

Notes On Ezekiel

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PREFACE

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

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

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INTRODUCTION

Of the prophet on whose book we enter we know few circumstances, none save the scanty personal particulars which he gives in the course of his prophecies, bound up with them and expressive of their character. We are told that he was a priest, son of Buzi; also of his wife and her sudden death, a sign to Israel; and of his residence at Tel-abib by the Chebar in the land of the Chaldeans. He speaks of Daniel his contemporary, in his own day famous for righteousness even as Noah and Job.*

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

But there are no writings in the Bible more characteristic, and none more used in furnishing imagery for the last book of the New Testament, the widest and deepest of all prophecies. Ezekiel and Jeremiah with Daniel are the prophets of the time of the captivity, not certainly without points of contact and the surest elements of sympathy, but as diverse in their tone and style and objects as they were in outward lot, and in the circumstances which God employed to give form to their predictions. It was the place of Jeremiah to be left with the poor in the land, and afterwards to be taken away with those who faithlessly fled to Egypt for a security they might have enjoyed in submission to their Babylonish master where they were; and so he wept and groaned with the beloved but unworthy remnant to the last. It was for Daniel to be

carried captive in the third year of Jehoiakim when Nebuchadnezzar verified the solemn warning to Hezekiah; though in Babylon God did not leave Himself without witness, and showed where wisdom and His secret alone lay, even when He had raised up the Gentile empires and made His people Lomami. Ezekiel was one of those carried into captivity in the subsequent reign* of Jehoiakin, son of Jehoiakim, when the king of Babylon swept away all the better sort from the land, and our prophet among the rest. There remained but one step lower, the calamitous reign of Zedekiah, that the anger of Jehovah might, cast them all out from His presence, because of manifold provocation and incurable rebellion. In view of this time, though also leaping over the times of the Gentiles of which Daniel treats, and dwelling richly on Israel's restoration at last, Ezekiel prophesied among the captives in Chaldea.

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

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

Those who occupy themselves with the outer framework of the truth have not failed to notice the strong sense of clean and unclean, of Levitical sanctity, of temple imagery, of feasts and priests and sacrifices, so natural to one of the sacerdotal family. Of course these features are obvious and indisputable; but far from a rigid imitation of the Pentateuch we shall find that God asserts His title to modify, omit, or add in that day, when his fellow-prophet Jeremiah explicitly declares (Jer. 31: 31-34) that Jehovah will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, "not according to the covenant I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith Jehovah! But this shall be the covenant that I make with the house of Israel: After those days, saith Jehovah, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts: and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith Jehovah: for I will forgive their iniquity, and will remember their sins no more." No doubt this is true of the Christian meanwhile, for the blood of the new covenant is already shed and ours by faith; but it will be applied to Israel and Judah as such, through divine mercy, in that day, as the verses of Jeremiah which follow (35-40) most clearly show.

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

in force, the details of which will appear as we pass through the book.

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

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

The structure of the book is evident. The first half consists of prophecies in strict chronological order before the final destruction of Jerusalem, when Zedekiah brought on himself the just punishment of his rebellion and perjury. (Ezek. 1-34) Ezekiel shows, under magnificent symbols, followed up by the plainest charges of sin, the hopelessness of every effort to shake off the Babylonish yoke, which Zedekiah was essaying through Egypt. But no; it was Jehovah who was judging Jerusalem, He who dwelt between the cherubim, though He might employ Nebuchadnezzar. Morally it could not be otherwise. The doom of the city, temple, king, and people are all shown in this first half. The second opens with a kind of parenthetical transition, in which he denounces seven objects of judgments among the nations surrounding or near the land, neglecting the time when these burdens were delivered, and grouping them in moral unity (Ezek. 25-32); after which the prophet recurs distinctly to Israel, opens the individual ground on which God henceforth would deal with them (Ezek. 32), denounces first the guilty shepherds or princes (Ezek. 34), and then the hatred of Mount Seir (Ezek. 35), next pledges first the moral (Ezek. 36) and then the corporate (Ezek. 37) restoration of all Israel, the overthrow of Gog and all his hosts (Ezek. 38, 39), and finally the return of the glory of God, with the re-established sanctuary, ritual, and priesthood in the land, now indeed holy, as well as the re-arrangement of the twelve-tribed nationality under the prince; for the name of the city from that day shall be Jehovah-shammah. (Ezek. 40-48) Whether in judgment or in peaceful blessing, it is the day of Jehovah for the earth, not at all the foreshown blessedness of Christianity, as the allegorists teach. Such doctrine, whether patristic or puritan, is misleading and a delusion. These extremes meet in the common error which robs Christ and the church of that answer to His heavenly glory which it is the Holy Spirit's function now to make good here below, and which shall be enjoyed yet more, yea, perfectly, when the Lord shall have come, changing our bodies into His likeness, and causing us to appear with Him in the heavenly glory of that day.

It is mere ignorance and malicious unbelief to call this Judaising. For it is no question of the sort when we speak of the future prospects of Israel according to the prophets. Judaising really means the mingling of Jewish elements with the gospel, and imposing them on Christians now. But the very point of the truth insisted on is, that Christians, caught up and glorified with Christ, will then have disappeared from the earth. Consequently it is the age to come, and another calling, when Israel shall be grafted into their own olive-tree. Hence, to look for the literal accomplishment of their visions is simply faith in the prophets, not Judaising, but rather a main safeguard against it; for we are thus kept the more from mingling their hopes with ours because we expect them to be fulfilled to Israel. The return from Babylon in no way met the closing prophecies; but this proves not the imperfection of Ezekiel's foreshadowing, but that his glorious anticipations are still to be fulfilled. The "*all* Israel" yet remains to be fulfilled when the Redeemer comes to Zion. Ezekiel 20: 33 is perfectly consistent with this; for Jeremiah and all the prophets teach the cutting off of apostates and rebels. Henderson therefore was not justified in saying

that the discrepancies between the ancient temple and that described by Ezekiel are non-essential. They prove on the contrary that we must either give up the inspiration of the prophet, or maintain that he predicts a return yet future with a new temple, and modified ritual, a fresh distribution of the land among the twelve tribes restored and blessed after their last enemies have been destroyed by divine judgments. No one supposes that he ceased to be a man when he became a prophet; but we are bound to believe that he was inspired so that his writings should give us God's word, and therefore no mixture of error.

Ezekiel 1

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

Nor is the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity without special reason. There had been ample space for those left behind in the land to repent of their vain hopes, as well as of their rebelliousness and their idolatry. They had had the warning of their brethren removed from the land: had they laid it to heart? Zedekiah "did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of Jehovah. And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God; but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the Jehovah God of Israel. Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much, after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of Jehovah which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the Jehovah God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place; but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of Jehovah arose against his people, till there was no remedy."

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

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

But there is much more. "Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man." (Ver. 5) If there could be any doubt left on the mind of him who reads this account, Ezekiel 10 distinctly shows that the living creatures are the cherubim. They are here, not two like the figures made out of the ends of the pure and beaten gold which formed the mercy-seat where God sat as on a throne, but four in relation, I presume, to the

creature. The God of Israel, who dwelt between the cherubim on the ark, was in the midst of His people, and approached by blood according to divine righteousness, which was guarded by the witness of His judicial authority. Ezekiel was given to behold His judgments in providence from without. He would judge His guilty people by Babylon as His instrument. Here therefore it is fire (ver. 5) which characterises the display of His destructive judgment as the God of heaven.

It would be almost an endless genealogy, and certainly to little edification, if one set out in detail the strange misconception of these symbols which have prevailed among men, both Jews and Christians. In the former this is not surprising; for the unbelief which wrought the evils which the prophet denounced still works the same stiff-necked opposition to the truth. "This generation" is not passed away, nor will it till all that is predicted be fulfilled. But Christians are far less excusable. Having the true light, they ought to see; but they only see aright, as the eye is single. If Christ's glory had been before them, not the church's (that is, their own), they would have made room for His relation to others as well as to themselves. They need not deny the old, because they believe the new. Had the national judgment of Israel been seen at the beginning of the prophecy, and their restoration at the end, the ancient fathers and the modern divines could not have dreamt of interpreting the four cherubim as the evangelists, or as a description of Christ's redemption work, or of God's glory in the church, or as the four seasons of the year, or the four quarters of the globe, or the four cardinal virtues, or the four passions of the soul, or the four faculties of the mind, or whatever other conjectures men have indulged in. A more plausible but very imperfect view is that of Calvin, who takes them as angels, and four in relation to the various questions of the world, each with four heads, angelic virtue being thus proved to reside in all, and God shown to work not only in man and other animals, but throughout inanimate things. He takes it therefore as a vision of God's empire administered by angels everywhere, all creatures being so impelled as if joined with the angels, and as if the angels comprehended within themselves all elements in all parts of the world.

As to the four cherubs, then, they were composite figures. "And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went everyone straightforward." (Vers. 6-9) The likeness of a man was theirs, though each had four faces and four wings (ver. 6); but the feet were straight, the sole like that of a calf's foot, and the face of an ox answering to that of a cherub. (Ver. 7; compare also Ezek. 10: 14) Activity, or aptness in doing, seems represented by the hands of a man; swiftness of execution from above in the wings, without a moment's deviation from the object in hand, and with four sides, so as to move in all directions. The intimation of verse 10 I take to be that in front the face of a man was seen, and that of an eagle behind, with a lion's face to the right and an ox's or steer's to the left.* These compose the symbolical supports of the throne, being the heads of the creatures preserved in the ark from the flood; man setting forth intelligence, the lion strength, the ox patience or stability, and the eagle rapidity of execution, the attributes of God or the qualities of His judgments. "As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side; they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle. Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. And they went everyone straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning." (Vers. 10-14) They went forward and returned like a flash of lightning.

* Some consider it to mean that the four faces had the same aspect, the man and lion on the right, and the

ox and eagle on the left.

Nor do we hear only of wings, but of wheels also. "Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel. When they went, they went upon their four sides: and they turned not when they went. As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels." (Vers. 15-21) It is the exact reverse of circumstances left to blind chance. Contrariwise, whatever the revolutions or changes among men, all is wittingly guided where it might be least expected. The instruments of the providential government, below the firmament or expanse were completely in accord with what was above, and over this was the likeness of a throne; and above all the likeness of a man exercising executory judgment, though with the unfailing pledge of mercy to an evil world.

Thus the throne of God was no longer in Israel, but the God of heaven was pleased and about to use the Gentiles to do His will in punishing guilty Jerusalem. It is His throne from heaven, not yet His throne in heaven, as in Revelation 4, where we have no wheels, but six wings to each. The living creatures there are accordingly not cherubim only, but seraphim, crying, Holy, holy, holy, and the whole creation is taken up under His dispensational titles, save what is distinctively millennial. Hence they are not the mere basis of God's throne in judging the Jew, providentially through the Gentile, but associated and identified with the throne of Him who judges all according to His nature. The world comes under His dealings, though above all apostate Jews and Gentiles, all "that dwell on the earth." The living creatures are in the circle of the throne and in its midst, no longer under it as in Ezekiel.

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

The Supreme who directed all was revealed in the appearance of a man, and so in relation to men. His attributes here made known are governmental, and applied by instruments on earth according to a providence which overlooks nothing. There is no finer refutation of heathen darkness or of Jewish narrowness than this symbolical representation of the divine ways with Israel as seen in Chaldea. Yet is it all positive truth, with the simple effect of manifesting the glory of God as He was then pleased to deal, and as He will when He undertakes the renewed blessing of repentant Israel to the joy of all the earth. How vain in that day will Israel feel to have been their unbelief throughout the day of grace when they rejected Jehovah-Messiah because He became man in accomplishment of Isaiah 7, and in accordance with His appearance here, who, unseen of the world, but announced to deaf and blind Israel, lets the believer know that He guided the springs of every movement here below to His glory, at the time when He ceased to own what He once designated "the throne of Jehovah" in Zion. Far from governing in and by Israel, His judgment is seen to be directed against them by the Gentile as His servant, however unconsciously.

Ezekiel 2

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

Strengthened by the Spirit, the prophet receives his mission to the children of Israel, though, yea, because, they had rejected God - "to rebellious Gentiles, Goyim [for such they really were in truth, no better than heathen morally and much worse in guilt], that have rebelled against me; they and their fathers have transgressed against me unto this very day. And the children are hard of face and stiff of heart. I send thee to them, and thou shalt say to them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah. And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear (for they are a rebellious house), shall yet know that a prophet hath been among them." (Vers. 3-5)

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

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

Ezekiel 3

In chapter 3 this is followed up. The eaten roll proves sweet as honey. The prophet was sent to Israel, with the certainty that they would not hear, impudent and hard-hearted as they were, but confronted by the prophet with a forehead of adamant. (Vers. 1-9) Receiving God's word in his heart, he was to go with a Thus saith Jehovah. (Vers. 10, 11) Then the Spirit took him up with the noise of the glory accompanying, and after seven days among the captives at Tel-abib, the word came that Jehovah made him a watchman to Israel, with the most solemn charge and responsibility to be faithful at his peril. It was no longer a question of the nation, but of individual fidelity. (Vers. 12-21) The chapter closes with a final command, when he sees the glory again on the plain as before by the Chebar. He was to be a prisoner in his house, with his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth, for they were rebellious. But God would also open his mouth with a solemn call to hear; but they were rebellious.

Ezekiel 4

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

iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year. Therefore thou shalt set thy face toward the siege of Jerusalem, and thine arm shall be uncovered, and thou shalt prophesy against it. And, behold, I will lay bands upon thee, and thou shalt not turn thee from one side to another, till thou hast ended the days of thy siege." (Vers. 4-8)

It is well known that this has given rise to much debate and difference of judgment. First, the reading of most MSS. of the Septuagint misled the early fathers, who read the more common Greek version, as we see, for instance, in Theodoret; and the same error appears in the Vulgate, though Jerome well knew that there is no doubt as to the Hebrew, followed by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. Next the reckoning even of Jerome is from the ruin of the revolted house of Israel in the reign of Pekah, when the king of Assyria carried off the ten tribes to the east. But I do not doubt that their view is sounder who count the three hundred and ninety years of Israel from Jeroboam, to whom Ahijah announced from Jehovah the gift of the ten tribes rent out of the hand of Solomon, and that the forty years of Judah point to the reign of Solomon himself, which really determined the ruin even of that most favoured portion of the people, little as man might see under the wealth and wisdom of the king the results of the idolatry then practised. "They have forsaken me," was the message of the prophet in that day, "and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon; and have not walked in my ways to do that which is right in mine eyes, and to keep my statutes and my judgments, as did David his father." Thus the seed of David were to be for this afflicted, as they have been, but not for ever. But if a brighter day await them, a long night of darkness first, and the coldest hour before the dawn; for they have added to their idolatry the still graver wickedness of rejecting their Messiah and of opposing the gospel that goes out to the Gentiles, so that wrath is come upon them to the uttermost. It seems no real obstacle to this that the house of Israel as a distinctive title of the ten tribes were carried off long before the termination of the period; because it is after the habitual manner of Ezekiel, however he may distinguish here as elsewhere, to embrace the whole nation under that name. Judah did not use for God's glory the long and peaceful and prosperous reign of him who in the midst of unexampled benefits turned away his heart after other gods; and the sentence of Lo-ammi was only executed when that portion of the elect nation which craved to the house of David, and even the last king who reigned of that house, by their treachery to Jehovah justified the backsliding tribes who had long before been swept away from the land.

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

Here it is another question. The prophet must set forth in his own person the degradation as well as the judgment impending because of the iniquity of the people. Hence another sign follows. "Take thou also unto thee wheat, and barley, and beans, and lentils, and millet, and filches, and put them in one vessel, and make thee bread thereof, according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon thy side, three hundred and ninety days shalt thou eat thereof. And thy meat which thou shalt eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day: from time to time shalt thou eat it. Thou shalt drink water also by measure, the sixth part of an hin: from time to time shalt thou drink. And thou shalt eat it as barley cakes, and thou shalt bake it with dung which cometh out of man, in their sight. And Jehovah said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, whither I will drive them. Then said I, Ah, Lord Jehovah! behold, my soul hath not been polluted: for from my youth up even till now have I not eaten of that which dieth of itself, or is torn in pieces; neither came abominable flesh into my mouth. Then he said unto me, Lo, I have given thee cow's dung for man's dung, and thou shalt prepare thy bread therewith. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in

Jerusalem: and they shall eat bread by weight, and with care; and they shall drink water by measure, and with astonishment; that they may want bread and water, and be astonished one with another, and consume away for their iniquity." (Vers. 9-17) In his measure Ezekiel is to taste the condition of Israel under the righteous dealings of God, not because he was personally out of divine favour, but on the contrary because he was near enough to God to enter into the reality of their wretchedness, though only the Son of man could in grace go down into its depths and take it up perfectly and suffer to the full, yea, far beyond all that ever was, or can be, their portion. Jesus in His zeal for God and love for His people alone could bear the burden, whether in government or in atonement; but for both the glory of His person fitted Him without abating one jot of what was due to God, and with the deepest results of blessing, as for us now, so for the godly Jew in the latter day. Never did He shield Himself, as Ezekiel does here, from an adequate taste of the ruin-state of Israel; never did He deprecate save, if possible, that cup of unutterable woe which it was His alone to drink, but drink it He did to the dregs, that grace might reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Ezekiel 5

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

"And thou, son of man, take thee a sharp knife, a barber's razor be taken to thee, and cause it to pass upon thy head and upon thy beard, and take to thee weighing balances, and divide the hair. Thou shalt burn with fire a third part in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are fulfilled: and thou shalt take a third part, and smite about it with a knife: and a third part thou shalt scatter in the wind; and I will draw out a sword after them. Thou shalt also take thereof a few in number, and bind them in thy skirts. Then take of them again, and cast them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire; for thereof shall a fire come forth into all the house of Israel." (Vers. 1-4) The application is certain and immediate, being furnished in the following words of the prophet: "Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; This is Jerusalem: I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her. And she hath changed my judgments into wickedness more than the nations, and my statutes more than the countries that are round about her: for they have refused my judgments and my statutes, they have not walked in them." (Vers. 5, 6)

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

"Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, because ye multiplied more than the nations that are round about you, and you have not walked in my statutes, neither have kept my judgments, neither have done

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

We clearly see then the divine dealing. A third was to perish by plague and famine inside the besieged city; a third to fall by the sword round about Jerusalem; and the remaining third to be scattered to all the winds with a sword drawn after them by God. Here too we see how those of Jerusalem under the circumstances represent "all the house of Israel," no account being taken in this place of the ten tribes already carried to the East. The defilement of Jehovah's sanctuary by heathen abominations brought in by kings and priests and people made Jerusalem intolerable.

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

Ezekiel 6

Chapter 6 shows that God takes account of all the scenes of their idolatrous evil throughout the land, though we have seen Jerusalem to have a bad pre-eminence. Hence Ezekiel is here commanded to look toward "the mountains of Israel." "And the word of Jehovah came unto me saying, Son of man, set thy face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, and say, Ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord Jehovah: Thus saith the Lord Jehovah to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys: Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. And your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken: and I will cast down your slain men before your idols. And I will lay the dead carcasses of the children of Israel before their idols; and I will scatter your bones round about your altars. In all your dwelling-places the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate; that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, and your idols may be broken and cease, and your images may be cut down, and your works may be abolished. And the slain shall fall in the midst of you, and ye shall know that I am Jehovah." (Vers. 1-7) Thus Jehovah would wake up the sword to destroy Israel throughout the land, who had abandoned Him for heathen gods which could not shield from, but assuredly expose to, destruction. Devotees, and altars, and images should all perish, idolaters before their idols, and their bones upon their altars: so complete the discomfiture, and so evident its ground.

Nevertheless will Jehovah in judgment remember mercy. "Yet will I leave a remnant, that ye may have

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

Here again Ezekiel is called to mark with characteristic action the sure divine judgment of Israel's abominations. The very land should become more waste and desolate than the desert in all their dwelling-places. "Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Smite with thine hand, and stamp with thy foot, and say, Alas, for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel! for they shall fall by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence. He that is afar off shall die of the pestilence; and he that is near shall fall by the sword; and he that remaineth and is besieged shall die by the famine: thus will I accomplish my fury upon them. Then shall ye know that I am Jehovah, when their slain men shall be among their idols round about their altars, upon every high hill, in all the tops of the mountains, and under every green tree, and under every thick oak, the place where they did offer sweet savour to all their idols. So will I stretch out my hand upon them, and make the land desolate, yea, more desolate than the wilderness toward Diblath, in all their habitations: and they shall know that I am Jehovah." (Vers. 11-14)

Ezekiel 7

Chapter 7 closes this preliminary strain, or cluster of strains, of coming woe. It is marked by comprehensiveness indeed; but instead of vagueness there is every mark of rapidity in the short, strange, abrupt style in which the Spirit proclaims with frequent and emphatic repetitions an end to the land of Israel as that which was just at hand. "And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Also, thou Son of man, thus saith the Lord Jehovah unto the land of Israel; An end, the end, is come upon the four corners of the land. Now is the end come upon thee, and I will send mine anger upon thee, and will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense upon thee all thine abominations. And mine eye shall not spare thee, neither will I have pity: but I will recompense thy ways upon thee, and thine abominations shall be in the midst of thee: and ye shall know that I am Jehovah. Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; An evil, an only evil, behold, is come. An end is come, the end is come: it watcheth for thee; behold, it is come. The mourning is come unto thee, O thou that dwellest in the land: the time is come, the day of trouble is near, and not the sounding again of the mountains. Now will I shortly pour out my fury upon thee, and accomplish mine anger upon thee: and I will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense thee for all thine abominations. And mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: I will recompense thee according to thy ways and thine abominations that are in the midst of thee; and ye shall know that I am Jehovah that smiteth." (Vers. 1-9)

Next we see that not only do "the four corners of the land" come under the distinct and decisive dealing of Jehovah, but in this case the results are complete and overwhelming. There is no recovery possible as far as man can see or say. "Behold the day, behold it is come: the morning is gone forth; the rod hath blossomed, pride hath budded. Violence is risen up into a rod of wickedness: none of them shall remain, nor of their multitude, nor of any of theirs: neither shall there be wailing for them." (Vers. 10, 11) The ordinary ways and feelings of men disappear. (Ver. 12) Wrath is on all the multitude. The special hopes of an Israelite are broken, for the jubilee, too, vanishes, and with it all prospect of recovery. (Ver. 18) How could idols help him? The sound of the trumpet which calls on man, which to a Jew should be the

assurance of God's hearing and appearing on their behalf as usual, is wholly unavailing; for Jehovah's wrath is upon all the multitude. (Ver. 14) They are thus seen shut up within concentric circles of devouring ruin. (Vers. 15-18) God's prophet announces' terrible to think, stroke upon stroke, from God against His people, enfeebled before by the sense of guilt. In the day of their calamity they are forced to feel that their gods are vanity, nothing but "silver and gold," and "they shall cast their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be as uncleanness." "Their silver and gold," adds the prophet most impressively, "shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of Jehovah; they shall not satisfy their souls nor fill their bowels, because it was the stumbling-block of their iniquity."

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

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

Ezekiel 8

It is evident that chapters 8 - 11 really form the parts, according to the chapters, of one connected vision. First, the excessive idolatry of Judah in Jerusalem is set forth, beginning with the house of God; secondly, destruction is ordered of God for all left in the city, save a marked remnant of those that sighed and cried for all the abominations done there, a destruction expressly beginning at Jehovah's sanctuary; thirdly, the part played by the cherubim and other agents of divine judgment, ere the glory of Jehovah slowly takes each step of departure; and fourthly, the denunciation of woes on the princes and the people yet left, with assurance to the righteous of a sanctuary in Jehovah Himself where there was no other in the heathen lands of their dispersion, and of final mercy in gathering them back while all else must perish, the glory retiring from the city to the Mount of Olives. From Ezekiel 12 to 19 inclusive are various connected circumstances and expositions of His ways on God's part.

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

The year is the next after that of the first vision: compare Ezekiel 1: 2. The reckoning is from the captivity of Jehoiachin. The prophet here had a fresh dealing of God while the elders of Judah sat before him. It was in the Spirit, not in bodily presence, that he was conveyed to Jerusalem, "in the vision of God" where he beheld at the door of the inner gate looking northward (that is, to Chaldea), the seat or pedestal of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy. "And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there

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

"But turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations. And he brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold, a hole in the wall. Then said he unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall: and when I had digged in the wall, behold a door. And he said unto me, Go in, and, behold, the wicked abominations that they do here. So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about." It is a scene of still more intimate and debasing idolatry, a reproduction of the degradations of Egypt; and bowing down to these, not the dregs but the rulers of the people! "And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand: and a thick cloud of incense went up." God had of old appointed seventy judges; and one of their most momentous functions was to deal with idol-worship. Here as many are found caught we may say, in the very act of priestly devotion to the representation of serpents and abominable beasts (or cattle) and all dung-gods. Shaphan was the scribe who read the book of the law to the tender-hearted Josiah: what an ominous change in Judah that now Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan stood in the midst of the seventy idolatrous elders!

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

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

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

There is no sufficient reason, in my opinion, to depart from the ordinary rendering of verse 17, and to change *hr:wOmz* from "branch" into song; nor need we heed the Rabbinical notion that the text is to be reckoned among the Tikkun Sopherim, the original reading being supposed to mean "to my [instead of 'their'] nose." The LXX seem to have so read, at least they render it *aujtoi; wj* "mukthrivzonte", "they are as scorers." But the Hebrew MSS support the common text which makes an excellent and consistent

sense. "Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them." Punishment to the uttermost must befall the Jews without mercy: Jehovah Himself would see to it.

Ezekiel 9

Chapter 9 gives us the divine preparations and plan for executing judgment on all, save the reserved remnant, in Jerusalem. "And he called also in my ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand. And, behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side: and they went in, and stood beside the brazen altar. And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side." The judgment is still from the north; the angelic executioners stand beside the brazen altar, the expression of divine requirement and judgment on the earth. The glory quits its wonted seat. Jerusalem is devoted to the vengeance of Jehovah. "Jehovah said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house." (Ver. 4-6) Grief is the fruit of communion with God in a day of evil. Those who felt such holy sorrow are expressly and conclusively exempt from the destroyers. All others must perish, old and young, maids, little ones, women; but not any one on whom is the mark. "And begin at my sanctuary." Compare 1 Peter 4. What is nearest to the Lord has the deepest responsibility.

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

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

Ezekiel 10

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

against the city whereon His eyes and His heart are perpetually.

"Then I looked, and, behold, in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubim there appeared over them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne. And he spake unto the man clothed with linen, and said, Go in between the wheels, even under the cherub, and fill thine hand with coals of fire from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city. And he went in in my sight. Now the cherubim stood on the right side of the house, when the man went in; and the cloud filled the inner court." (Ver. 1-3) Thus from Him who is not even named, but who fills the throne above, came the command intimating consuming judgment for the city; and he who was commissioned to mark the righteous for exemption is now told to fill his hand with coals of fire from between the cherubim and to scatter them over Jerusalem. The cloud of Jehovah's presence was there; but it afforded no shelter, no direction now to the people who had abandoned all care for His will and preferred a calf or a dung-god to the Eternal of Israel. How changed from the day when Jehovah went before them, or filled the sanctuary!

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

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

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

There are some features of difference from the earliest manifestation. Not that there is any severance of the wheels from the cherubic figures, or the least divergence from common action, or in the end of their complicated movements. All pervading intelligence is yet more asserted of the whole body, backs, hands, wings, wheels. "As for the wheels it was called in my hearing, Galgal" [wheel, or roll, roll]. In verse 18 we see a move of the gravest significance: "Then the glory of Jehovah departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight: when they went out, the wheels also were beside them, and every one stood at the door of the east gate of Jehovah's house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river of Chebar; and I knew that they were the cherubim. Every one had four faces apiece, and every one four wings; and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings. And the likeness of their faces was the same faces which I saw by the river of Chebar, their appearances and themselves: they went every one straight forward." (Ver. 18-22) There might be a lingering over the east gate, but the glory was departing.

Ezekiel 11

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

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

There appears no sufficient reason in the similarity of the number twenty-five for identifying the scoffers here described with the sun-worshippers between the porch and the altar of Ezekiel 8. Here the leaders at least were princes of the people, not of the sanctuary or of the priests. As the previous scene set forth the religious apostasy, so this the audacity and infidelity of their civil chiefs, though in the door of the gate of Jehovah's house. They were the evil counsellors who thwarted His word through the prophet to Zedekiah. Jeremiah exhorted the Jews in Jerusalem to submission under the king of Babylon, and the captives to build houses and plant gardens and raise up families in their exile, praying for the peace of the city, till the seventy years were accomplished and a remnant should return to Jerusalem. The false prophets predicted smooth things both at home and abroad, in every way fomenting rebellion under the colour of patriotism and pretending Jehovah's name while encouraging to insubjection under His humbling hand.

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

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

Thereon, as Ezekiel prophesied, Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died (ver. 13, 14), which drew out the prophet into sorrow and intercession for the remnant. For the captive loved the men, scornful though they might be, who dwelt in Jerusalem. On this the word of Jehovah impresses on him that his brethren emphatically, the men of his relationship, "yea the whole house of Israel," were objects of contempt to the haughty inhabitants of Jerusalem who assumed the most self-complacent airs because they were still in the city of solemnities, as against their brethren in captivity. (Ver. 15) "Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come. Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. And they shall come thither, and they shall take away all the detestable things thereof and all the abominations thereof from thence. And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. But as for them whose heart walketh after the heart of their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their way upon their own heads, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 16-21)

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

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

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

Ezekiel 12

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

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

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

bright spot, but an active, deep, and old plague of leprosy "And I did so as I was commanded: I brought forth my articles by day, as articles for captivity, and in the even I digged through the wall with mine hand; I brought it forth in the twilight, and I bare it upon my shoulder in their sight." (Ver. 7)

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

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

Next, Ezekiel was to be a representative man to the people of the land in partaking of bread and water with every token of alarm. "And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, eat thy bread with quaking, and drink thy water with trembling and with carefulness; and say unto the people of the land, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and of the land of Israel; They shall eat their bread with carefulness, and drink their water with astonishment, that her land may be desolate from all that is therein, because of the violence of all them that dwell therein. And the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall be desolate; and ye shall know that I am Jehovah." (Ver. 17-20)

The chapter closes with messages which rebuke the incredulity of the people in the prophetic word, so common as to become proverbial. "And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth? Tell them therefore, thus saith the Lord Jehovah; I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision. For there shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel. For I am Jehovah: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged: for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord Jehovah. Again the word of Jehovah came to me saying, Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off. Therefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, There shall none of my words be prolonged any more, but

the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 21-28) God would give in that day such an earnest of all that is coming that people could not for shame put all off to the end of days. "In your days, O rebellious house, I will say the word, and it shall be performed, saith the Lord Jehovah." What a testimony to man's dislike of God in that he so readily swallows the enemy's bait that the time of fulfilment is far off! He does not like God's interference, whose kingdom in any full sense is intolerable. But what says the prophet Ezekiel? "None of my words shall be longer deferred: for I will speak a word, and it shall be performed, saith the Lord Jehovah."

Ezekiel 13

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

"And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of Jehovah; Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts. Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of Jehovah. They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, Jehovah saith: and Jehovah hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word. Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, Jehovah saith it; albeit I have not spoken? (Ver. 1-7) To be a prophet out of one's own heart is to ensure judgment from God, who, however gracious and merciful, must needs be jealous of His majesty and truth, thus utterly misrepresented and profaned. What could be the end for themselves and such as followed them but destruction? They were like foxes in the ruins, full of craft and mischief. No wonder that there was no going up into the breaches nor making up a fence round the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of Jehovah; like those who desired at a later day to make a fair show in the flesh, and constrained the Gentiles to be circumcised, only lest themselves should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. Such persons feared not Jehovah nor had His secret but only falsehood and divination, seeing that they said "Jehovah saith" when they were not sent by Him, and yet they made men hope for the fulfilment of the word. Hence the solemn appeal by Ezekiel: "have ye not seen a false vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination? and ye say, Jehovah saith, when I have not spoken."

Then follows the divine denunciation. "Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, saith the Lord Jehovah. And mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies: they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the Lord Jehovah. Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar: say unto them which daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower: and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it. Lo, when the wall is fallen, shall it not be said unto you, Where is the daubing wherewith ye have daubed it? Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, I will even rend it with a stormy wind in my fury; and there shall be an overflowing shower in mine anger, and great hailstones in my fury to consume it. So will I break down the wall that ye have daubed with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundation thereof shall be discovered, and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof: and ye shall know that I am Jehovah. Thus will I accomplish my wrath upon the wall, and upon

them that have daubed it with untempered mortar, and will say unto you, The wall is no more, neither they that daubed it; to wit, the prophets of Israel which prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and which see visions of peace for her, and there is no peace, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 8-16) What an awful thing it is when the enemies of God morally compel Him to be their enemy! Long-suffering and plenteous in mercy He is slow to wrath; but when patience continued longer would ruin His saints and compromise His own honour, war is proclaimed against those who thus hypocritically undermine His glory and thwart His holy will as to His people; and the anger of Jehovah is according to His majesty. He is against the prophets of vanity, and His hand upon them. "In the secret council of my people shall they not be, and in the register of the house of Israel shall they not be written, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel." Their names should be blotted out as having forfeited their rights, a public dealing on the earth and not a question of eternal judgment, though it is equally clear that their portion then will be everlasting destruction. To make it a deprivation of church membership here and of communion of saints in heaven is to lose all just sense of the passage. Further, the character of sin is remembered in the punishment. Did the false prophets soothe the national feeling of the Jews by promising a speedy return from exile? They themselves should never see the land from which they were, or were to be, expelled by the foe; and they should thus learn who and what was their Jehovah God with whose name they had trifled. He will not have His people led away to their ruin with impunity to the seducers, least of all hear the holy name of peace perverted to selfish mischief; as when a wall of defence is built, but only daubed with mortar that will not hold. What is it but a sham? It shall fall, is the word to builders. "An overflowing shower cometh, and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall, and a storm of wind shall rend." So the prophets elsewhere set forth the future and last troubles of Israel, as in Psalm 83, Isaiah 28, 29, Ezek. 38: 22, Revelation 8, 16. To such a judgment Jehovah pledges Himself, so that every refuge of lies shall be razed and the misleaders and misled be destroyed with the awful conviction that it is God who is thus judging the false prophets and their vision of peaceless peace.

And not men only, but women too took their sad part in the moral havoc of Israel. Therefore the word of Jehovah: "Likewise, thou son of man, set thy face against the daughters of thy people, which prophesy out of their own heart; and prophesy thou against them, and say, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; Woe to the women that sew pillows to all armholes, and make kerchiefs upon the head of every stature to hunt souls! Will ye hunt the souls of my people, and will ye save the souls alive that come unto you? And will ye pollute me among my people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, to slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls alive that should not live, by your lying to my people that hear your lies?" (Ver. 17-19) The influence of women has been great in this world for evil and for good; and as God has deigned to vouchsafe to some of them His best gifts, so we need not be surprised that Satan should employ those he can for ill. The particular form of evil here noticed is their pandering to the ears of their victims and thus catching souls in their toils for the most paltry objects in this life, morally slaying such as should not die and keeping alive such as should not live.

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

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

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

Ezekiel 14

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

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

Then comes a still more explicit message to the house of Israel in verses 6-11, that they should repent and turn from their idols: otherwise Jehovah should answer such inquirers by Himself, and this by cutting them off, whether a deceived prophet or such as might seek to them. "Therefore say unto the House of Israel, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations. For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to enquire of him concerning me: I Jehovah will answer him by myself: and I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am

Jehovah. And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I Jehovah have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity: the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him; that the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, neither be polluted any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be my people, and I may be their God, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 6-11) Thus does God act judicially, showing Himself forward to a forward people, and sending those who lie to such as love a lie; that both may be punished together, and Israel may learn the needed lesson, and be His people as He their God.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ezekiel 15

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

"And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, What is the vine tree more than any tree,

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

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

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

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

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

Just so, says the Spirit of God, is it with the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Being barren of fruit Godward, they are devoted as fuel for the fires of divine judgment. If the Jews failed to represent the one true God, if they falsified the testimony committed to their charge, if they were traitors to His name, what could Jehovah do but consume as enemies those who of all men had the gravest responsibility to obey His law? To wink at their moral turpitude and their abominable idolatry could not become the all-seeing God who was pleased to dwell there only among all the nations of the earth; and the time was not yet come to lay, in the death and resurrection of Christ, the foundation of a new creation which should neither fall nor pass away. The living God must therefore deal with His people according to the ground taken in covenant between Him and them; and hence the action here announced by the prophet. "Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, As the vine tree among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so will I give the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will set my face against them; they shall go out from one fire, and another fire shall devour them: and ye shall know that I am Jehovah, when I set my face against them. And I will make the land desolate, because they have committed a trespass, saith the Lord Jehovah." (Ver. 6-8)

How energetic is the assurance! Not only would Jehovah give the inhabitants of Jerusalem like the vine for fuel, but he would "set His face against them." And what does not this portend to such as know His name and His necessary hatred of evil! As if it were not definite enough that Jehovah thus proclaims His settled antagonism, it is added that they shall go out from the fire, and the fire shall devour them. So indeed it was with the guilty city of the Great King. If the fire was left here, it was but to encounter the fire there. Escape there was none; for no real repentance followed, nor was God mocked. And He who had of old judged mankind as a whole, or in the narrowest circle of their guilt, must deal with yet more

nicety of care in the case of His own elect people in their capital. Had they hearkened to Him and walked in His ways, He would have both subdued their enemies and satisfied themselves with all good things; but they would not hearken to Jehovah and chose them strange gods of the heathen. Thus Jehovah must either acquiesce in His own dishonour if He sustained Jerusalem in spite of its apostasy, or compel them to know that He is Jehovah when He set His face against them. Sorrowful alternative! As the first could not be, the latter was the only course merited by their iniquities - the only road open till Messiah came, and, bearing their judgment, made it righteous for the mercies of God to begin afresh on grounds of sovereign grace. As things were then, the prophet could but announce "I will make the land desolate, because they have trespassed a trespass, saith the Lord Jehovah."

Ezekiel 16

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

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

But scripture itself shows us that a base birth cannot bind to evil where God is drawn and leant on in the least. How was it here? A wretched outcast void of the commonest care or pity, exposed in the field on the day when she was born. (Ver. 4, 5) Then Jehovah passed by, and saw her polluted with her blood and said to her in her blood, Live; and this most emphatically. (Ver. 6) Under His fostering culture she grew up to womanhood, dressed and decked with the most splendid ornaments; and Jehovah entered into covenant with her and took her as His own. And she who was made thus cleansed and beautiful and adorned, prospered into a kingdom with a fame that went abroad on account of the splendour which Jehovah put on her. (Ver. 7-14)

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

"Thou hast also taken thy fair jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given thee, and madest to thyself images of men, and didst commit whoredom with them, and tookest thy brodered garments, and coveredst them: and thou hast set mine oil and mine incense before them. My meat also which I gave thee, fine flour, and oil, and honey, wherewith I fed thee, thou hast even set it before them for a sweet savour: and thus it was, saith the Lord Jehovah. Moreover thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured. Is this of thy whoredoms a small matter, that thou hast slain my children, and delivered them to cause them to pass through the fire for them?" (Ver. 17-21) There was this added to His aggrieved heart, that with all her abominations and her lewdness Jerusalem remembered not the days of her youth when she was naked and bare, polluted with her blood. (Ver. 22)

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

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

"How weak [or, withered] is thine heart, saith the Lord Jehovah, seeing thou doest all these things, the work of an imperious whorish woman; in that thou buildest thine eminent place in the head of every way, and makest thine high place in every street; and hast not been as an harlot, in that thou scornest hire; but as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband! They give gifts to all whores: but thou givest thy gifts to all thy lovers, and hirest them, that they may come unto thee on every side for thy whoredom. And the contrary is in thee from other women in thy whoredoms, whereas none followeth thee to commit whoredoms; and in that thou givest a reward, and no reward is given unto thee, therefore thou art contrary." (Ver. 30-34) This indeed was a tremendous aggravation of Jerusalem's guilt. They had nothing to gain; so blessed had they been of Jehovah. Others in their blind craving after goods they saw elsewhere might impute them to the gods of the hills or of the valleys, and so add idol to idol; but Jerusalem was inexcusable because she had nothing to desire from any one nation around, great or small, far or near. It was therefore lusting after false gods for mere lust; it was sinning her worst for the love of it, leaving the vilest strumpets excused comparatively with herself.

Jehovah thus summons the harlot Jerusalem to hear His sentence on their mad and insatiable wantonness. "Wherefore, O harlot, hear the word of Jehovah: thus saith the Lord Jehovah; because thy filthiness was poured out, and thy nakedness discovered through thy whoredoms with thy lovers, and with all the idols of thy abominations, and by the blood of thy children, which thou didst give unto them; behold, therefore, I will gather all thy lovers, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated; I will even gather them round about against thee, and will discover thy nakedness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness. And I will judge thee as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy. And I will also give thee into their hand, and they shall throw down thine eminent place, and shall break down thy high places: they shall strip thee also of thy clothes, and shall take thy fair jewels, and leave thee naked and bare. They shall also bring up a company against thee, and they shall stone thee with stones, and thrust thee through with their swords. And they shall burn thine houses with fire, and execute judgment upon thee in the sight of many women: and I will cause thee to cease from playing the harlot, and thou also shalt give no hire any more. So, will I make my fury toward thee to rest, and my jealousy shall depart from thee, and I will be quiet and will be no more angry. Because thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth, but hast fretted me in all these things; behold, therefore, I also will recompense thy way upon thine head, saith the Lord Jehovah: and thou shalt not commit this lewdness above all thine abominations." (Ver. 35-43)

As to "filthiness" in verse 36, it seems more than doubtful that such a version of tv