladness.* Ver. 11. "*Shalt thou not be ashamed,*" see at ii. 1. "*For all thy doings:*" in this and the preceding clause these doings are very different from the old condition, vers. 5, 7. "*I will take away out of the midst of thee thy proudly exulting ones:*" the adjective is the same that was used to describe the city of Nineveh as "joyous," ii. 15; but the entire phrase is used in Isa. xiii. 3 of the wild warriors called in by Jehovah to destroy Babylon. "*And thou shalt no more be haughty in my holy mountain,*" in which nothing is to hurt or destroy in those glorious times, Isa. xi. 9. This verb is used in the description of the ungodly daughters of Zion, Isa. iii. 16. Ver. 12. "*But I will leave,*" as a remnant; it is the cognate verb to the noun which appears again in ver. 13 as it already did in ii. 7, 9; see what is said there and at Micah ii. 12. "*An afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of Jehovah:*" for it is those who are thus emptied of themselves who are ready to receive and rest on Him. The whole statement is very much like Isa. xiv. 32, only that the verb is there more accurately rendered "take refuge"; as to which rendering see what is said on Nah. i. 7. Ver. 13. This remnant "*shall not do iniquity,*" or unrighteousness, or injustice; see at ver. 5. "*Nor speak lies,*" with their purified lips, in their pure language; compare these things brought together in Rev. xxi. 27. "*Neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth.*" The word translated "deceitful" occurs only four



14 feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid. Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The LORD hath taken away thy judgements, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not fear evil any more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear

times more, three of them in Jeremiah; nor is its cognate verb common: it is sometimes rendered "to beguile," and perhaps it is more general and comprehensive than direct lying. A kindred noun is used of the rejected and murdered Servant of God, "neither was any deceit in His mouth," Isa. liii. 9; this text may have been in Zephaniah's mind, since I think he evinces a strong wish to copy the latter part of Isaiah in largely identifying Messiah and His people, the true Israel, the head and members. "*For they shall feed and lie down,*" these two verbs were already brought together at ii. 7. "*And none shall make them afraid:*" Zephaniah may have drawn this immediately from the conclusion of a glorious Messianic prophecy in Micah iv. 4, see what is said on it; nevertheless going back to the original promise in Lev. xxvi. 6. Ver. 14. This is an impassioned invitation to be joyful, and to manifest the joy in every way; as is natural after the promises in ver. 11. Many such passages are very characteristic of the latter part of Isaiah, from chap. xl. 9 on to lxvi. 9-12. The only peculiarity that would escape the English reader is this: three out of the four verbs are in the feminine singular, addressed to the daughter of Zion, or of Jerusalem: but since this is really a plural, the verb attached to Israel is in the plural. Ver. 15. "*Jehovah hath taken away thy judgements,*" as He has already taken away thy proudly exulting ones, who caused these, ver. 11. The "judgements" stand in some connexion with the "judgement" in vers. 5 and 8. "*He hath cast out thine enemy.*" So Nah. i. 15 combines the call to holy joy with the assurance that the worthless one who had passed through Judah is utterly cut off. This verbal form is never elsewhere used except of "preparing," usually "preparing the way," Isa. xl. 3; unless at Lev. xiv. 36, to "empty" the house suspected of having the plague of leprosy: perhaps in this sense here, the enemy being polluted. "*The King of Israel, even Jehovah, is in the midst of thee.*" This title has its origin in the song of Moses at the Red Sea, Ex. xv. 18; it is explicitly set forth by Balaam, Num. xxiii. 21; and it is taken up by a chorus of psalmists and prophets. But the emphasis is laid upon the gracious truth that this their King is in the midst of them, as is repeated at ver. 17; compare Deut. xxiii. 14. He had been in the midst of her already, ver. 5, but in very different circumstances. "*Thou shalt not fear evil any more,*" when He is in the midst of thee, and God is all in all. The change of a vowel gives us the verb "fear," as in the text, or "see" as in the margin and the Authorized.

III. 16-18. Assurance of faith, in the powerful, loving, present God, their Saviour. Ver. 16. Perfect love casts out fear that hath torment,

17 thou not : O Zion, let not thine hands be slack. The LORD thy God is in the midst of thee, a mighty one who will save : he will rejoice over thee with joy, he will rest in his love, he will joy over 18 thee with singing. I will gather them that sorrow for the solemn

or punishment ; yet it is hard for a sinner to get over fear, and therefore this command is given, rising out of the promise in ver. 15. Then there will be no slack hands, whether these be the result of indifference or of fear, Isa. xiii. 7, xxxv. 3, 4. Ver. 17. "*Jehovah thy God is in the midst of thee,*" as was said in ver. 15. Now He is described as "thy God ;" since if God is ours, all things are ours, and we cannot fear, unless in that sense in which "happy is the man that feareth alway ;" Prov. xxviii. 14, and "there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared," Ps. cxxx. 4. "*A mighty one, who will save.*" This title, "mighty one," proudly assumed by earthly warriors, who will cry bitterly in the testing times of judgement, i. 14, is vindicated for God in the Psalms and Isaiah and Jeremiah. The language here can scarcely not be thought to refer to Isa. ix. 6, x. 21. On ver. 13 it has been remarked that Zephaniah does not bring out the personality of Messiah, perhaps it was a truth less suitable for his particular message at that stage of the fortunes of the people of God : in that verse Messiah and His people are placed together ; in this one it is Messiah and His Father who sent Him, whether the prophet knew much or little of the mystery. It is essential to notice that this mighty one will save, as is repeated ver. 19 ; for the world's mighty men were famous by destroying. "*He will rejoice over thee with joy, He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing ;*" in which words we have very much the same said of Him towards His people that was said of them towards Him in ver. 14. This mutual endearment is wonderful in any circumstances, particularly wonderful in the comparative ignorance and bondage of the Old Testament dispensation : and yet it is nowhere so fully expressed as in the Song of Songs. It is indeed to be found as early as in the fundamental promise, Deut. xxx. 9 ; compare xxviii. 63, hence Jer. xxxii. 41. But I have no doubt that Zephaniah refers particularly to Isa. lxii. 4, 5. He has, however, a peculiar touch to contribute to the picture, though quite in harmony with the others, "He will rest in His love," literally, as in the margin, "be silent" in it. The word is repeatedly rendered, to hold one's peace : and it is elsewhere applied to God, Ps. l. 21 ; Isa. xlii. 14 ; Hab. i. 13 : but here is a unique application of it to love, as if to say, it cannot be expressed in human words, and He refrains from using any. Ver. 18. "*I will gather them that sorrow for the solemn assembly,<sup>1</sup> who were of thee.*" All their

<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew scholar understands the uncertainties of translation indicated in the margin. The verb "gather" is also used in the sense "take away," and has been so used at i. 2, yet only for the sake of resemblance to another verb united to it. And the verb rendered "sorrow," happens to coincide in form with a verb translated in the next marginal note, "removed from." But I prefer the translation in the text.

assembly, who were of thee : *to whom* the burden upon her was a  
 19 reproach. Behold, at that time I will deal with all them that  
 afflict thee : and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that  
 was driven away; and I will make them a praise and a name, whose  
 20 shame hath been in all the earth. At that time will I bring you  
 in, and at that time will I gather you: for I will make you a name

other sorrows, for outward losses however severe, were not to be named in the same breath with their sorrow for the loss of divine ordinances, as these had been first polluted by them, and then in righteous judgement taken away from them, Hos. ii. 11. Such sorrowing is a very gracious affection, compare Ps. xlii. and xliii., and the like : hence it is restricted to true Israelites, "which were of thee;" for there are always nominal Israelites, of whom it is said, "they went out from us, but they were not of us," 1 John ii. 19. "Tryst" is the only English word which at all expresses the Hebrew word variously rendered in the Authorized Version, "solemn assembly," "solemn feast," "set feast," "appointed time," "solemnity," etc. ; it occurs most commonly of all in the unfortunate rendering "tabernacle of the congregation," altered in the Revised to "tent of meeting," which is simply "trysting tent." "*To whom the burden upon her was a reproach,*" plainer and more exact, perhaps, but not differing essentially in meaning from the Authorized, "to whom the reproach of it was a burden."

III. 19. "*I will deal with all them that afflict thee,*" who are to come bending unto her, Isa. lx. 14. The Authorized Version gives a happy turn to its translation of the Hebrew verb "do," namely, "undo:" but the Revised is more exact ; see Ezek. xxii. 14, xxiii. 25. "*And I will save her that halteth,*" etc., with some reference to their father Jacob halting on his thigh, Gen. xxxii. 32 ; for the word never occurs elsewhere except in Micah iv. 6, 7, from which Zephaniah borrows, as is seen by the next clause, which is found there also.

The Good Shepherd brings home all His lost and suffering ones ; see the figures of feeding and lying down at ver. 13 and at ii. 7, and such passages as Isa. xl. 11. "*And I will make them a praise and a name,*" an expression which comes up again in next verse. "*Whose shame hath been in all the earth.*" Of this shame Zephaniah has spoken in vers. 5 and 11. It had been known in all the world by their scattering ; but now it was all past and gone, as in their fathers' history the reproach of Egypt had been rolled away at Joshua's first Passover for the people restored to the favour of their God, Josh. v. 9.

III. 20. "*I will bring you in . . . and gather you,*" as had just been said in the verse before. "*For I will make you a name and a praise.*" There are niceties, the reasons for which are sometimes difficult to settle decidedly. Thus here, both ver. 19 and ver. 20 refer to the noble promise in Deut. xxvi. 19, the two nouns, however, in ver. 20 being in reversed order. Why? Perhaps "name" in ver. 19 remains in the second place, so as to be in immediate contrast

and a praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I bring again your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD.

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with "shame" which is mentioned at the end of the verse ; but in ver. 20 the second place is given to "praise," because in Deuteronomy there are three nouns, "in praise, and in name, and in honour," the last of which is left out by Zephaniah both times. And though the verb is "make" in both verses of the English Bible, in ver. 19 it has been also changed from the verb used in Deuteronomy, to a kindred one, most literally, "I will set them." "*Among all the peoples of the earth.*" There is not much practical difference between "people" and "nation;" yet in Scripture the former is distinctly the more honourable, and it is more applied to Israel; see something as to these words at Micah iv. 1. When Israel is called a nation, there is often manifestly a slight or a reproach conveyed by the term; it might be so at ii. 1, 9. On the other hand, when nations (often translated the heathen, or the Gentiles) receive the appellation peoples, there is sometimes apparently a hint of their being brought more upon a level with God's people Israel: it may be so here, as they seem to share the blessing, and yet this is not distinctly said. It has been necessarily implied, however, at ver. 10, in their bringing His offering. "*When I bring again your captivity before your eyes.*" See what is said on ii. 7.

THE END.